

An Introduction to Japanese Food

Purpose:

Students will be introduced to a typical Japanese meal and the use of chopsticks.

Target Grade Levels: 1-3

Essential Questions:

1. What type of food is served in a typical Japanese meal?
2. What do Japanese families eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?
3. How do the Japanese use chopsticks?

Objective:

To have students gain knowledge and understanding of the types of food eaten by Japanese families, names of some kinds of food, proper way to eat Japanese food, and learn to use chopsticks.

Materials:

- Chopsticks for each student
- How to hold chopsticks (available at: <http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/cook/intro/intro2.html>)
- Bowls for rice and soup
- Ingredients for recipe on Teacher Information: rice (enough to serve your class), miso paste, dried bonito flakes, water, tofu, leeks, shiitake mushrooms, cabbage
- Pans to cook rice and make soup

Activities:

1. Introduce the lesson by asking the students the following question:
“What kinds of food do you think Japanese eat?” List their answers.
2. Begin by introducing the word *gohan* which means “meal” in Japanese. Explain that this word actually refers to steamed rice, but rice is such an important food to the Japanese that *gohan* has come to mean all sorts of meals—even Western ones like spaghetti. Rice is not considered a vegetable that is served with meat or fish, as in the West, but an

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independent dish, eaten in its own bowl.

3. Explain that the type of rice Japanese people eat is short grain, which is different from the long-grain variety that is enjoyed in most other parts of the world. When cooked, short-grain rice is soft and moist while long-grain rice is rather dry.
4. Explain that the most traditional Japanese meal is a serving of plain, white rice, along with a main dish (fish or meat), some kind of side dish (often cooked vegetables), soup (either *miso* soup or clear broth), and pickled vegetables.
5. Explain that miso soup is made by mixing miso paste (a traditional flavoring) and *dashi* (stock). The paste is made by fermenting soy beans, rice or barley, and salt. There are different kinds of miso depending on the region, just like there are different varieties of cheese. The most common type of miso is a light brown color, although there are some that are pale yellow and others that are dark brown. The soup can be prepared with vegetables, meat, fish, tofu, or any combination of these.
6. Explain that *dashi* is stock generally made from *konbu* (kelp), dried bonito (a kind of fish) flakes, or both. Bonito flakes are now available outside of Japan, so we will be making *dashi* with them.
7. Tell the students that today we will be making Miso soup and rice.
8. Follow the directions on the following pages to make Miso soup and rice.
9. Demonstrate how to use chopsticks and help children as needed.
10. Practice using chopsticks by picking up the sticky rice with them.
11. Tell the students to pick up the rice bowl and hold it close to their mouth to eat from it. Hold the soup bowl just like the rice bowl, and sip the soup directly from it.

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12. Enjoy eating the soup and rice.
13. Discuss with the students the taste of the food.
14. Tell students what typical Japanese meals include—

Breakfast: grilled fish, rice, miso soup, and Japanese pickles. Often rice is eaten by rolling it up in a sheet of dried seaweed (nori) and dipping it in soy sauce.

Lunch: Sushi, noodles (soba) or rice, bread,

Supper: Tempura, noodles or rice, fish, bread,

School lunches: sometimes meat (sometimes stew), fish, vegetables, and salad, bread, fruit, and milk.

Assessment:

Have the students write the directions for making the soup and rice in journals (copy from the board). Encourage students to write about the taste of the food, how to eat it, and how to eat with chopsticks.

Relationship to Social Studies Standards:

Grade 1, People in Societies, Grade-level Indicator 1

Describe similarities and differences in the ways different cultures meet common human needs including: (a) food, (b) clothing, (c) shelter, (d) language, and (e) artistic expressions.

Grade 2, People in Societies, Grade-level Indicator 1

Describe the cultural practices and products of people on different continents.

Grade 3, People in Societies, Grade-level Indicator 1

Compare some of the cultural practices and products of various

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groups of people who have lived in the local community including:
(a) artistic expression, (b) religion, (c) language, and (d) food.

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