By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- identify traditional Bermudian foods;
- trace where Bermudian food traditions originally came from;
- understand how meals and foods reflect family history and traditions; and
- recognise the role of food and shared meals in creating and maintaining family traditions.

In this chapter, students will learn about the role food plays in defining and reflecting culture, community, and family. They will look at the roots of Bermuda’s traditional dishes and at ways that these dishes are being creatively adapted today. Students will collect memories, traditions, and recipes associated with everyday and special family meals. In addition, they will examine how food and home remedy traditions are passed down within families.

**CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS**

In this chapter, in addition to social studies curriculum links, there are readings, discussion questions, and activities that fit well with language arts, visual and fine arts, design and technology, health and safety, library science, math, business studies, and advisory discussion period or circle time.
Sonya Robinson’s codfish cakes, cassava pie, peas ‘n rice and baked beans.  
Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.

Chef Chris Malpas’ farine pie.  
Farine is dried cassava which is soaked before making the pie.

Culinary Arts

Food unites and divides us. Some dishes we commonly eat we know as traditional Bermudian foods, while others are specific to our families. Part of the pleasure of eating these is in the memories of family and home that they evoke. Shared meals help create a family bond. They are a time for rituals and stories. We each have our place at the table and our role in producing the meal, be it through economic support, cooking, setting the table, blessing the food, accepting and recognising the sustenance provided, telling a story, or cleaning up. Often we invite others to share our family life by having a meal with us.

A Taste of Home

Bermudian cuisine was created by joining ingredients and techniques from English, African, Canadian, Portuguese, and Caribbean traditions. A traditional Sunday breakfast in Bermuda includes: boiled codfish eaten by Bermudians throughout history and a common meal of bondpeople, potatoes probably from the British Isles, bananas from Africa and the Caribbean, and tea with milk from England. The British gave Bermuda fish and chips, chutneys (reflecting the British involvement with India), and hot cross buns (an Easter tradition), among other foods. Recipes calling for curry probably come from the West Indies. As you eat, take a moment to think about which cultures have shaped Bermuda’s cuisine.

Other typical Bermudian meals may include baked or fried fish, Hoppin’ John (peas and rice) or macaroni and cheese. On special occasions, conch fritters, shark hash, codfish cakes, fish chowder, stew, and pawpaws (papayas) may be served. Other typical dishes include roast chicken, pork, and mussel or beef pie

1 Bermudians have used salted codfish in a variety of dishes based on recipes brought to Bermuda by the various different cultures making it home. Salting fish is a way to preserve it. Salted fish was first brought to Bermuda by the wreck of the Sea Venture (1609).
made with curry spices. Pumpkin, boiled or in fritters, is sometimes served as a side dish. Cassava or farine pie accompanies the Christmas feast. Desserts with spices such as ginger, nutmeg, allspice, and cinnamon are frequently enjoyed. The selection of fresh vegetables varies with the season. Seasonal fruits also flavour the foods: loquats are used in pies, chutneys, and jams; citrus is used in cakes, jams, jellies, and marmalades; bananas are used in breads and as snacks, and Suriname cherries are popular as a snack or made into a jam or jelly.

Bermudian cuisine continues to evolve. Since many Bermudians travel, they bring back tastes for new foods and ways of eating. Sometimes this creates new dishes; other times it may change our eating habits and customs. Bermudian meals in the past were traditionally sit-down style not the eating on the run introduced by American fast foods.

Although many Bermudian cooks were drawn into the hospitality industry, Bermuda’s home foodways were not, for the most part, carried into the hotels and restaurants. International dishes rather than native Bermudian foods are the mainstay of most restaurants in Bermuda, but some chefs are introducing traditional Bermudian dishes in creative ways.

Discussion Questions

1. How can food and meals unite people?
2. How can food and meals divide people?
Meal Traditions, Table Manners, and Family Memories

Family meals are full of family folklore. Often the dinner table is where stories are told and special family ways of doing things are taught and repeated. Does your family have a certain structure for meals? Who prepares the meal? Who sets the table? Who sits where? How are everyday meals different from the meals you share to celebrate holidays or special achievements? What special foods does your family serve at holiday meals? Are there recipes that have been passed down in the family? What are the stories that go along with your family’s meal traditions? As you think about these questions, realise that the answers help you paint a picture of your family; and, remember: it’s your family folklore and traditions that provide the colour.

In many Bermudian homes, traditions are plentiful for preparing, presenting, and eating food. These may include the tableware used, the rituals before eating (such as special prayers for grace), the roles of preparing and serving the food, as well as the special recipes that are served. These customs, passed on within families, are shared by many Bermudians.

Every family has certain rituals, often including specific foods, which are linked to special days. Fond memories of childhood often arise when eating these dishes. Fred Ming, consultant chef at the Landfall Restaurant and a former teacher at Bermuda College, remembers a typical Sunday-after-church meal that his family shared when he was growing up.

Now most of the time when we came from church on a Sunday, [we’d] stop off at my granny’s. We used to sample her famous bread-and-butter pudding. This is not like the English bread-and-butter pudding. This pudding was dark, resembled something like a fruitcake, [and] had lots of raisins and spices and eggs and so forth, but [it] was [made from] leftovers, like the stale bread. [It] was a way of utilising bread that was left over. And occasionally we would make ice cream. We all had a turn turning the handle of the ice cream.
maker until the ice cream was ready to eat. But certainly, Sundays after church, Sunday
afternoons, were great. We all went to church in our Sunday best, and [when] we came back
home we always had a treat of roasted nuts and, of course, a lovely lunch.

Mr Eardley Ebbin, a retired chef, thinking back to his childhood, remembers the chores the family
members helped with in order to put Christmas dinner on the table.

At Christmas everybody had to help in the kitchen. Cassava—you had to scrape it
and peel it and grate it, and you had to squeeze it. Hams, the puddings—they were cooked
in the yard. Cedar—we had a cedar fire and got grates so you brought it outdoors. Hams
were smoked. The Portuguese made their own sausages—Portuguese sausages [called
chourico or chorizo].

Isaura Mary Reis describes traditional Portuguese foods she prepares when she has a party.

I do a lot of entertainment. Sometimes I have 45 to 50 people in my house, and
that's when I have a bit of celebration. Mostly I provide the bacalau (codfish) because
Portuguese people have a tendency to like fish. [I prepare] a fillet without the egg, very plain,
with the same seasonings [Portuguese pepper, garlic, salt]. Of course you must have potatoes
and chorlico, which is the hot sausage, and chicken and types of salads and pasta. That
would be the kind of menu we would have for a celebration.

Afternoon tea, an English tradition,
was adopted by Bermudians. It offered an
afternoon social gathering where the hostess
could relax, as most of the foods could be
prepared ahead of time (with the exception,
of course, of the tea!). Afternoon tea might
be a fancy affair with white linen, special tea
cakes and sandwiches, and formal dress, or
simply a cup of tea with a biscuit or slice of
banana bread shared with a drop-in Sunday-
afternoon visitor. Although in today's fast-
paced world, tea service is mainly found at
hotels and guesthouses, some women have
continued the tradition in their homes.

They've discovered that tea parties fit perfectly
as a special, small, regular social occasion.

Tina Daniels, of Paget, describes how her tea
parties got started and what they mean to the members, who she affectionately calls “tea ladies.”

Myself and three friends started our tea parties about five years ago. It started when
one of our number decided she would like to have a small group of friends over for afternoon
tea to show off her new home. The four of us had known each other over the years, but never
got all together for a chat. We had such a good time that we decided to make it a regular tea
event and to take it in turns to visit each other's homes on a Saturday afternoon once a quarter.

2 chourico is pronounced “shadeesh”
These are now treasured and much-looked-forward-to occasions. We all dress up—sometimes including hats! The best china and silver are dusted off. The most delicious cakes, pastries, cookies are served. And husbands and children are banished from the hostess’ house for about three to four hours—we have been known to talk from three until eight! Sometimes we have a theme when each person is asked to bring along something to share with the other “tea ladies.”

Discussion Questions

1. What are your favourite foods? What are your parents’ favourite foods? Are they same as yours? Why do you think that your favourite foods are the same or different than your parents’ favourite foods?

2. What are typical dishes served at your home on a regular basis? For special celebrations?

3. Make a list on the blackboard and link the dishes to the cultures they came from or borrowed ingredients or techniques from.

4. Are there expected behaviours at meal times in your house? What are they?

5. How do meals differ when you have guests? How do they differ on special holidays?

6. Is there a particular restaurant your family goes to for special occasions? Why do they go to that restaurant?

7. Have you ever had afternoon or tea? What types of foods were served?

8. If you were going to create a special meal, what would you serve?

9. Do certain celebrations require not only special foods but also special ways of dressing and behaving? If so, identify the celebrations and describe the special foods and ways of dressing and behaving.

Collecting Bermudian Cuisine

1. At home, ask about recipes that are special to your family. Find out the stories related to these recipes. Why are they special? Where did the dish come from? When and why is it served? Who prepares it? Were the dishes first prepared for a special circumstance? Are there certain ways of preparing them that are distinct from preparing other dishes?

2. Write down the recipe. There may or may not be a written recipe for the dish, so you may end up having to take notes while it is being prepared.

3. Bring the recipe, and the story about the dish, to class to add to a class Bermuda cookbook. This cookbook can be created on paper or on a web page and should include pictures of the dishes, of people preparing and eating the food, and the stories associated with the food.

4. Write out directions on how to set the table for a special family meal. Be sure to list what table dressings you would use.

5. You could also create a Bermudian cuisine videotape series. Make the videotape like a cooking show, but go beyond showing how the dishes are prepared to including discussions about why the dish is so special to each family. You may also want to show different ways of setting a table.
6. If there are Bermudian cuisines that are not represented in your class, be sure to go beyond your families to collect recipes and stories to represent the broad range of Bermudian foods.

7. Hold a tasting in class. Prepare one of the recipes you collected. Bring the dish to school, along with the recipe. Be ready to tell the story behind the dish to your classmates.

8. Invite the community to participate in a fishcake cook-off at your school. Ask some of the chefs at local restaurants to serve as the judges.

### Recipes for Visitors

1. Put together a full meal using recipes from those you collected. Look at how many people each recipe serves. Pretend you are having a big party and will need enough of each dish to feed 20 people. Change the quantities in each recipe so it will make enough to feed that many people.

2. Then plan a small dinner for just two guests. How will you change the recipes so you won’t have too much food? Rewrite the quantities to make only enough for two.

### Special Celebrations

1. Interview a family member or a friend about a special celebration that they have. Ask them about the origin of the celebration, who participates, the food served, how people dress, and if there are special ways of behaving.

2. Write a description of this celebration. Include photographs or drawings to illustrate your description. Also include a sample menu and recipes.

3. In class, make a list of special celebrations. Then invite members of the community to come in and describe how they celebrate these events.

4. Discuss the similarities and differences in how people celebrate. What are the characteristics that make the celebrations special and not just ordinary activities?

Laquita Trew making hot cross buns, an Easter specialty. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.
Many families have special recipes and ways of preparing common dishes. Some families proudly share these recipes with others, perhaps even competing in cooking competitions; while others keep their specialties secret, ensuring that only their families prepare the recipe in exactly that manner. Carmelia Bean, a student at CedarBridge Academy, wrote a story about her family’s tradition of passing on a recipe from mother to daughter over the generations.

Something sweet, this something will make your mouth water. A dessert that makes you scream and wonder, one that gives a sensation that will leave your lips asking for more.

My grandmother first made this dessert; she shared and started this tradition. All females of the family are responsible for keeping this secret.

In order to obtain this dessert recipe you must be a daughter or female married into the family. If you are a daughter, your mother chooses what age to share this gift with you including whether you should have it at all. The males of the family do not know this recipe or any of the ingredients it contains.

My mother was able to receive this gift and share and make treats for the family. When she felt that I was of that responsible age, she then shared it with me. There is no paper card sent down to each generation or female. Once you are told this recipe you must always remember.

When I learned how to make this scrumptious dessert I was ecstatic. I was extremely happy. I then began to make it at home and share it with my classmates and principal for a school assignment dealing with family traditions. Everyone was thrilled to have tasted such an angelic dessert. My principal, Mrs Kalmar Richards, was even shocked and said, “I have never tasted a dessert like that before”. Before you knew it I felt like a celebrity; everyone wanted to know the recipe! Of course it was funny because I could never share it.

By now I am sure you want to know what this delicious dessert is. It’s bread-and-butter pudding.
Discussion Questions

1. Does your family have any special dishes?
2. Are there recipes that have been passed down in your family? What are they and who learns them? How?

Activity

Family Meals

1. Write a description of preparing and eating a family meal at your home. Include all the steps and what is expected of each family member. Then make a comic book sequence of pictures with words that illustrate the feel of your family meals.
2. Make a family cookbook. Include in it recipes and stories related to the recipes, add photographs, and other items that will evoke memories related to the recipes.
3. Start collecting family stories. Write down some of the stories you have heard told around your family dinner table.

Traditional Foods and Contemporary Times

Fred Ming talks about foods that were traditionally eaten in Bermuda during his grandparents’ lives. As a chef, he advocates being creative and using these traditional foods in new ways to prepare a new Bermudian cuisine. Often these types of dishes are referred to as **nouvelle cuisine**.

In the early days, of course, fish was the predominant part of the daily diet, and the rationale behind that is because we had plenty of fish—more than ample. But today, certainly we don’t have sufficient fish, fresh fish, around for our own staple diet. Fish chowder, of course, was the real big thing, more like a cheap [working] man’s type of meal. And then you had different types of fish juice [stock]. Onions and onion pie were a big thing. When you travel today, [when] you go overseas, you still see Bermuda onions on the menu, although they don’t come from Bermuda. But you

Chef Judith Wadson at the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.
can remember that in the early days—because Bermuda had plenty of onions and potatoes, vegetables as a whole—they used to export and made a name for themselves because of the climate that Bermuda possessed. But certainly, taking it to a different level, fish cakes, you know with a sweet bun. I mean, that’s unusual. . . . No one has ever heard of that because it’s a total conflict of taste having a savoury fish cake on a sweet bun. . . .

But you know, Bermuda’s more than just fish chowder. We have a lot of indigenous products that we grow here. Shark [hash] is a lovely dish. But certainly, the old pumpkin fritters, the old sweet potato pie, things of that nature, certainly, still find a place in the kitchen. The homemade lemonade, and limeades, and homemade ginger beer, all those beverages that quenched our thirst. And don’t forget the homemade breads that were baked in the ovens . . .

But I think what we need to do is to get some of these dishes and put [them] into the restaurants as a part of the contemporary cooking, present it in a different way and a different manner. And certainly, this is one of my dreams: that we can get chefs, not only Bermudian chefs but [also] chefs that come from overseas [to create] . . . another ethnic way of cooking and [to] learn about the Bermuda style of cooking.

Sometimes Chef Judith Wadson creatively adapts traditional Bermudian recipes by adding a new twist.

A good [nouvelle recipe] that is simple is topping codfish cakes or baked fish with a fruit salsa. It’s refreshing and the fruit used could be local, compounding the use of seasonal, fresh, and local. Loquats are in season in February and March; Suriname cherries bear fruit twice—in May and September; melons grow in the summer; citrus is abundant in December.

**Judith Wadson’s Recipe for Fruit Salsa**

*Serve as topping for codfish cakes or grilled or baked fish.*

- 2 cups ripe fruit (loquat, Suriname cherry, melon or citrus), peeled and seeded, cut into 1/2 inch cubes
- 1/2 cup Bermuda onion or scallions or just their green tops, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon fresh ginger, peeled and minced
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon or lime juice
- 1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro (coriander), minced

Mix all the ingredients together with wooden spoon and let sit an hour or so to allow flavours to fuse.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Which of the items mentioned by Fred Ming do you eat?

2. Where do Bermuda onions come from now, and why?

3. Can you think of other combinations of foods, like the savoury fishcake with the sweet bun, that are unique to Bermuda?
**Activities**

**A Nouvelle Cuisine for Bermuda**

1. Talk to your parents and others about traditional Bermuda foods. Which are their favourites? What combinations of foods do they like?

2. Go to the library and check out some cookbooks that focus on *nouvelle cuisine* from a variety of countries. Look at how creative chefs have adapted traditional foods to become new dishes. Try creating your own *nouvelle* Bermudian recipe.

3. Working with a partner, plan a meal that incorporates traditional Bermudian foods in a new way.

4. Invite a chef to come to your classroom and demonstrate a Bermudian *nouvelle* recipe.

**Activities**

**International Cuisine**

1. Gather menus from Bermuda’s restaurants and figure out which countries’ foods are being offered. (Note: Many menus are included in the phone book.)

2. Create a restaurant map, showing which cultures are represented in Bermuda’s restaurant menus.

3. Write a restaurant guide that describes not only the food but also the restaurants and countries whose cuisine is being offered. Write it as though it were your journal of a trip around the world.

4. Make a website out of your restaurant guide journal. Include links from the restaurants to information about the countries whose cuisine they prepare. You can expand it to include information about the chefs, the menus, and decor of the restaurant.

**Multiple Traditions at the Dinner Table**

Many families in Bermuda eat foods prepared in the English Bermuda manner as well as ones prepared in the style of another country. Isaura Mary Reis explains the types of foods they typically eat at home and the different styles of preparation:

> The cuisine at my house is both Portuguese and English cuisine. [The English cuisine] uses less seasoning and [is] more into the barbecue type of thing, whereas we are more into the baking and **marinating** with the Portuguese wine, the paprika—Portuguese pepper, which gives that type of flavour that we all love—and tomato sauce. The other way [English], they just put the sauce over it. It’s completely different [from Portuguese cooking]. We make the **sauté**, marinate the meat for the next day. You can do it two ways: with less sauce to go in the oven, or in a pot and put lots of sauce in it and boil it. Same type of thing for fish. We use a lot of garlic. They say garlic is good for the heart.

*Isaura Mary Reis.* Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.
For the fish, I use white wine; for the meat, I use the red wine; and if I do the chicken, I sometimes put a bit of beer on it; and everything you add with water. For the fish, you put the seasonings on it like the pepper, garlic, a bit of salt. Now we use less salt because of people’s cholesterol and blood pressure and that sort of thing. But it still tastes the same. And of course you squeeze a bit of lemon over the fish, and you broil that.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Do you have two distinct culinary traditions that are served at your house? If so, what are they?
2. Mrs Reis says that garlic is good for the heart. Do you know of other seasonings that are supposed to do more than flavour the food?
3. Mrs Reis says that now they use less salt because of health reasons. Does your family change recipes for health reasons? How are they changed? Does it make a difference in the taste?

**Activities**

1. Ask cooks you know about the seasonings they use. Find out if any of the seasonings serve purposes other than the flavour they add to the dish, such as garlic for the heart, spearmint for fresh breath, ginger to settle the stomach.
2. Take a favourite family recipe and modify it to make it healthier. For example, do you have to use all the sugar a recipe calls for? What about the fats in a recipe could you replace them with something else?
3. Using your modified recipe, make the dish for your family. Don’t tell them you have changed the recipe. See if they notice anything. Report on your experiment to the class.
Learning to Cook; Learning to Heal

Isaura Mary Reis explains that her children like Portuguese cooking, but they did not learn about it from her; they learned it from their grandmother and aunts. Think about who cooks the traditional dishes in your family.

I never had any time for cooking. I always had someone else doing the cooking, the grandmothers or aunts. I don't know how to make the [malasada] dough, unfortunately, because I was studying. I finished [school] and wanted to work. I didn't have time for cooking. It is time-consuming to do these things. If you are home, then you have more time to learn. [My children] like Portuguese food. Mostly they learned from their grandmother, the paternal grandmother.

Sometimes foods prepared in certain ways are used to help cure illness. Joann Adams describes how she learned the remedies she uses for healing by observing her parents and other relatives practising that art:

I guess [I learned home remedies] because they were used in the household—through observation. You learn what you see other people do. [The home remedies] are things my family has used—either my grandparents or my parents—that I've learned from them and other relatives and in later years from other people with whom I've come in contact.

I make several herb teas, and I also use many herbal plants for medicinal purposes, as do many Bermudians. I do it as a part of my daily living . . . It's just things that we've done and I continue to do. I also share with my children . . . remedies that most Bermudians have used through time. There are lots of people that still use things. People still use match-me-if-you-can leaves to put on the body for fever. That's one that's still used fairly prominently. A lot of people still use lemongrass for colds and fevers.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you know how to cook? If you do, how did you learn? If you don't know how, why?
2. Who could teach you to make your family’s special recipes?
3. Do you think our busy lifestyles affect what we eat and how we interact together? If so, how? Do you think this is good or bad?

4. Does anyone in your household use home remedies to heal?

5. Have you ever tried a home remedy? Did it work?

**Activities**

**Home Remedies**

1. Interview people you know about home remedies. Find out at least five different remedies. Write down what the remedy is for, directions for making it, where you find the ingredients, and how you use it.

2. Ask other people if they have ever used any of the home remedies you collected. Ask if the remedies worked.

3. Create a graph illustrating what you find out about the effectiveness of home remedies.

4. Make a home remedy book. Include in it pictures of the plants called for so you can identify them.

5. Create a matching game. Put pictures of the plants on cards and on other cards put plant names. See how many people can match the correct name with the plant. Then see if they know what the plant can be used for as a healing agent.

**A Remedy for Colds and Coughs**

One [home remedy] I hate that my aunt used is minced onion and sugar. [You make it with] probably one onion and about four to six teaspoons of sugar. You mince onion and mix it with sugar and it actually turns into syrup [without cooking]. The sugar draws and absorbs the onion. It helps bring up the phlegm on the chest [so you] cough it up; it loosens. I don't like a strong onion taste so you can imagine me taking this minced onion syrup. It's really good for colds and coughs. It works. [You take] one teaspoon, probably three times a day. —Joanne Adams

**Video Links**

- View the *Exploring Bermuda Connections* video segment during which Fernanda Pacheco prepares the Azorean recipe for egg bread. Try writing down the recipe as you watch.

**Now It Is Your Turn**

Look around Bermuda! Check out the stories and traditions of the cooks in your family and those of other cultural backgrounds in your community. Start listening to the stories told around the dinner table and at other meals, picnics, and family gatherings and start writing them down. Notice which situations and foods prompt stories in your family.
By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- identify traditional Bermudian foods
  (SS Goal 1, subgoal 1.1, 1.2, 1.4; SS Goal 5 subgoal 5.1);
- trace where Bermudian food traditions originally came from
  (SS Goal 1 subgoal 1.1, 1.4; SS Goal 2 subgoal 2.1);
- understand how meals and foods reflect family history and traditions
  (SS Goal 1, subgoal 1.1, 1.2; SS Goal 4, subgoal 4.1, 4.2; SS Goal 5,
  subgoal 5.2, 5.3); and
- recognise the role of food and shared meals in creating and maintaining
  family traditions
  (SS Goal 1, subgoal 1.1, 1.2, 1.4; SS Goal 4 subgoal 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 SS Goal 5,
  subgoal 5.2, 5.3).