

### Lesson Objectives

- Examine factors that lead to the rise of regional food traditions
- Research the food traditions of a state
- Compare and contrast the food traditions of different states

### Suggested Grade Levels

4–8

### Time Frame

Three or four 45-minute periods

### Social Studies Performance Expectations

I. Culture — Early Grades (a, c); Middle Grades (a, c)  
 III. People, Places, & Environment — Early Grades (h); Middle Grades (h)  
 (See Appendix)

### Supplies

- Art supplies
- Internet access

# American Menus

## Setting the Stage

1. Write the following questions about barbecue on the board and ask students to share and explain their answers:
  - a. *What do Texans call slow-cooked beef served with a hot, spicy sauce?*
  - b. *What is the name of the tender chopped pork with a peppery vinegar sauce served in North Carolina?*
  - c. *What do you ask for if you want pulled pork with a sweet tomato sauce in Tennessee?*
  - d. *What do you call chicken cooked on a backyard grill in Oregon?*
2. Explain that all of these dishes are called “barbecue,” showing that the meaning of the word changes depending on what region of the U.S. you’re in. (For a brief history of barbecue, refer to [www.cbbqa.com/dove](http://www.cbbqa.com/dove).) Tell students: *Barbecue is not the only food that varies depending on the region. Throughout the nation, people eat different foods, prepare the same foods differently, and sometimes specialize in a food or dish not available elsewhere. We’re going to explore the well-known foods of different regions in the U.S. and discover how these foods reflect the people and resources of the area.*

*Note:* If you don’t think the barbecue example will resonate with your students, ask them if they’ve ever traveled to another state and eaten something not found in your state. Give a personal example to get them thinking.

## Activity Procedure

1. Ask students: *Why do you think there are different kinds of food in different parts of the country? What might account for the differences?* Brainstorm a list of ideas including: immigration, interactions between different cultures, crops that grow well in an area, and natural food sources that can be gathered.
2. Explain that the cultures of the people who live in an area and the resources available to them often influence the food traditions of a region. Give several examples (e.g., the interaction between French settlers and African slaves in Louisiana gave rise to Creole cooking, and the prevalence of hog raising in the South after the Civil War made pork the meat of choice for barbecue). For a brief review of regional foods in the U.S., refer to [www.sallys-place.com/food/ethnic.cuisine/us.htm](http://www.sallys-place.com/food/ethnic.cuisine/us.htm) (enter “ethnic cuisine united states” in the search engine) or <http://www3.chass.ncsu.edu/PA540/pnayak/>.



Barbecue Festival poster, Lexington, North Carolina  
 Courtesy The Barbecue Festival, Inc.

3. Divide the class into groups of two or three. Assign each group a state for which they'll create a menu. Make sure to choose states from all regions of the country. Groups will research the food traditions of that state, and identify the cultures, local resources, and any other factors that contributed to the development of their state's food traditions. Allow students time to utilize reference materials in the school and/or local library. Encourage students to examine local recipe books from their assigned state and the *Smithsonian Folklife Festival Cookbook*, if possible. Students can also consult websites maintained by their state or state agricultural boards, the "500 Years of American Food" section of the *Key Ingredients* website ([www.keyingredients.org](http://www.keyingredients.org)), and the "State Foods" section of The Food Timeline ([www.gti.net/mocolib1/kid/food.html](http://www.gti.net/mocolib1/kid/food.html)).
4. Based on their research, each group will develop a restaurant menu featuring the food traditions of the

state. The cover of the menu should include the name of the restaurant and a brief explanation of the factors that have shaped the food traditions of the state. Inside, the menu should include at least five dishes with descriptions of their main ingredients, their significance in the state's food traditions, and any other important aspects of the dish (e.g., special cooking techniques, local variations, and time of year served). Each dish should be illustrated with a photo or drawing. Give groups the option to create their menus on a computer or with art supplies.

5. When the menus are complete, ask groups to set out their menus on tables or desks around the room. Students will then assume the role of travel writers for *American Menus* magazine. They'll visit each state restaurant to discover the unique dining experiences offered in that area of the country. One member of each group should be present at all times at their respective restaurant to guide other students through the menu. Students should keep a "travel log" to record the foods they find most out of the ordinary. After visiting all of the restaurants, students will write an article on three of the restaurants for *American Menus*. The article should explain the kind of dishes travelers would find available at each restaurant and how those dishes reflect the cultures or resources of the state.
6. Submit the class menus to your area's *Key Ingredients* hosts to complement the exhibition or display them on an "American Menus" bulletin board in your class.

#### Lesson Extension

1. Assign groups to prepare an item on their menu to share with the class.

#### Resources

"500 Years of American Food" Page. Key Ingredients: America by Food. 2003. Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.  
 <[http://www.keyingredients.org/001\\_timeline/001\\_timeline\\_01.asp](http://www.keyingredients.org/001_timeline/001_timeline_01.asp)>.  
 Interactive timeline explores American food by historical era, theme, and region.

Dove, Laura. "Barbeque: An Introduction." 1997. California Barbeque Association. <<http://www.cbbqa.com/dove>>. A brief history of barbecue.

Freeman, Nancy. "Ethnic Cuisine: United States." Sally's Place. <[http://www.sallys-place.com/food/ethnic\\_cuisine/us.htm](http://www.sallys-place.com/food/ethnic_cuisine/us.htm)>. Discusses the role of regionalism and diversity in American cuisine. Includes an extensive resource list.

"Foods of America: Regional Trends in American Cuisine" Page. North Carolina State University. <<http://www3.chass.ncsu.edu/PA540/pnayak>>. Explores the regional foods of America, offers recipes, and discusses characteristics which identify each cuisine and make it unique. Includes links to related sites.

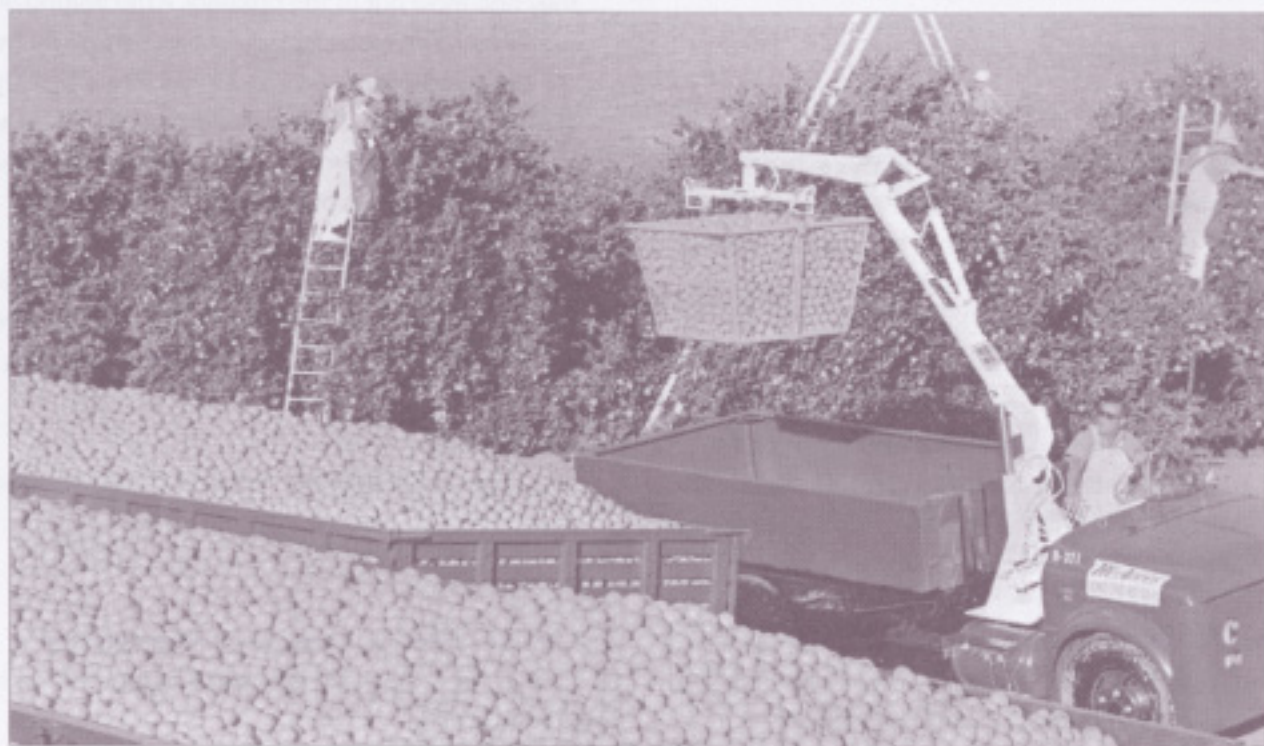
Kirlin, Katherine S. and Thomas M. Kirlin, *Smithsonian Folklife Cookbook*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

More than 275 recipes, along with illustrations, anecdotes, essays, photographs, and drawings, paint a vivid picture of America's foods and the people who enjoy them.

"Traditional State Recipes & Foods" Page. Ed. Lynne Olver. The Food Timeline. Morris County Library.

<<http://www.gti.net/mocolib1/kid/food.html>>.

Offers great ideas and excellent resources on how to search for traditional state foods.



A Florida citrus grove, about 1970  
Courtesy Colourpicture

Across Florida, citrus groves stretch farther than the eye can see.