

The Heritage Continues

Lesson #21: REFLECTING ON FOOD

TIME

50 minutes

MATERIALS FROM TRUNK

Worksheet #29 - Diary Excerpts of Susan Magoffin

TEACHER PREPARATIONS

Read worksheet #29 and become familiar with its contents. If this worksheet is to be handed out to the students, make one copy for yourself and each student.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- 1) recognize food as a part of culture
- 2) interpret a primary source to gain an understanding of the food of Mexico
- 3) evaluate the effect of outside influences on the foodways of Mexicans and Mexican Americans

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Culture is something we take for granted. Many times we become aware of what our culture is when we are exposed to a culture in which people have beliefs, traditions, and habits different from our own. Exposure of one culture to another also creates a situation where various elements of the cultures merge for one reason or another. One example can be found in the food of Mexico and Mexican Americans.

Food is joy, *fiesta*, and ritual in Mexico. Feasting marks the cycle of life from birth to death. For example, when a child is baptized, hosts of friends and relatives go to church and afterwards is a Christening Feast. On All Souls' Day in November, when the Mexican people pay respect to their dead relatives, they carry carefully prepared food to share with the dead. In Mexico food is romance and work. It is an expression of affection and its blessings are to be shared. People will often bring freshly cooked food to neighbors with the explanation, "It turned out so well."

At one time corn grew wild in many parts of Mexico. The Indians of Mexico used corn as the basis of their diet. They soaked or cooked the kernels to soften them, ground them into a paste, and added water to make a dough for their flatbreads. Small pieces of this dough were flattened into thin patties and cooked on a griddle. These breads were filled with cooked beans.

The arrival of Europeans in Mexico had an impact on food. The Spanish gave the name "tortillas" to this flat bread. Their arrival also brought new ingredients. The variety of

tortilla fillings grew and new dishes emerged such as enchiladas, tacos, and tostadas.

The opening of the Santa Fe Trail in 1820 brought more interaction between Mexicans of the Southwest and traders and immigrants from the United States. Contacts between the Southwest and the heart of Mexico were scarce due to the great distance between the two. However, the Louisiana Purchase brought the United States relatively close to Santa Fe. Enterprising traders soon opened up this trade route across the Plains from St. Louis to Santa Fe and south into Mexico. The Southwest's geographical and commercial separation from Mexico itself opened this large Mexican province to American economic and cultural expansion. For twenty years the Santa Fe Trail flourished.

Today Mexican recipes vary depending upon what region they originated in. Many Mexicans use vegetables such as potatoes and peas in their tortilla fillings. Others use avocados, tomatoes, and lettuce. When Mexicans moved north to areas such as Kansas other changes took place due to the accessibility or inaccessibility of ingredients. Tortillas are still a welcome part of every meal in Mexico and many meals in the United States.

VOCABULARY

- **Culture** = Shared world view and a beliefs of a particular community transmitted through their arts, beliefs, and customs.
- **Erijoles** = A species of dark beans of large size stewed or fried in mutton fat and not too highly seasoned.
- **Mola** = A flat stone, approximately 18" x 7", used for grinding corn into flour.
- **Tortilla** = Flat round bread, can be made from corn or flour.

ACTIVITY

- 1) Discuss with the class how food can be an expression of culture.

Culture is the arts, beliefs, and customs that form a way of life for a group of people at a certain time. Food is a custom. It is something shared by a community. In Mexico food is part of life from birth to death. Examples of this include Christening Feasts and All Souls' Day.

Ask the class for examples of how food is part of their culture.

Examples might include special foods at holidays (turkey at Thanksgiving), food as part of a celebration or community event (birthday cakes, picnics, or tailgate parties), and food as part of socializing with friends (going out for a pizza).

Explain to students that tortillas are an example of different cultures coming together.

Before the Spanish arrived the Indians of Mexico used corn and beans. The Spanish used Spanish words to name this food. They called the flat corn bread tortillas.

- 2) Introduce worksheet #29, Diary Excerpts of Susan Magoffin by telling the class what the Santa Fe Trail was and how Susan Magoffin was associated with it.

The Santa Fe Trail stretched from the Kansas/Missouri border to Santa Fe. Unlike many other trails, the Santa Fe Trail was used for carrying trade goods between the East and the Southwest. Susan's husband was a veteran trader, and she joined him on a trip from Independence, Missouri through the Southwest and south to Chihuahua, Mexico in 1846-1847.

Hand out the worksheet or read its contents aloud to the students.

- 3) Use the following questions to initiate a discussion of Susan Magoffin's observations.

What can be learned about how tortillas were made near Albuquerque in 1846?

They were difficult to make from the perspective of the visiting American, Susan Magoffin. "What a deal of trouble it is too. I had not thought half the work."

In the Mexican culture women make the tortillas.

The ingredients in tortillas were water, grease for the griddle, and corn soaked in ley (lime).

Tortillas were eaten with frijoles (beans of large size stewed or fried in mutton fat and not too highly seasoned).

The steps in making tortillas are (1) soak corn in ley (lime) and remove husks, (2) mash corn on mola stone and add enough water to make a paste, (3) divide paste into little pieces and flatten these, (4) place flattened dough on greased griddle and flip several times until cooked through.]

Why did Susan Magoffin record the process of making Mexican tortillas in such detail?

It was unique to her since she was unfamiliar with the Mexican culture. People tend to take their own cultures for granted. It is not until they come in contact with cultures different from their own that they realize there are other "ways" to do things.

- 4) After the class has discussed what they have learned from Susan Magoffin's observations, ask them to think of reasons that variations might be found in tortillas. The following quote may be read to help begin the discussion.

"...my father had. . .been here during when he was a young man so he knew Mexican-American cooking. . .The only change in the food was flour tortillas. It was corn over there [in Mexico] and it

was flour over here [in Kansas]."

This is a quote from an oral history interview with Cipriana (Sue) Rodriguez, Garden City. She was interviewed by Robert Oppenheimer in her home in 1981. A complete copy of the transcript of this interview is located in the collections of the Kansas State Historical Society.

Regionalism is an example of how and why food alters. People use ingredients that are readily available. Those living near an ocean may use seafood in their tortillas. People having access to fresh vegetables used potatoes and peas. When Cipriana Rodriguez's family moved to Kansas they began using wheat flour instead of grinding corn meal to make their tortillas.

Other cultures influence food. Mexican Indians filled their tortillas with boiled beans. Europeans arriving in Mexico introduced ingredients that led to the developments of dishes like the enchilada, taco, and tostada.

- 5) Ask the class to consider food of today. How has fast food influenced Mexican or Mexican American food? Do restaurants such as Taco Bell, Taco Tico, Taco John's, etc. serve Mexican food or an adaptation of it? How have they influenced our views of what Mexican food is?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

- 1) Have the students interview older Mexican Americans in the community regarding foodways. Create a list of questions to ask.
- 2) Ask the students to gather several recipes from Mexican cookbooks and Mexican American families. Compare ingredients and decide which recipes come from the same region of Mexico. Discuss how recipes change over time as they pass from family member to family member and ingredients are deleted and/or changed.
- 3) View the "Food" section of the video *The Hispanic Face of Kansas* included in this trunk (counter #124). Discuss the history of Mexican food, how food is part of Mexican American traditions such as fiestas, and how it is passed on from one generation to another.
- 4) See the complementary lessons in this manual: "Making Tortillas."
- 5) Have the class evaluate the value of sources. Ask them to compare the two types of sources used in this lesson, oral history interview vs. diary or journal entries. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? Which source is the best to use? Why?
Using the widest variety of sources possible is always the best approach.