



Episode 6: FOOD

Food is more than just sustenance. It's a vehicle for culture, a way to delight in the world around us, engage our senses, connect with other people. It's how we tell someone we love them. It's the lessons we pass down between generations—and the ones we don't. This episode is about food in Japanese American concentration camps. It's about mutton, so much mutton...but it's also about disrupted traditions, about memory, about politics, and about subtle—and not so subtle—acts of resistance.

See the full transcript [here](#).

Discussion Questions:

1. What's a question that you would like to ask one of your ancestors who has passed away? Why is this question important to you?
2. What is a culturally significant food or food memory for you? What does that food signify to you? How do (family) relationships tie into the food?
3. In this episode, several incarcerated people talk about the horrible smell of mutton. Tell about a food scent, either good or bad, that takes you back to a particular time or place.

Lesson Idea:

Food is a core part of our daily lives but it is also an important part of how we transmit culture, memory, and identity. Now that you have learned about food in Japanese American concentration camps, take a moment to reflect on the significance of certain foods in your own life.

[Note: This activity may be triggering for students who are experiencing food insecurity. One alternative may be to start by asking, “How many of you have ever eaten food in a cafeteria or other institutional setting? What was the food like? Is there any particular food that stands out for you? Most students, even those experiencing food insecurity, will be able to relate to the topic of school lunches.]

Ask students to choose a food that has special meaning for them. They can either write a food poem about it (see prompts and sample below), or write a poem about school lunches. Have students share their poems with each other.

Food Poem Prompts:

Use [this graphic organizer](#) to write a poem about a food that has special meaning for you. Start by jotting down the answers to each question, then revise or rearrange as you wish. Your poem doesn't need to rhyme; it can just be a series of short phrases or sentences. You don't need to use all of the questions, and you can repeat lines for emphasis. Feel free to add other ideas.

- Name of food
- What does it look like?
- What does it taste like?
- What does it smell like?
- What does it remind you of?
- What different forms does it take?
- When do you eat it?
- How do you eat it?
- Is there a family member you associate with this food?
- Who made/makes it for you?
- Who do you eat it with?
- Why does it have special meaning for you?



Sample Poem:

Mochi

Round, white balls of gooey, sweet rice

Mochi

Familiar scent of steaming rice

Mochi

Bland-tasting and neutral--good all by itself or with other things

Ozoni, oden, oshiruko, kakimochi

Mochi

Takes me back to childhood, family, New Year's celebrations

Watching men rhythmically pounding the rice while women turn it over and over

To chants of "Yoisho"

Skillfully avoiding the wooden mallet

Or "cheating" and using an electric mochi machine

Scalded hands and misshapen blobs

Mochi

Eaten with shoyu, sugar, daikon, or with anko tucked inside,

The first thing we eat on New Year's day

Mochi

Tradition says that you should eat one mochi for every year of your life

But that's too many!

Choking hazard for babies and old people

Mochi

A tradition passed on from generation to generation

Sweet memories of Bachan, Mom in her kappogi, Hood River cousins

Mochi

