

2.6

Grade Level

6-9

Subjects

Health
Science

Time Frame

1-2 class periods

Teacher Materials

- Al Jazeera Native Foods video
- Native Food Experiences Worksheet

Native Food Experiences

In this lesson, students read Pomo perspectives on both traditional Indigenous foods and settler/introduced foods. Students explore some of the values and cultural norms surrounding food, and consider ways the relationship between the environment, food, and community.

Teacher Background

The excerpts included in this lesson come directly from the **Pomo community** in Sonoma County, California.

It is common for Tribal communities to participate in recordings for university, government, and other cultural preservation projects. While these recordings can come in handy and can even fill in the cultural knowledge gaps for younger generations, they can also be problematic. While not always the case, early transcriptions of recordings have been altered to fit the lens of the researcher, and sometimes stories are changed dramatically from their original content in order to fit the needs or desires of the recorder.

In addition, it is problematic that, for decades, anthropologists, researchers, and cultural collectors recorded, photographed, and documented Tribal histories and cultures for posterity's sake, all the while standing by as the American government systematically dismantled many Native communities. Documented perspectives can come to feel more like artifacts that were collected for the Western lens than to uplift the Native community itself.

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Healthy Ecosystems Feed Healthy Communities

Problematizing and exploring possible solutions to these types of practices are now penetrating the field of anthropology and are leading to shifts in the way culture is observed in the future.

This is why, when possible, it is important for educators to integrate texts written by Native people, about Native people, into their lessons. Texts written by Native people may be more commonly found beginning in the latter part of the 20th century into the present.

“Enough for All: Foods of My Dry Creek Pomo and Bodega Miwuk People,” by Katherine Rose Smith, is written by a Dry Creek Pomo woman, for example. Katherine describes her family traditions and values surrounding food. The benefit of sharing texts that are written entirely from the Native perspective is that the Native community has control over what cultural information is shared, and how it is shared.

“Kashaya Pomo Memories of Food”, includes excerpts from Essie Parrish, as told to an anthropologist in the mid-20th century. Essie Parrish was a Kashaya Pomo religious leader and a renowned basket weaver who worked hard to protect and teach her cultural traditions. Essie Parrish is featured in a wide variety of short films documenting traditions around acorn preparation and basket weaving.

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Vocabulary

- **Indigenous:** Produced, growing, living, or occurring Natively or naturally in a particular region or environment
- **Indigenous Foods:** Locally grown food that is originally from the area and has been eaten by Native people for thousands of years. Food is grown with no chemicals or pesticides; food is grown in just the right amount.
- **Settler/Introduced Foods:** Foods that come from other countries or from outside the local ecosystem. Foods are sometimes healthy and sometimes damaging to health. Sometimes these plants can harm the local ecosystem.
- **Processed Foods:** Foods that have been altered or changed from their original form. They often have added flavors, or artificial substances added, and might taste different than their original form
- **Whole Foods:** Foods that have very little, or no processing/have not been changed from their original form. Foods do not have additives, or any artificial substances added.

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Engage

Provide students with the **Native Food Experiences notetaker**.

Guide students to **STEP 1** of the **notetaker**.

Show the 20 minute **Al Jazeera video** linked below. The video follows a young journalist as he travels across the U.S., visiting Native restaurants and trying Native food for the first time.

Al Jazeera Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fe52rEPQSuU>

Explore

Guide students to **STEP 2** of the **Native Food Experiences worksheet**.

Remind students that when settlers seized control of the land now known as the United States, the Native peoples living in those regions were unfamiliar with any food that was not Indigenous to the Americas.

In **STEP 2** of the worksheet, students will read stories of when Pomo people first encountered introduced foods.

As a class, in pairs, or in groups, ask students to read the quotes in **STEP 2** and complete the analysis questions.

Explain

Depending on the geographic location of the tribe, communities had access to a different variety of food. Tribal communities living on the coasts, for example, would have had more access to food that comes from the ocean, while tribes that lived in regions with very hot, dry, climates would have had an easier time growing vegetables like beans and squash.

In addition, tribes had complex trade networks that allowed them to trade their local food sources and materials for foods that did not grow naturally in their region. In California, for example, acorns and acorn flour were a major trade item, as tribes living in desert or mountainous regions would have had less access to Oak trees.

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Even so, the geographic size of North, Central, and South America is very large, and so it is not necessarily the case that Indigenous peoples across the neighboring continents were familiar with foods from other Indigenous communities.

Elaborate/ Extend

Direct students to **STEP 3** of the **Native Food Experiences worksheet**.

In **STEP 3**, students explore some of the traditional values around food in one Pomo family during the 20th century.

Evaluate

Review the questions from the **PART 3** texts, exploring Pomo values around food, the environment, and the community.



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Lesson Resources

Sources:

- Food in California Indian Culture by Ira Jacknis
- Enough for All by Katherine Rose Smith
- Tending the Wild by Kat Anderson
- Al Jazeera Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fe52rEPQSuU>

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Learning Standards

CA Indian Essential Understandings

Essential Understanding 2: California Indian identity is individual and the range of Tribal identity from assimilated to traditional is unique to each individual. The diversity of identity means there is no standard or cookie cutter appearance or behavior. There is no generic American Indian, in California, or in the United States.

Essential Understanding 3: Tribal traditional beliefs and practices, including links to spirituality, are practiced in communities where the culture, traditions and languages are vibrant parts of daily life. Additionally, each tribe has an oral history that pre-dates contact with non-Indians.

Essential Understanding 4: California Indian peoples' histories and cultures have been and continue to be impacted by foreign, state, and federal policies. Policies developed during the Mission Period, the Gold Rush Allotment, the Boarding School Period, termination policies, and self-determination policies are integral parts of the history of tribes in California.

Essential Understanding 5: Land and place are unique and inextricably tied to Tribal cultures.

CA Content Standard

Common Core:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2

Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.

Native Food Experiences

Name: _____

Date: ____/____/____

Native Food Experiences

STEP 1:

Watch the video linked below and provide 5 new details that you learn about Native food.

Al Jazeera Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fe52rEPQSuU>

Details:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Native Food Experiences

Name: _____

Date: ____/____/____

STEP 2:

The following excerpts are from the anthology **Food in California Indian Culture by Ira Jacknis**, specifically from the piece titled **“Kashaya Pomo Memories of Food”**.

In this piece, Essie Parrish, a Pomo cultural leader, recalls her family members' experiences trying **introduced foods** for the first time.

“The First White Food” (told September, 1958)

It was also there at Métini that the white people first discovered the Indians having come up, they found them. After they discovered the Indians, they wanted to domesticate them. In order to feed them food, in order to let them know about the white man's food, [the white man] served them some of their own white food.,

Never having seen white men's food before, they thought that they were being given poison. Having given the [Indians] their food, they left and returned home but [the Indians] threw it in a ditch. Some they buried when they poured it out. They were afraid to eat that, not knowing anything about it-all they knew was their own food, wild food. They had never seen white people's food before then. That is what our old people told us.

Questions:

1. According to the text, what were the motives/reasons for giving the Natives “white food”?

2. How did the Native people interpret the situation, and how did they protect themselves from potential danger?

In many ways, introduced foods do have negative health outcomes for Native (and other) people. White bread, for example, is processed and is high in sugar. In addition to being unhealthy for the human body, introducing European strains of wheat (what white bread is made from) into the Indigenous landscape results in the new wheat plants competing with Indigenous plants that historically produce healthy Traditional foods for Native people.

Native Food Experiences

Name: _____

Date: ____/____/____

The following excerpt, also from Essie Parrish, describes her community's first experience with coffee. Coffee originates from Ethiopia, in Africa, was introduced to the Europeans, and then introduced to the Americas.

“The First Encounter with Coffee Beans” (Told September, 1958)

As before, a white man gave them coffee to drink-gave it in a sack. At that time, a long time ago, they ground the coffee themselves. He gave them a grinder too. When he had done so, he taught them [how to use it]. But [the Indians] didn't do it-they still didn't know what it was for. Even though he showed them, they didn't understand what it was for. They didn't want to drink it either.

She boiled it too. Just the way they used to cook their acorns, that's how she boiled [the coffee beans], thinking they would become soft- she boiled them whole. She let it boil and boil- let it boil all day long. She tested them with her fingers, but they never did get soft-they weren't cooked. Then, saying that they must have been bad, that they were just like rocks, she poured them out.

Questions:

1. According to the text, the Native community did not find coffee to be a useful food when it was first introduced. What does this example show us about cultural differences and preferences around food?

Native Food Experiences

Name: _____

Date: ____/____/____

The following excerpt is from the book **“Enough for All: Foods of My Dry Creek Pomo and Bodega Miwuk People,”** by Katherine Rose Smith. In the excerpts, Smith recalls stories and lessons from her childhood. Smith tells stories that highlight the values, traditions, and foods commonly enjoyed by her Pomo family in the first half of the 20th Century.

Ground/Land/World

[I give] respect, gratefulness, and joyfulness for the good food we have been given by the Creator to eat. It’s not just the food alone that’s important, but the knowledge [of the] earth that provides it.

In the old days, the gathering and preparing of foods involved preparing the body and spirit with prayers, fasting, songs, and dances, all part of the necessary respect, thankfulness, joy, and sacrifice involved in gathering and use of these foods.

‘Food is all around us.’ The way my mother said it was lovely, meaningful, and true. It was true in the early 1940’s, the years of my childhood, as it is today, more than seventy years later. She would tell me this when I followed along as she tended the plants in her Victory garden: that we Indians could never starve. This wasn’t because of the precious vegetables she carefully raised in her garden, but because there is food all around us. All we had to do was know when to collect and how to prepare the many foods that are created for us and all the other beings living here. There is enough for all.

Today, much of the Native foods-plants, birds, mammals, fish, and shellfish-my ancestors harvested are either completely gone, like the Native grasses and clovers, or severely endangered or in decline, like the seaweed, abalone, quail and other birds, rabbits, steelhead salmon, trout, surf fish, wild strawberries, and shellfish.

If you are still lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, it is still possible to see and taste some food cooked in the old ways at special events throughout California. The job for all of us is to help our home...to be healthy, and to make sure these foods are always with us.

My mother told...that her own mother, my grandmother, taught her that “we had many relatives and we all had to live together; so we’d better learn how to get along with each other.”

She said it wasn’t hard to do. It was just like taking care of your younger brother or sister. You got to know them, find out what they liked and what made them cry, so you’d know what to do. If you took good care of them, you didn’t have to work as hard. Sounds like it’s not true, but it is. When the baby gets to be a man or a woman, they’re going to help you out.

You know, I thought she was talking about us Indians and how we are supposed to get along. I found out later by my older sister that Mother wasn’t just talking about Indians, but the plants, animals, birds-everything on this earth. They are our relatives and we better know how to act around them or they’ll get after us.”

Native Food Experiences

Name: _____

Date: ____/____/____

Questions:

- 1. In the context of the Dry Creek Pomo people, what does the quote “Food is all around us” mean?**
- 2. According to the text, what is our “job” or responsibility? What are some ways that we can help our “home” stay healthy?**
- 3. According to the text, how is taking care of our environment like taking care of a family?**
- 4. If food comes from the environment in which we live, why do you think it is important to take care of that environment? What can happen when we disrespect or mistreat our environment?**

Name: _____

Date: ____/____/____

STEP 3:

The following excerpts are from **“Enough for All” by Katherine Rose Smith**, a Dry Creek Pomo woman. In it, she describes her memories around traditional Pomo foods, living as a young girl in the mid 20th century.

Animal Foods

When I was growing up, fishing and hunting for game birds and mammals were something usually done by men and boys. The gutting and cleaning of these animals were their jobs. The plucking was done by everyone.

Daddy loved to hunt, but I was never part of that experience. Only the boys hunted. I fondly remember my younger brother Doug shooting robins with his new .22, and Momma proudly cleaning the birds and roasting them. Thank you, delicious, lovely birds!

No doves were killed or eaten. The Dry Creek Pomo creation story, which can take all night to tell in all its complexity, sitting around a campfire, says that Dry Creek people were created from the soil at Dry Creek and a feather from the mourning dove placed in that soil. For various reasons, hummingbirds and owls, bluebirds, red-winged blackbirds, or jays either.

By the time I was in my teens in the mid-1950's, my father did not hunt as often as he had in earlier times and, unlike in his younger years, he did not return from the seasonal deer hunt with a kill-although he would still bag a pheasant or mallard around the Suisun or Novato wetlands. Still, he would get his tags and pack up his camping and hunting gear in the fall to go hunting around the far west hunting grounds with his much younger hunting buddies. It was his ritual.,

Questions:

1. Name 3 Pomo norms or traditions around food that are described in the text.

a.

b.

c.

2. How have eating habits changed over time? Reference one example from the text, and one example from your own knowledge or experiences.

a.

b.