

# PREPARING AND TASTING FOOD



## *Objective*

Students will prepare food from the early 1800s and consider issues of availability (of ingredients), storage, expense and taste.

## *Standards*

Reading 3.A.1.a (grades 3 – 5)

## *Grade level*

3 - 5

## *Length of lesson*

45 – 60 minutes

## *Materials from trunk*

Historic recipes with description included from Lobsouse and Spotted Dog

- Ship's Biscuit for a Single Mess (hard tack)
- Bashed Neeps (Neeps Hackit with Balmagowry)
- Sea-Pie
- Whipt Syllabub
- White Pudding
- Drowned (Boiled) Baby
- Pilaff
- Spotted Dog
- Toasted Cheese

Historic recipes with description from the USS Constitution

- Plum Duff
- Hot Chocolate

Book: *Children at the Hearth: 19th Century Cooking, Manners and Games*, by Barbara Swell

Sample **hard tack** or “**ship's biscuit**”

Objects from the trunk related to eating and cooking:

- **Soldier's Mess** (horn spoon, twisted fork, tin bowl and cup, frying pan)

# PREPARING AND TASTING FOOD

## *Materials from classroom*

- Access to an oven
- Ingredients for hard tack (flour, water, salt) (see recipe)
- Equipment for measuring, mixing, rolling out and baking

## *Overview*

This lesson leads students in a hands-on experience with food from the early 1800s. Students will examine food descriptions and historical recipes as well as measure ingredients and roll dough. Discussion of taste differences, food name origins, preparation, diet, storage and sanitation will compare historic and contemporary times.

## *Teacher Background*

“**Hearth**” is referred to as the warm center of the home. Most American homes did not have traditional stoves until much later in the nineteenth-century. In the early 1800s, preparing and preserving food was at the center of daily life. Family status determined who in the household was in charge of the cooking. In upper class families, the mistress of the house would instruct the cook, usually a female slave or servant, how to prepare **receipts** (recipes) passed down from generation to generation. In middling or lower class families, the mistress of the household generally did all of the food preparation.

Cooking happened inside the home, in the large fireplace, or sometimes outdoors over an open-hearth pit. Because hearths were so large, sometimes up to 12-feet in length, women could maintain several different fires for preparing large meals.

Hearth cooking was often messy and dangerous. Heavy pots and pans made of cast iron were hung or placed over open flames. Women would have to constantly stir or turn food, right next to the open flames. Hearth cooking not only required tending to the food, but also to the fire and coals; different kinds of fires and flames were best for different kinds of meal preparation and cooking, so heat had to be timed and adjusted. Women also had to chop the wood for the fire and fetch water. Burns were common and women had to make sure their long heavy skirts did not catch fire!

Recipes during the early nineteenth century reflected regional tastes, season, and availability. Food was prepared in a variety of ways, including roasting, boiling, broiling, frying, stewing and toasting. Preservation methods like drying, smoking and salting were essential to prevent spoiling so that food would last into the colder season. In Maryland during the early nineteenth century, cuisine represented the diversity of cultures present throughout the region.

Traditional English recipes dominated the foodways at first; the introduction of new foods from the Americas, including tomatoes, potatoes, corn, sugar and chocolate, allowed the new Americans to experiment with their diets. Slaves brought over from Africa also contributed to new dietary trends throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

# PREPARING AND TASTING FOOD

For good historical background on hearth cooking, see link for Gregory LeFever Article in Related Resources Section).

Sailors and militiamen during the War of 1812 were much more limited as to their diet and food preparation. American soldiers were issued a daily ration of:

20 oz. beef	.64 oz. salt	1 gill* vinegar	18 oz. flour
.64 oz. soap	1 gill rum	.24 oz. candle	

\*A “gill” is equal to 5 fluid ounces.

They were limited in how much they could carry as well as what they could prepare. Often times they were not near a hearth or campfire. They would also have to rely on food such as dried beef and hard tack if they were out at sea or in battle, without access to a fire. Hard tack was a major staple for the military during the War of 1812. Hardtack is a simple type of cracker or biscuit made from flour, water, and sometimes salt. Hardtack was a primary staple in the diet of a sailor during the War of 1812. Inexpensive and long lasting, it was used in the absence of perishable foods, commonly during long sea voyages and military campaigns.

## *Procedure*

1. Pass around sample of the hard tack or ship’s biscuit and ask the following question. What is this? What it is made of? Does it look like anything students eat today? Explain that this is a sample of hard tack or ship’s biscuit – something sailors and soldiers fighting during the War of 1812 would be all too familiar with (another name for regular bread is soft tack). Why would people have made this (i.e. storage, traveling with it)? Refer to the Catalog Card for Ship’s Biscuit/Hard Tack for additional historical information for this item.
2. Ask students what we can learn from examining historic recipes and food. By looking at the way people prepared, ate and experienced food, we can learn more about their everyday life (resources available, storage and sanitation, etc.) Though they may not come to mind immediately, historic recipes are a good example of a primary resource.
3. As a class (or in small groups) make hard tack/ship’s biscuits following the recipe in the trunk (a copy of the recipe from Lobscouse & Spotted Dog). You may choose to shorten the beating and folding step if necessary. Allow students to measure and roll the dough themselves. (Ingredients listed in recipe makes approximately one dozen 3-inch square or round biscuits).
4. After the students have finished preparing the hard tack (and it is in the oven cooking), discuss the process of making the food and imagine who and how it would have been made 200 years ago.
5. Divide students into small groups and distribute historic recipes of other foods to each group. After students have read the recipes and accompanying excerpts, discuss what they can determine from these texts. What was daily life like for the people preparing, eating and storing this food? Do students have any comments about the descriptions of food preparation? Is the language in the recipes clear and easy to read? Are ingredients familiar? Did they use the same utensils? What would it have been like to cook over an open fire? Are some of the foods similar to foods we eat

## PREPARING AND TASTING FOOD

and enjoy today? Or are they different? What are the differences?

6. Once the hard tack is cooked, be sure to enjoy it as a class and discuss the experience of eating it. Hard tack was a staple for many (pioneers, soldiers, sailors) because even if infested with grubs or weevils, this cracker can last for years without going bad. Note: Students will have to soak it in milk, tea or water to make it soft enough to eat (see recipe for hot chocolate).

### *Extensions*

- Plan a community feast using historic recipes. Ask families to each prepare one of three dishes at home that can then be brought in for a potluck: Whipt Syllabub, Pilaff, Toasted Cheese (all recipes included in the trunk). If you like, two weeks in advance of the potluck, prepare pickled gherkins. Students can also research other recipes and prepare those foods as well. In preparation for the event, students could write a menu and design invitations to the event.

### *Modifications*

- You may choose to focus on hard tack/ship biscuit and discuss the other historic recipes included in the trunk at a later date or in a different way. If you use only the hard tack/ship's biscuit recipe, explore the larger themes of access to ingredients, storage and sanitation, motivation for cooking and food preparation.
- If your school has food restrictions or if you do not have access to an oven in your school, have the kids prepare the dough either in the classroom or at home and have them bring their hard tack in the following day. If you choose this method, you will have to break the lesson into two class periods or two days.

# PREPARING AND TASTING FOOD

## *Related Resources*

Grossman, Anne Chotzinoff and Lisa Grossman Thomas

2000 *Lobscouse and Spotted Dog*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Oliver, Sandra

2005 *Food in Colonial and Federal America*. West Port, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Swell, Barbara

1999 *Children at the Hearth: 19th Century Cooking, Manners & Games*. Asheville, North Carolina: Native Ground Music, Inc.

“Early Cooking Hearths” article by Gregory LeFever, article in Early American Life

<http://www.gregorylefever.com/pdfs/Cooking%20Hearths%202.pdf>

Website that accompanies the book Lobscouse and Spotted Dog

<http://www.wwnorton.com/pob/spottedd/>

Websites about Lord Nelson’s Navy include lots of information about food

<http://www.hms.org.uk/nelsonsnavymaggot.htm>

<http://www.hms.org.uk/nelsonsnavydiet.htm>

Another recipe for Hard Tack (with photographs)

<http://www.wikihow.com/Make-Hardtack>

## **Recipes from the USS Constitution Museum**

Plum Duff

<http://www.asailorslifeforme.org/educator/activities/Plum-Duff-Recipe-Dinnertime.pdf>

War of 1812 Hot Chocolate

<http://www.asailorslifeforme.org/educator/activities/1812-Hot-Chocolate-Recipe-Dinnertime.pdf>