

**Thematic Unit:**

**Learners' Lives as Curriculum©:**

**GOOD FOOD**



**Level: Beginning Literacy**

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"When I was in Somalia, I liked to eat bananas, fish, beans, corn, apples, goat meat, pasta, candy, coffee. When I am in Pittsburgh I like to eat pasta, rice, corn, eggs, apples, oranges, grapes, tomatoes, chicken."

- *By Halima Hussein*





"When we were children, we ate many different types of fruit. In Bhutan, our land was beautiful. Our farms were big. We grew bananas, pears, oranges, mangos, lychees, pineapples, and coconuts. Many children like fruit."

- *By Khina Bista, Pabitra Dahal, Pashupati Dahal, and Tila Thapa*

1.) PLAYING WITH LANGUAGE:  
FOOD WORDS



Look at the stories on pages 1 and 2.  
Circle the food words that you know.

2.) Practice the words.

Work with your teacher.

Work with a friend.

3.) Think about food words that you know.

Write them here:

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#### 4.) LEARN ABOUT EACH OTHER: TALKING



Think about food and cooking.

Talk to your teacher.

Talk to your friends.

My Name: _____	My Friend's Name: _____

In my country...	In my friend's country...

In my culture...	In the U.S...

## 5.) LEARNING ABOUT EACH OTHER: QUESTIONS



Talk to your classmates.  
What foods do they like?

Do you like

1.	rice?	_____ likes rice.
2.	apples?	_____ likes apples.
3.	goat meat?	_____ likes goat meat.
4.	mangos?	_____ likes mangos.
5.	eggs?	_____ likes chicken.
6.	pasta?	_____ likes pasta.
7.	chicken?	_____ likes chicken.
8.	coffee?	_____ likes _____.
9.	coconuts?	_____ _____ coconuts.
10.	bananas?	_____ likes _____.
11.	pineapples?	_____ _____ pineapples.
12.		
13.		

## 6.) WRITING

Write about your friends.



1. \_\_\_\_\_ likes rice.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ likes apples.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ likes mangos.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ likes eggs.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ likes \_\_\_\_\_.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ likes \_\_\_\_\_.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ pears.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ pineapples.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_.



## 7.) VERBS

Go back to page 1 and page 2.  
Look again at the stories.  
Circle the verbs.



PAST = BEFORE	PRESENT = NOW
<i>"When we <b>were</b> children..."</i>	<i>"Many children <b>like</b> fruit."</i>

Write verbs for cooking and eating:



NOW	BEFORE



## 8.) GAME: MATCHING



Look. Match.

tomatoes



chicken



beans



apples



rice



mangos



goat



oranges



eggs



coffee



bananas



pineapples



candy



coconuts



corn



fish



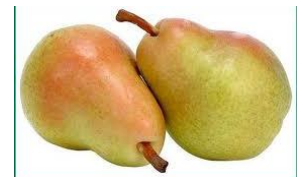
pasta



lychees



grapes



pears



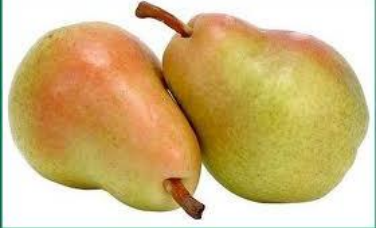






## 9.) GAME: BINGO

		FREE		

## 10.) MAKING SENTENCES

I	like	goat meat	and
You	likes	pork	to
We	eat	beef	not
My friend	eats	chicken	s
Many people	does	vegetables	?
They	doesn't	fruit	.
My child	don't	rice	.
My children	cook	lychees	.
My family	cooks	coffee	.
He	can't	tea	.
She	can	pasta	,
	won't		,
	Do		,
	Does		,

## 11.) MY STORY: WRITING

Write about you.



My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I am from \_\_\_\_\_.

I like \_\_\_\_\_.

I don't like \_\_\_\_\_.

I eat \_\_\_\_\_.

I don't eat \_\_\_\_\_.

I cook \_\_\_\_\_.

I don't cook \_\_\_\_\_.

I \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_.



## MY STORY: LISTENING AND TALKING

Read your story to your  
friends.



Talk about all the stories.

MY NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 12.) PROJECT: HELP WITH U.S. COOKING

Make a book to help other people understand U.S. cooking.

### JOB:



- a) Talk with your class about your book.
- b) Give everyone a job.
- c) Make your book.



PICTURE DICTIONARY: \_\_\_\_\_

FOOD AND CULTURE: \_\_\_\_\_

HEALTHY FOOD: \_\_\_\_\_

RECIPES: \_\_\_\_\_

### 13.) MORE STORIES

"When I was a girl, I ate milk, corn,  
beans, and cabbage water eggs bananas  
Now I eat rice, meat, and vegetables,"

*- By Mainun Sekondo*





"When I was a child I loved vegetables. I ate peas, cucumbers, parsley, tomatoes, bell peppers. Shrimp was my favorite. My family liked seafood."

- *By Myint Myint Khaing*

## 14.) LOOKING BACK

### Language Learning:

Read. Check (✓) "yes", "a little", or "no".

	YES	A LITTLE	NO
I know English food words.			
I can talk about food in English.			
I can read about food in English.			
I can write about food in English.			
I can find good food in the U.S.			
I can choose healthy food.			
I understand American food.			

### Activities:

	GOOD	O.K.	BAD
Reading/ Writing			
Talking			
Games			
Book			

# NOTES FOR TEACHERS

**GENERAL NOTES:** I designed this unit with my beginning ESL literacy class in mind; almost all of them are either nonliterate (L1 has a written form, but they have no literacy skills in L1) or preliterate (L1 has no written form). None of them ever attended school before coming to the U.S. The intended level is why the print is so big and why I have so many photos, making this thematic unit longer than most. It's also why each story has its own page, why the activities have visual cues (writing/ speaking, etc.), and why the directions are limited and sometimes absent. At this level, it's important to limit all text to what is necessary (not "too many words"). I hope that the lack of specific directions on the pages also allows teachers to adapt the topic of food to their priorities – leaving room to discuss cooking, eating, culture, childhood food memories, nutrition, etc.

Beginning literacy learners frequently have trouble doing self-directed pair or small group work, due to lack of experience with school. For that reason, instruction for them often tends to become more teacher-centered and whole-class based. I've found that they often feel more comfortable with this format. However, provided with adequate practice, structure, and direction, they can do some self-directed activities (and probably should, for autonomy). They will likely need and want a bit more supervision and guidance than other learners.

In the photo on page 2, Halima Hussein spontaneously decided to take over the class when I stepped out of the room. The writers of the other stories are shown with their children in a family literacy program (on page 3, their grandchildren).

**Opening Stories, pages 1-2:** When introducing new reading material to my class, I have found the following sequence helpful with nonliterate and preliterate beginning literacy learners and sometimes with semiliterate beginning learners:

- 1) Working from the reading selection written on the board: Teacher reads out loud, once very slowly so learners can hear and focus on how to pronounce each word, then at "normal speed" so the class can hear "how an American would really read it". Repeat as/ if needed.
- 2) Working from the board: Teacher points to and reads one word at a time; learners repeat after each word.
- 3) Working from the board: Learners and teacher read the selection in unison.
- 4) Working from the board: Learners read the selection in unison while teacher silently points to all of the words on the board in turn.
- 5) Working from individual copies: Learners read it to each other in pairs.

For beginning literacy learners to become confident with a reading selection (about the length of the stories here), these steps may be spread out over a week or two. They don't all need to be done every day and can be combined or mixed up as needed. I usually give learners a few minutes to individually review their copies of the reading before and/or after we do any of the steps above.

**Number 3, page 3 (writing food words):** Many beginning literacy learners need a LOT of time to write – it's physically difficult and very time-consuming, due to lack of practice and often problems with letter knowledge. For this reason, writing and copying is not always the best use of class time for them. I've noticed that many learners at this level also become very focused on writing down EVERYTHING on the board (and/or any print nearby,

whether or not it has anything to do with the lesson); they frequently have trouble distinguishing between what is important and what they don't need to copy. It can be necessary to carefully limit and control what writing they do and when. This can mean avoiding writing on the board, flat-out telling them NOT to write something, or telling them to put their pencils down.

This writing activity has five long lines because I wanted beginning writers to have all the space they need for their letters. Five words seems like a reasonable minimum goal here. Since beginning literacy learners can vary widely in skill level, it's advisable to have different tasks for different learners. Those with stronger literacy skills can write multiple words on each line. Learners may either come up with their own food words, or need the teacher to provide them. Some may need to use this activity to practice letter formation; others may try writing a list with commas; some could look at a picture dictionary, find food words, and copy them down.

**Number 5, page 5, and Number 6, page 6:** This is a "Find Someone Who..." activity. These are often very challenging for beginning literacy learners, because they don't understand what to do. It will probably take extra time. However, these activities also provide valuable speaking and reading practice (asking questions, understanding responses, and fluency). If you judge this to be worth the time, here are a few suggestions to help get it to work:

- 1) Model the activity – do it first in front of the whole class with a few learners whose spoken English is a bit stronger, or do it with a few volunteers and staff.
- 2) Explicitly direct them the first few times they do the activity. "A: You say, 'Do you like bananas? Very good. Now B, you say 'Yes, I like bananas'. Now you write: B likes bananas.'" They will also need directions on which name goes in what blank. It could help to put the model sentences they come up with on the board, drawing the blanks in all the right places, changing the names, and summarizing with the entire class.
- 3) If "find someone who" just won't work: Try a round-robin, whole-group variation. For example, the person to the left of A asks A, "Do you like apples?" and the whole group can write down the name to either complete the sentence, "A likes apples", or, if the answer is no, ask the next person if he like apples. Next, A can ask the person sitting next to her, "B, do you like rice?", and so on.

**Number 7, page 7 (Verbs):** Before this activity, there should be some lessons on verbs (a very abstract concept which can be difficult to grasp at this level). I tell beginning literacy classes that a verb is something we *do* or something we *are*, then follow up with concrete examples of verbs in English that they actually know and/or use (walk, run, go, eat, etc.). From there you can move on to writing simple sentences on the board, preferably using their names: "A is from Bhutan. B walks every day." Identify the verb for them, and later, start asking them to identify the verb. For this activity, you might start by asking: "What do you do with food?" If they don't understand the question, start with some obvious examples: "Do you *cook* chicken? Do you *eat* apples?", or maybe ridiculous questions like "Do you *drive* bananas?", to get them to correct you and thereby supply a more useable answer. After that basis is established, you could move on to more specific cooking and eating verbs that have come out of classroom activities and discussion (chop, boil, serve, etc.). This is an opportunity for discussions of healthy eating and food safety (bake and boil are healthier than fry, wash vegetables before eating, what goes in the fridge/ freezer, etc.). I've also found it helpful to explain past and present by associating



them with “today/ now” and “finished”. Specific time expressions are also helpful: “Last night I cooked dinner, yesterday \_\_\_\_\_ was here, today \_\_\_\_\_ is not here”, etc.

**Number 8, pages 8-10 (Matching):** Feel free to use all three pages, just one, or any combination. Also, “corn” and “coconuts” are next to each other on the top of page 11 to provide a possible teachable moment comparing the two words (look at more than one letter of each word, not all words that start with “c-“ or “co-“ are the same, etc.).

**Number 9, page 11 (Bingo):** This can be filled out with (written) food words from the unit; other food words discussed in class; or with pictures, providing learners with the spoken word. (The pictures on page 14 may be convenient for this.) With beginning literacy, I recommend skipping the “B-I-N-G-O” across the top of the columns. Also, you will probably need to explicitly teach the function of the free space. Depending on the level of your class, you may choose to set up the game so that they have to read the food words to play, or not.

**Number 10, pages 12-13 (Making Sentences):** Here, learners will put together their own sentences using the words and pictures provided. The two pages are meant to be cut apart, with one copy given to each learner. Page 13 (words) and page 14 (pictures) were made as one activity. Use any combination of the words and pictures provided.

If your class knows about the subjects and verbs (which beginning literacy learners can learn to recognize and identify, with time and practice), you can use the words on page 13 to reinforce and practice this. The columns are arranged to support this, with subjects first, then verbs (the last column has periods and commas/ apostrophes, plus blanks for any words or names that you or the class may want to add). I teach subjects and verbs with beginning literacy learners, even though it’s challenging and abstract, because I think it helps to provide practice with putting together a complete thought. A common problem with this level is extremely limited sentence structure and function words; many learners seem to rely on throwing together whatever nouns and verbs (usually ending with *-ing*) that they think will allow them to communicate, and they can often be very successful. But that strategy can also lead to real difficulties in conversation, even with teachers.

For this activity, I’d recommend showing them a few examples first. Pile up the cut-out pieces from each column separately. Read over them with learners and show them how you can take an item from each pile and make a sentence, then change one and have a new sentence. After that, maybe have learners suggest or give you another item to change the sentence again. When they’re comfortable with that, they can practice it individually and/or in pairs (with help).

**Number 13, pages 17-18 (More Stories):** Errors here can be used as opportunities to correct spelling, talk about how sentences end with a period, etc. Since traditional Muslim religious law prohibits eating shrimp (page 14), it could be a good time to compare and contrast dietary laws in different religions, and/ or different favorite or common foods in different countries.