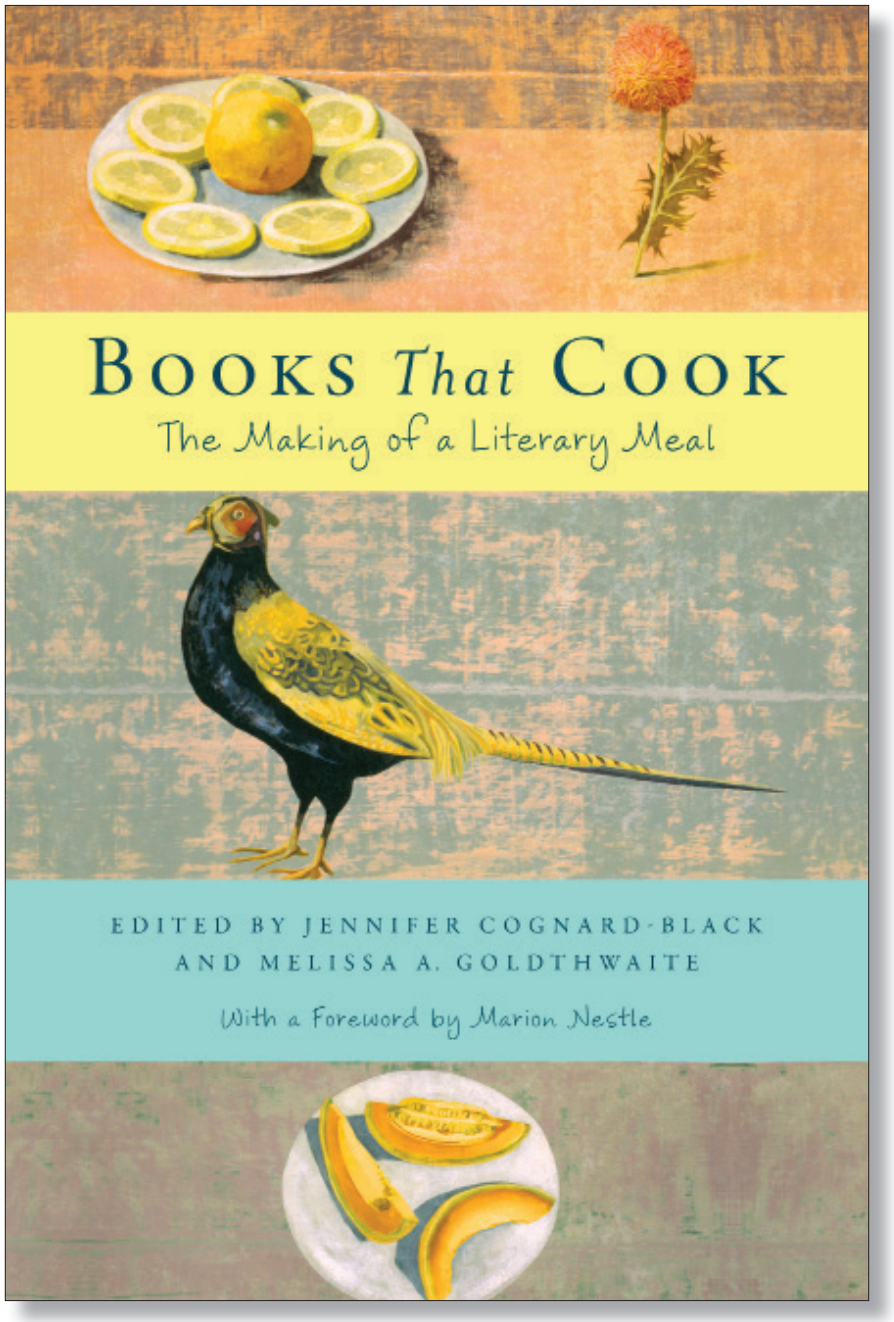
BOOKS THAT COOK

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Organized like a cookbook, *Books That Cook: The Making of a Literary Meal* is a collection of American literature written on the theme of food: from an invocation to a final toast, from starters to desserts. All food literatures are indebted to the form and purpose of cookbooks, and each section begins with an excerpt from an influential American cookbook, progressing chronologically from the late 1700s through the present day, including such favorites as *American Cookery, the Joy of Cooking*, and *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. The literary works within each section are an extension of these cookbooks, while the cookbook excerpts in turn become pieces of literature—forms of storytelling and memory-making all their own.

Each section offers a delectable assortment of poetry, prose, and essays, and the selections all include at least one tempting recipe to entice readers to cook this book. Including writing from such notables as Maya Angelou, James Beard, Alice B. Toklas, Sherman Alexie, Nora Ephron, M.F.K. Fisher, and Alice Waters, among many others, *Books That Cook* reveals the range of ways authors incorporate recipes—whether the recipe flavors the story or the story serves to add spice to the recipe. *Books That Cook* is a collection to serve students and teachers of food studies as well as any epicure who enjoys a good meal alongside a good book.

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Editors' Note

These suggestions for teaching selections from *Books That Cook* cover the four genres of food writing included in the collection: cookbooks, food essays, recipe poems, and foodie fictions. The editors of *Books That Cook* offer ideas for provocative classroom discussions and at least one sample assignment engaging each of these genres.

For further ideas on teaching the literatures of food, the editors suggest reading an article they wrote on using food writing in the composition classroom for College English: "Books that Cook: Teaching Food and Food Literature in the English Classroom." *College English* 70.4 (March 2008): 417–432.

Cookbooks as Literature

READINGS

American Cookery by Amelia Simmons; *The American Frugal Housewife* by Lydia Maria Child; *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* by Fannie Merritt Farmer; *The Joy of Cooking* by Irma S. Rombauer; *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* by Julia Child, Louisette Bertholle, and Simone Beck; and *Chez Panisse Menu Cookbook* by Alice Waters.

SUMMARY

It may be strange to think of cookbooks as pieces of literature. At first glance, a cookbook seems to be nothing more than a compendium of recipes, a kind of how-to book that should be part of the "for Dummies" series. And yet there are numerous foodies, both cooks and eaters, who will read through a cookbook stem-to-stern as if reading a memoir or a novel. As the loquacious narrator of John Lancaster's sardonic recipe novel *The Debt to Pleasure* points out in his introduction, "The classic cookbook borrows features from the otherwise radically opposed genres of encyclopedia and confession. On the one hand, the world categorized, diagnosed, defined, explained, alphabetized; on the other, the self laid bare, all quirks and anecdotes and personal history. . . . [As] my Provencal (English) neighbor (now dead) used to say: 'I love cookbooks—d'you know, I read them like novels!'" (xii).

In fact, cookbooks share essential features with novels and memoirs, including settings, characters, plots, scenes, dialogue, interior monologue, allusion and metaphor, and a clearly delineated point-of-view. Literary critic Anne Bower has argued convincingly that community cookbooks are a form of American story-telling—and, as such, a kind of literature. Breaking down the codes and conventions of these cookbooks into detailed discussions of their narrative elements, Bower maintains that such books have all the basic parts of a story—elements that readers recognize as literary. As Bower puts it, "Professional novelists are not the only ones who use the language of domesticity to consider our history, our present lives, and our future" (49).

What is the setting of a cookbook? What sort of voice does the narrator adopt—serious or sassy, erudite or everyday? Who are the characters? What is their relationship to each other? What is the organization of the book as a whole—i.e., its "plot"? How, exactly, is dialogue or interior monologue presented on the page? What is the point-of-view? How do illustrations extend and/or comment on the content? These kinds of questions will spur students to

Introduction

rethink the purpose and structure of cookbooks, and the six cookbook excerpts offered in *Books That Cook* are distinct in how they engage these basic elements of storytelling.

For instance, another literary critic, Susan Leonardi, has read closely the narrative components of Irma Rombauer's *The Joy of Cooking*, including its use of allusion ("intertextual references" to novelists and poets), its "cast of characters" (specifically members of Rombauer's own cooking community, whom she often quotes or has conversations with as she presents her recipes), and the book's chatty narrator herself, "a persona," writes Leonardi, "who approaches the first-person narrator of fiction or autobiography" in her friendliness and confessionality (342). Asking students to compare the narrator found in *The Joy of Cooking* to the voices of narrators within American Cookery, the *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*, and/or the *Chez Panisse Menu Cookbook* will show them that not all cookbook narrators engage their readers in the same way: some are more logical and precise (such as Fannie Farmer); some are more polemical and opinionated (Amelia Simmons); some are more sophisticated (Alice Waters); and some, as Leonardi notes, are more chatty and colloquial (Irma Rombauer). Once students have had a chance to note the differences in these narrators' use of diction, language levels, quotations or data, imagery, humor, and the like, it's compelling to have a discussion about the distinct audiences imagined by these narrators (why one kind of narrator might appeal to a certain kind of reader) as well as to consider the genre of novel or memoir each cookbook mirrors (e.g., literary, romantic, detective, comic, coming-of-age, etc.). Then, asking students to apply this discussion to an analysis of a cookbook of their own choosing further deepens and expands how students reimagine cookbooks as literature.

Historical Contexts for Cookbooks

SUMMARY

Another way to encourage students to think about cookbooks as literature is to have them put these books into their historical contexts, thereby linking the literary elements of a specific text to the cultural predilections of readers at a certain point in American history. In the introduction to *Books That Cook*, there is an extended analysis of Amelia Simmons' 1796 recipe for "Pompkin Pudding" that places both the voice and the form of this recipe within the larger context of how Simmons is attempting to create a new national cuisine based on regional ingredients found in colonial America. To help students think about the development of the cookbook genre across three centuries, the excerpts offered in *Books That Cook* are presented chronologically, starting with Simmons and ending with Alice Waters. Asking students to engage research on the contemporary culture informing each cookbook puts that book in conversation with other texts and popular discourses of its particular historical moment, thereby extending and expanding a discussion about the authors' literary choices.

For example, Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* appeared in 1961 during the post-World War II era, a time in which Americans—even twenty years after the liberation of France—were still in the grip of Francophilia, particularly a desire to learn how to cook, eat, and pronounce the names of French foods. While it's common knowledge that Child's celebrity was assisted in no small part by her diligence, optimism, and a lucky break with Knopf publishers after struggling for a decade to place her cookbook, her meteoric rise to fame in the early 1960s was also due to the cultural ideal of a glorified and glamorized kitchen in which middle-class women had the time, the money, and the motivation to challenge and perfect their culinary skills. As literary historian Sherrie Inness has shown, these middle-class women were encouraged to imagine themselves not just as professional housekeepers but as "artists," where kitchens were their studios and meals their exhibitions. A cookbook typical of the 1950s, the *Today's Woman Cook Book*, told housewives that cooking was a "creative and rewarding pastime, rather than a necessary chore[:] great fun. . .and infinitely fascinating because there's no limit to what your imagination can do" (3). Despite Betty Friedan's watershed argument in her 1963 *Feminine Mystique* that posited domesticity as a form of entrapment and brainwashing, many women of this period thought of their cooking as creative and rewarding. "[A] meal prepared with the right creativity could serve as a lasting sign of a woman's success as a hostess and cook," explains Inness. "Creative cooking was not only an act of enjoyment. . . ; it was also a highly competitive way to demonstrate [one's] domestic talents" (148).

Historical Contexts for Cookbooks

By translating the *haute cuisine* of French restaurants into descriptive and practical recipes for these American housewives—so that even novices could attempt dishes such as Beef Bourguignon, Salade Nicoise, and Coq au Vin—Child succeeded in garnering an enormous and appreciative audience, so much so that many were called "Juliaphiles." This celebrity has re-emerged recently with the book and film versions of *Julie & Julia*, a memoir written by Julie Powell in 2006 and then adapted and produced as a film by Nora Ephron in 2009. Books That Cook offers a comic tidbit from Ephron's own culinary novel *Heartburn*, and students might find it productive to consider how and why Ephron was able to remake Julia Child for a new era of home cooks: millennial women who, now, tend to work outside the home, are often single into their thirties or even later, and are interested in international cuisines beyond that of France.

In her own time, Child's popularity was due in part to her pedigree and training at the Cordon Bleu, which carried a certain cachet—tapping into widespread notions that "culture" was located in Europe. On the other hand, however, Child's narrative voice was also down-to-earth and conversational. Though the recipes in *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* reflect an elite form of gastronomy that even today typifies French cuisine, Child's versions of such dishes as Soupe à L'oignon, Steak au Poivre, and Artichauts au Naturel are presented in casual, even informal directions. For example, her recipe for Artichauts au Naturel, found in *Books That Cook*, begins:

"Artichokes should be boiled in a large kettle so that they have plenty of room. It is not necessary to tie the leaves in place. Because they must cook a comparatively long time, artichokes turn an olive green. Any Frenchman would look with disfavor on a bright green boiled artichoke, knowing that baking soda had been added to the water" (221).

Note how this particular recipe uses word choice that is casual. Child doesn't say that the cook should use a large kettle so that the artichokes aren't "overly crowded" or "uncomfortably congested." Instead, she says they need "plenty of room"—a common phrase that a reader might apply to a comfortable pair of pants or a roomy backseat. In this way, Child speaks the reader's own language.

At the same time, however, she also teaches readers something they might not know about Continental cuisine, explaining that the French would notice if a boiled artichoke was bright green rather than olive green, and would assume that baking soda had been added as a "trick" to keep the vegetable from developing the darker color. In a sense, then, Child is looking out for her readers, offering a helpful hint—a hint quite specifically geared to American cooks. Kerstin Fischer, a linguist who has studied the language that

Historical Contexts for Cookbooks

Child employs in her recipes, notes that "the instructions are combined with. . .background information, arguments for informed choice[,] and descriptions of what the cook is going to encounter in the food preparation process," which work to demystify the mystique of French cooking as well as make the voice of the narrator both familiar and helpful (115).

As in a conversation over coffee or a cup of tea, Child isn't merely stating what she believes to be true about a certain dish. Instead, she encourages her readers to make their own choices. In the various artichoke recipes and directions for serving them found within *Books That Cook*, students might note how often Child turns the decision-making over to her readers. For example, "It is not necessary to remove the choke, but it makes a nicer presentation if you wish to take the time"; or "Most wine authorities agree that water should be served with [artichokes] rather than wine. . . . But, if you insist, serve a strong, dry, chilled wine" (221, 220). Readers are encouraged to exercise personal preference, which empowers them as cooks in their own right.

Understood more broadly, in both her recipe writing and also within her television show, The French Chef, Child is a narrator who is simultaneously knowledgeable—a specialist on refined cooking—yet also one that's homey: open, friendly, and approachable. Her persona offers expertise through an unintimidating style, a brilliant combination given her desire to appeal to middle-class, stay-at-home female cooks of the 1960s. A large part of Child's fame, then, was in having the skill of a chef within the demeanor of a cook. Students might productively make connections between the designations of "chef" and "cook" from the 1960s to those that are still in circulation today. On the Food Network, students could watch certain shows and ask the basic question of who is called a "chef" and who is seen as a "cook"—and why? An analysis of how these two labels influence the ways in which an audience perceives the central "characters" of various shows—such as America's Best Cook or Iron Chef—allows a classroom conversation about the reasons behind Julia Child's popularity at mid-century carrying into the present moment. Such a discussion also leads to thoughts about gender and genre, for masculinity is still attached to the label "chef" (think here of Anthony Bourdain, Mario Batali, Wolfgang Puck, or Gordon Ramsay), while "cook" is often feminized (the cookbook authors contained in *Books That Cook* are almost all seen, even now, as "home cooks" rather than "chefs"). Questions of race and class, too, may be discussed—both in terms of Julia Child and the chef/cook binary, but also in terms of the production of cookbooks and chef celebs more generally in American pop culture.

Recipes as Literature

SUMMARY

One way to transition class discussion from recipes found in cookbooks to recipes in other kinds of literature—such as the poems, essays, and fiction in *Books That Cook*—is to have students think about recipes themselves as literary texts. As mentioned in the introduction to *Books That Cook*, recipes are a unique kind of writing insofar as they are intentionally collaborative: "The text does not have full meaning until a reader puts the recipe in motion through cooking and then brings that food to a common table" (2). In a very real sense, readers participate in the narrative of recipes, becoming the central characters of any recipe's "story."

Rather than starting with a recipe found in *Books That Cook*, it's interesting to hand out index cards to students and ask them to write down a recipe they know by heart. Some students might balk at this assignment, believing that they haven't memorized a single recipe. Yet even the method for putting together a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich still counts as a recipe, and so it's safe to say that any American eater has at least one recipe down pat.

Once these recipes are written down, it's fascinating to ask students to consider how the form of a recipe is structured like a story. How is the title like the name of a novel? What information about character, subject matter, and point-of-view is contained in the title alone? From here, thinking of the list of ingredients as a kind of scene-setting gets students to imagine their list as "once upon a time." What sort of a world is being created out of this list? What is its color, texture, or smell? Is this world more artificial or more natural, more formal or more everyday? Is it an "historic" world or one that's up-to-date with a vengeance? And since most ingredient lists are imagined as belonging to kitchens (though not all—a campfire comes to mind as the setting for a S'mores recipe), asking students to describe or even to draw the kitchen that's evoked by the ingredient list helps to underscore how this list can set a scene.

After listing the ingredients, almost all recipes will become a set of instructions, presented in the imperative mood: sentences beginning with verbs, usually in the present tense. The instructions are the "plot" of this story, and it's effective to ask students what kinds of plots are being told through any given dish. Looking just at the verbs can be illuminating: gather, mix, fold, beat, roll, spread, drop, stir, heat, bake, cook. What sorts of actions are characters engaged in as part of this narrative—and why? How do the actions influence the mood and unfolding of the story? What difference does it make that the verbs are in the present tense—or are they ever in the past tense? What is the sequence of these verbs—and why? And, finally, since it's the reader him- or

Recipes as Literature

herself who is being asked to "do" these verbs, how does that affect the experience of reading a recipe story? The implied point-of-view in a recipe is the second-person "you," which is an unusual perspective. Unlike the first- or third-person, "you" brings a reader right into the center of any story, making that story more active and more personal.

Ultimately, any recipe ends with the welcome conclusion of a finished dish. And although it may seem obvious, it's still worth thinking about how, exactly, a recipe writer arrives at this finale. Does the story end with how many are served and a calorie count per portion? Does it finish with advice on how to plate and present the dish, or when the dish is best served (i.e., in a certain season, for a specific holiday, or as part of a particular meal)? Does the recipe suggest how leftovers might be saved, or does it offer a comment on how the food tends to be appreciated ("yum, yum" or "delicious")? These distinct endings leave the reader in different places as well as in different moods. Asking students whether these endings feel closed or open, heroic or tragic, satisfying or unfinished allows them to see that even the final "hurrah" of a recipe is more complex than just downing the finished dish.

After having a discussion about these recipe cards, a teacher might ask students to swap them. When giving a favorite or well-known recipe to another person, written down on an index card, a kind of cultural work has been enacted. Now someone else (a "reader") can potentially cook up another person's family history, culinary knowledge, ethnic background, and sense of identity. That the genre is inherently meant to be shared—after all, a recipe is a record, passed down from one generation to the next—is worth considering and talking about. What does it mean to write down a story whose function includes giving it away? How is this act of sharing recipes a unique way of preserving history? What importance is attached to the visual idiosyncrasy of this text, specifically that it's written in the author's own hand, perhaps illustrated by the author as well? And, finally, if these swapped recipe cards were compiled into a single cookbook, what kind of book might that be? What would a reader learn about this particular group of cooks and eaters—their habits, joys, frustrations, knowledge, and day-to-day lives? If desired, students might try to cook the recipes they've received from their peers and bring these foods to class, thereby adding a material, three-dimensional, and delicious component to this larger discussion of recipe sharing and memory making.

Sample Recipe-Based Assignment: A "Recipe Recollection"

SUMMARY

It's surprising how powerful a single recipe can be for unlocking students' memories and emotions about family and friends, place and space, or their own coming-of-age. One writing assignment that works quite well in conjunction with *Books That Cook* is to ask students to track down the recipe for a favorite dish from their childhood and then write about that dish in a personal essay, making sure to include the recipe within their piece.

In the drafting, it's best to begin by choosing a single food item—the main ingredient of the recipe connecting students to their past, particularly their childhood, their family, their friends, their enemies and/or a specific geography, a sense of place, and/or a culture. Students should get their hands on that main ingredient, either from a market or a grocery store. Then ask students to do the following:

Study the food. Draw it; feel it; sound it (i.e., try to make it produce a sound, either in the hand or in the mouth or both); smell it; taste it. Engage all of the senses. Use these senses to re-create (re-feel, re-experience) memory connected to that food. As Mark Winegardner says in the introduction to his collection of essays We Are What We Ate, "Taste it. Swallow. Close your eyes. Roll your tongue around in your mouth. You're there" (9). Think about the food both bad and good: when is it best? When is it worst? When and how does it sustain? When and how does it undermine?

Now make wider associations with that food. These wider associations may be metaphoric. Allusional. Symbolic. What does the food mean in terms of literature or religion: e.g., the Bible, the Koran, the Tao Te Ching, Shakespeare, Dante, Dickinson, Tagore? What is it a symbol of—what does the food represent? Does it sell anything; is it commercial? Does it evoke a shared idea or feeling?

Then return to the recipe itself. Call Mom, Dad, Aunt Joanna, or Uncle Sahom up on the phone or contact them over email. Get the recipe. Again from Winegardner: "If you spent four years of poverty (or graduate school, or alcoholism) eating nothing but rice and beans, you can't talk about eating that without talking honestly about those four years. If a cherished part of the summers of your childhood was spent eating a postnuclear flavored Sno-kone, or participating face-first in the village pie-eating contest, then to celebrate the Sno-kone or to remember the taste of that supermarket-baked pie is to conjure up more than desserts of yore. If you can't eat shrimp scampi anymore because it was what your ex-spouse always, always ordered, a disquisition on shrimp scampi will, I

Sample Recipe-Based Assignment: A "Recipe Recollection"

guarantee you, produce not just a flood of memory, but more honest autobiography than will any earnestly straightforward attempt at honest autobiography" (9).

Now write. Now, write an essay that includes this recipe (please include the recipe in the text of the essay somewhere). As you write, ask yourself such questions as: What did the food mean to you, way back when—and why? Has that meaning changed—and why? What does it mean to family members? Friends? Enemies? Folk in your neighborhood? Folk in your nation? In another nation? What did it mean in the nineteenth century? The eleventh century? What does it mean when the food is absent, when it's unavailable? Where does the food actually come from? Is it possible for it to be "natural"—or are any of its parts "natural"? Do others believe it's inedible (or, at least, unappetizing)—and why? Is this food "girly" or "manly" or for "old-timers" or "young'ns" or for a specific ethnic or cultural group, such as transgendered grannies—and why? Is this food sexy? Or is it a turn-off—and why? Are the memories of this food hard or soft—and why? Is there humor or satire associated with this food—and why? And why? And why? And why?

AT ITS MOST BASIC, THIS RECIPE RECOLLECTION NEEDS TO:

1) include the recipe,

2) use sense-based, metaphoric, allusional, symbolic, personal, and/or historic images to re-create the food,

3) be connected to your own, personal memories, and

4) attempt to connect beyond the self: to move out from the "I" of the essay to think about this food in terms of "you" and "we."

The essay should be approximately four or five pages, double-spaced.

Sample Recipe-Based Assignment: A "Recipe Recollection"

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Introduction

READINGS

From Delights and Prejudices by James Beard; "To Cèpe, with Love (or, The Alchemy of Longing) by E. J. Levy; "An Unspoken Hunger" by Terry Tempest Williams; "In Nancy's Kitchen" by Caroline M. Grant; "H Is for Happy" by M. F. K. Fisher; "All It Took Was a Road / Surprises of Urban Renewal" by Ntozake Shange; "Eat Your Pets" by Ellen Meloy; "Spirit-Fried No-Name River Brown Trout: A Recipe" by David James Duncan; "The Poet in the Kitchen" by David Citino; "A Good Roast Chicken" by Teresa Lust; "Turkey Bone Gumbo" by Sara Roahen; "Boiled Chicken Feet and Hundred-Year Old Eggs" by Shirley Geok-Lin Lim; "The Vegetable Gardens at Bilignin" by Alice B. Toklas; "Repulsive Dinners: A Memoir" by Laurie Colwin; "How to Cook Moong Dal, Bengali Style" by Deborah Thompson; "Food and Belonging: At 'Home' and in 'Alien-Kitchens'" by Ketu H. Katrak; "Baking for Sylvia" by Kate Moses; "Pie" by Judith Moore; "Funeral Food" by Michael Lee West; "Pie Throwing" by CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective; and "The Assurance of Caramel Cake" by Maya Angelou.

SUMMARY

Creative nonfiction about food can have many purposes: to reveal something about a person, a family, a culture, or human experience; to instruct, to delight, to comfort. The memoirs and essays included in *Books That Cook*: *The Making of a Literary Meal* demonstrate the range available to nonfiction food writers. Much of that writing is unconventional. For example, CrimethInc. Ex-Workers' Collective's "Pie Throwing" uses familiar conventions of one form to encourage political activism. The writers use the form of a recipe, a list of ingredients and instructions, to teach readers how to "pie"—to, through throwing a pie in someone's face, undermine "the power structures of our society by showing that icons and idols are not unassailable or above ridicule" (308). Although most of the selections in *Books That Cook* are not as overtly political, food writing often does speak to larger concerns, such as hunger, poverty, eating disorders, environmental degradation, and questionable industrial food practices. But it can also express love, care, comfort, and joy.

Some of the authors included in this book write about important food-related issues with humor, while still making a serious point. For example, David James Duncan offers a recipe for cooking brown trout. His recipe includes just two ingredients—butter and brown trout, but he uses humorous contrasts to show the difference between these ingredients and the substitutes some might choose.

Introduction

When making a case for using real butter, he writes, "Forget margarine, forget olive oil (the cultural dissonance!), forget *I Can't Believe It's Not Coagulated Petroleum With Yellow Dye!®* forget cholesterolic and caloric paranoia, period" (170). His description of a fresh river trout substitution is even more bitingly humorous, as Duncan exposes "the corporate spawned delusion that those blotchy cellophane- and styrofoam-swaddled, dented-Grumman-canoe-colored fish-corpses at the local chain supermarket are, as the label claims, 'trout'" (171). His tone changes, though, later in the essay when Duncan writes of love and honor, how a trout he caught and released became for him "a spiritual touchstone" (179). He then offers a different kind of recipe—one for "spirit-fried" trout, a recipe for spiritual nourishment.Food and nourishment are often connected to both particular people and places. Sara Roahen shows particular foods as symbolic of a place in "Turkey Bone Gumbo," which she wrote after hurricane Katrina and after she left New Orleans. When she tried "to imagine what it would mean to be a New Orleanian" wherever she was, she turned to food: rice and beans, shrimp, fig cakes, gumbo, coffee with chicory (198-99). David Citino, too, writes about food he associates with places and people he loved: he remembers taking Nonna, his Italian grandmother, shopping in Cleveland and recalls "the potent force of garlic, olive oil in kegs and gallon cans, great baskets of live snails, tripe, dates, and figs" (186). He recalls, too, other details of his childhood and adolescence in Cleveland, the "ingredients" of his life—ones he can "cut and paste, chop, grate and dice" and arrange in his writing (187).

As you teach the essays and memoirs in *Books That Cook*, encourage students writing nonfiction about food to consider their own associations with foods from particular places or foods they associate with particular people—even (or especially) those places and people no longer in their lives, for food writing can be about both love and loss. With attention to character and purpose—two vital ingredients in nonfiction writing about food—students, too, can write their own delectable essays and memoirs.

"Food is About People": Character in Essays and Memoirs

SUMMARY

In her introduction to *Pass the Polenta and Other Writings from the Kitchen,* Teresa Lust reminds readers that "food is not merely about calories and minimum daily requirements and metabolic pathways"—that "food is about people" (ix). Writing creative nonfiction about food, too, involves writing about people: both oneself and others. The writer makes herself a character, sometimes more than one character, in essays and memoirs, for there is the self who is writing and reflecting as well as the self—child, adolescent, lover, spouse, etc.—being written about. For example, in "Pie," Judith Moore writes about childhood memories of making "mud-crust pies in doll-size pie tins" (293). Readers can imagine Moore as a pre-school toddler with her rag doll "Belinda," see her in her sandbox, making pies from "flowers or pebbles" and "adding daubs of wet mud butter" (293). She uses the kinds of details that allow us to see her as a child, but later in the essay, we also see Moore as an adult wearing an apron in her kitchen, making a real fruit pie. She merges these two "selves" (her childhood and adult selves) with a sense of wonder (she calls herself "handmaiden to a miracle" in making pie) and fear ("the pie's aroma may tempt a distant wolf" more "vicious than the wolves" from childhood) (299, 300).

In addition to including themselves as characters, creative nonfiction writers often also include other characters—family members, significant others, friends, even strangers. Teresa Lust, in "A Good Roast Chicken," writes mainly about her grandparents and her mother. Her characterization of her grandfather, Joe, is so clear a reader might think Lust actually witnessed all she describes, yet her narrative provides clues about how she learned about her grandfather and the events about which she writes, such as "an August day now fifty years deep in [her] mother's memory" (192). Encourage students to interview family members, to look at old photo albums, to listen to family stories told and retold at holiday dinners in order to gather details they can use in their writing. In addition to sharing stories heard from her mother, Lust makes it clear that she uses her imagination to fill in some of the details: "I like to think my grandfather summed up his efforts and decided the pump just wasn't quite a seventy-chicken job. Or else I imagine him. . . ." (193). "I like to think" and "I imagine" provide cues to readers that although the writing is based on true events, the writer also sometimes has to imagine what she couldn't have observed.

Observation, too, is an important element in writing about others: observing the appearance, quirks, and ways of speaking that others display. Deborah Thompson's "How to Cook Moong Dal, Bengali Style" is based on close listening; it's written in the voice of her Bengali mother-in-law, who is seeking to teach Thomp-

"Food is About People": Character in Essays and Memoirs

son to cook moong dal three years after Thompson's husband passed away. These details, set up in an epigraph, provide the tension and an understanding of the relationship. The rest of the characterization comes completely through the mother-in-law's words, such as: "What have you done with Raju's cooking books? You still have? What about rest of his books? So many books. You have given away?" (257). The onslaught of questions and the missing words that indicate dialect help characterize the main character and her relationship with her American daughter-in-law. This short essay provides a reminder to writers: observe, listen.

What It's All About: Purpose and Theme

SUMMARY

Nonfiction written about food is seldom just about the food. Often, it's about some aspect of human experience with which others can identify: love, desire, fear, loss, happiness. M. F. K. Fisher writes about happiness in "H Is for Happy." Although she provides a recipe for "Aunt Gwen's Fried Egg Sandwiches" and writes of her outings with Gwen—their "pockets sagging" and "spirits spiraling in a kind of intoxication of freedom, breathlessness, fatigue, and delicious anticipation" of the sandwiches (124)—she also writes of other kinds of happiness in her short essay: lone meals, dining when in love, eating with a particular group. The essay is less about a particular food than it is about being with the right people in the right setting. In providing her recipe, she even includes "spiritual ingredients" in addition to the physical eggs, bread, and drippings (127).

Both Terry Tempest Williams and E. J. Levy write about risk, love, and desire in their food-related essays. Williams's one-paragraph micro-essay "An Unspoken Hunger" shows two people sharing an avocado in the desert. The food described is simple, but the words she chooses suggest the heat of desire: "We smother the avocado with salsa, hot chilies at noon in the desert. We look at each other and smile, eating avocados with sharp silver blades, risking the blood of our tongues repeatedly" (64). Levy's essay, "To Cèpe, with Love (or, The Alchemy of Longing)," is much longer and more direct about the relationship between the food she describes (mushrooms) and love, risk, and desire. She writes, "In food, as in love, I like to take my chances" (46). And although she's referring to mushrooms when she writes, "I love the pursuit as much as I love the eating. There is always an element of risk" (45), it's clear that Levy's love of the hunt and a bit of danger extends to her intimate relationships as well.

Loss and remembrance are other common themes of food writing. Caroline M. Grant, for example, writes an essay about cooking in her mother-in-law Nancy's kitchen while caring for her during an illness that eventually took Nancy's life. She writes, too, of her own children and how she tells them about their grandmother: "I show them pictures and tell them about the meals we shared" (93). "In Nancy's Kitchen" shows Grant "caught between the needs of an unpredictably declining mother-in-law and a clamorously insistent toddler" but finding comfort in "the steady rhythms and predictably satisfying outcomes of baking" (93). When she offers her recipe for Lemon Polenta Cookies at the end of the essay, readers know the context of love, care, loss, and the need for comfort.

Michael Lee West also writes about loss, but not about the loss of a loved one. Rather, in "Funeral Foods," she instructs readers on what to cook after someone dies, what to share with those who are grieving. "When words fail us," she writes,

What It's All About: Purpose and Theme

"we offer food" (302). She writes of southern culture and informs her readers of "a few unwritten rules" of funeral food—such as that the food should be easy to transport, be reheatable, and that it should not be spicy (303). With humor and practicality, she warns against foods that are "hard on the gut" (306), but what comes across most in this essay is the power of food to comfort, to "speak" when mere words fail.Maya Angelou, in "The Assurance of Caramel Cake," also shows the power of food to comfort. She recounts a childhood experience of protection and comfort, a time when her grandmother, Momma, defended her against the cruelty of a teacher (by slapping the teacher who had slapped Angelou) and then baked a cake, a labor-intensive act that "took four to five hours" (325). Angelou's uncle explained to her, "'This cake can't pay you for being slapped in the face. Momma made it just to tell you how much we love you and how precious you are'" (329).

Whether students wish to write about a food-related issue or remember a person who made them feel loved and precious, essays and memoirs provide a fitting form.

Sample Nonfiction Assignment: First Food Memories

SUMMARY

Early experiences with food often shape individuals in powerful ways. In "Boiled Chicken Feet and Hundred-Year-Old Eggs," Shirley Geok-Lin Lim recalls some of her early experiences with food—for example, watching her aunts and stepmother gnaw "the small bones" of chicken feet, "grinding the jellied cartilage of the ligaments audibly" (204). She writes, too, of her father seeking to share his pei ta-an (also known as hundred-year-old eggs) with her and remembers "its acrid stench," how close she was to vomiting (207). Although these descriptions show the author's distaste, later in the essay, she rethinks these foods and her cultural heritage, realizing that "even after decades of American fast foods and the rich diet of the middle class, my deprived childhood has indelibly fixed as gastronomic fantasies those dishes impoverished Chinese had produced out of the paltry ingredients they could afford" (209). As an adult, she dines with her brother, eating these foods of her childhood and understanding hunger, poverty, and her own desires in new ways.

Recall a childhood experience you had with food. It can be positive or negative, delightful, horrific, or complex. James Beard, in *Delights and Prejudices*, writes about both positive experiences (his love for chicken jelly) and negative ones (his loathing for milk) (30).

Write down the details you remember—and try to learn the details you don't remember. Where did this experience take place? How old were you? Who else was present? What food was involved? How did you respond to it? James Beard, too, writes about some of his early "taste memories." For example, he recounts being in the kitchen "on all fours" and continues: "I crawled into the vegetable bin, settled on a giant onion and ate it, skin and all" (29).

If someone else was present during an experience you describe, consider asking that person about his or her memories of the event. You might also learn more about how the food you remember was cooked. Note, for example, Beard's description of how to cook chicken jelly, a food that might be unfamiliar to contemporary audiences (29-30).

Think about how you view that food now. How did that early experience shape your view of that food (or of the people who shared it with you or forced it upon you)? Beard claims that he "never ceased to love the hearty flavor of raw onions" (29). But some writers, like Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, come to understand childhood food experiences differently with the perspective offered by time and more experience. For some writers, the experience is complex—neither a complete love or loathing for a food experienced in childhood. Although James Beard never

Sample Nonfiction Assignment: First Food Memories

learned to love milk, he came to accept it when it was "combined with other ingredients" to make clam soup (30-1). How has time, experience, and reflection shaped your understanding of that early food experience?

Write a 4-6 page essay, sharing and reflecting upon a childhood food experience. Use the details you remember and those you've gathered from talking with others to help readers see and understand your experience. Like the nonfiction writers whose essays are included in *Books That Cook*, pay close attention to character (how you represent yourself and others) and purpose (the message you want to get across to readers).

Sample Nonfiction Assignment: First Food Memories

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Introduction:
Considering Conventions

READINGS

"Porkchop Gravy" by Bill Kloefkorn; "Full Moon Soup with Snow" by April Lindner; Coriander and Carrot" by Michael S. Glaser; "Recipe: Gingerbread" by Karen Leona Anderson; "Bread" by Sharon Olds; "Making the Perfect Fried Egg Sandwich" by Howard Dinin; "American Liver Mush" by Ravi Shankar; "How to Make Stew in the Pinacate Desert: Recipe for Locke and Drum" by Gary Snyder; "The Poem of Chicken Breast and Fettuccine" by David Citino; "13/16" by Sherman Alexie; "Summer Salad" by Melissa A. Goldthwaite; "Reception" by Kathy Fagan; "Suman sa Ibos" by Cheryl Quimba; and "How to Make Rhubarb Wine" by Ted Kooser.

SUMMARY

At the heart of both poetry writing and food writing are two main ingredients: sensory images and strong verbs. Recipes are full of both: the list of ingredients and directions for preparation engage the reader or cook's sense of smell (the sulfurous scent of Brussels sprouts), sight (deep red tomatoes), hearing (the swish of a whisk through eggs, the rhythmic tap of knife against wooden cutting board while mincing garlic), touch (the fuzzy skin of a peach), and taste (the sweetness of corn).

Other conventions of poetry, too, lend themselves to writing about food. In addition to sensory images and strong, active verbs, poets pay close attention to sound. They often use alliteration (the repetition of the initial sound of words), assonance (the repetition of vowel sounds), consonance (the repetition of consonant sounds), rhyme (words that end with the same sound), and onomatopoeia (when a word's sound suggests its meaning), paying attention to euphony and cacophony and how sound helps create or support meaning.

Form is also significant in poems. For example, many poems featured in *Books That Cook* take the form of a list. Kathy Fagan, in "Reception," combines an attention to history, etymology, and the names of different kinds of tomatoes and roses. Through her lists, she celebrates individuality and abundance—the sharing of a "love salad" with family and friends who came together for her wedding (242-43). Ravi Shankar in "American Liver Mush" also uses lists to create his recipe poem—yet most of his ingredients (from a John Deere hat to Uggs and Birkenstocks) are not edible (159-161). He uses the lists and directions for preparation familiar to readers of recipes in order to provide (and perhaps critique) a picture of American culture—in all its oddness and variety.

Introduction: Considering Conventions

One aspect of attention to form is lineation. Ask students to note the length of lines and how it affects reading. For example, Howard Dinin uses very short lines in "Making the Perfect Fried Egg Sandwich," which makes the reading go quickly. Although the poem is long, showing the complexity of cooking a deceptively simple dish, the short lines also speed the reader up, especially near the end where the shortest lines rush the reader:

> "Ok
>
> Now!
>
> Quick!" (134).

Compare these short lines and fragments to the sentence structure and form in Bill Kloefkorn's "Porkchop Gravy." Most of Kloefkorn's poem is one long sentence written in three-line stanzas. The long sentence, though, which takes up the first 32 lines of the poem, is followed by a two-word sentence, which takes up the final line: "The beginning" (16). This contrast helps create tension in the poem.

In the selected poems, there's much to analyze when considering form and lineation. From Cheryl Quimba's use of uneven line lengths and unorthodox spacing to Gary Snyder's long-lined directions peppered with dashes, the examples throughout will provide much fodder for class discussion.

Another element common to poetry is tension, the use of balanced opposites or productive conflicts that come together in the poem. For example, Howard Dinin writes of an egg as a symbol of life—one that also contains a death. He furthers this tension by writing a poem about providing sustenance for someone who is, in fact, dying. Both Melissa A. Goldthwaite and April Lindner work with the tension between hot and cold—Goldthwaite setting her poem in summer but featuring a recipe for a cold salad, Lindner setting her poem in winter but making a hot soup.

Like other poets, Goldthwaite and Lindner also use figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, and personification. Lindner uses simile to show "roots, knobby and pale as knuckles" and personification when she shows shards of garlic "dancing" in a pan (43). Goldthwaite uses a metaphor—"tiny green fists of fruit"—to help readers imagine unripe apples (240). These examples are small moments in each poem, helping readers see food differently. Sharon Olds, though, carries her comparison throughout an entire poem, highlighting the connection between the process of baking and a bodily process. She creates an extended metaphor in "Bread," simultaneously showing her daughter in the process of baking bread

and revealing the ways in which that process is similar to the one a girl's body goes through during puberty (84). Ask students to consider the other figures of speech used in the poems, and ask them to consider what effect those poetic elements have.

From Reading to Writing

SUMMARY

Helping students use poetic conventions in their own writing often starts with helping them recognize the conventions in the writing of others. For example, you might provide students a list of poetic terms and ask them to find those conventions in the selections in *Books That Cook: The Making of a Literary Meal*. In terms of sound, Michael S. Glaser uses alliteration in his title "Coriander and Carrot," repeating the "c" sound; he uses onomatopoeia when he describes the sound of pouring olive oil as "a blurp"; and he rhymes "beat" and "heat" in giving directions (63). April Linder uses assonance in her title "Full Moon Soup with Snow"—the repetition of the "Ooo" sound in "moon" and "soup" followed by the "oh" sound in "snow" suggest a sense of pleasure and wonder (43). Lindner uses some of these same sounds in her poem. In line 10, for example, she writes, "Time to make do with roots," repeating the vowel sound in "to," "do," and "roots" (43). She repeats vowel sounds, too, in the lines "Scatter / cracked black pepper" and both vowel and consonant sounds in "gnarly parsnips" (44). She also includes rhyme ("sleek and girlish leeks / with their thin, whiskery chins") and onomatopoeia ("rasping"), making this poem an especially interesting study in a poet's use of sound (43).

Once students recognize the presence of conventions, ask them to consider why the poet might have used them, what effect the conventions have. Why, for instance, might Karen Leona Anderson in her poem "Recipe: Gingerbread" repeat words such as "not" and "no"? Why might she use homophones such as "need" and "knead"? (78). What is the effect of Sherman Alexie's use of anaphora (repetition of the beginning words in successive lines), his repeated phrase "It is done" in the second part of his poem "13/16"? (211) or Cheryl Quimba's repetition of the words "4 cups"? (291).

Although students might answer the question of "why" differently and may recognize different effects, this process of questioning and finding meaning will help them consider their own purposes for using poetic conventions.

Sample Assignment: Writing a Recipe Poem

SUMMARY

Food poems need not be personal or autobiographical. Karen Leona Anderson, for example, does historical research and provides a recipe by another cookbook author, Amelia Simmons, showing connections among Simmons's biography, the ingredients available to her, and a recipe. Like many poets featured in *Books That Cook*, though, many student will want to start with their own experiences: a food they have prepared or eaten, an experience that moved or troubled them.

Choose a setting. Although many poets writing recipe poems set their poems in the kitchen, poets have considerable choice in setting. Ted Kooser, in "How to Make Rhubarb Wine," begins his poem outside in a rhubarb patch (333), and Gary Snyder sets his entire poem "How to Make Stew in the Pinacate Desert" outside. The setting will help determine other elements of the poem: while Snyder directs his reader to "build a fire of Ocotillo" and to sit "on a poncho in the dark" (168, 169), Kooser tells his reader to "Wear a hat" and to "watch for rattlesnakes" (333). By setting their poems outside, these poets are able to include unexpected images and sounds in poems about food.

Consider your ingredients and purpose. Ingredients involve the actual foods being prepared but also other elements of the poem: who is cooking, who is eating, what objects are present, the conventions you use, and why that particular dish is being prepared. As Bill Kloefkorn writes, "movement and spoon and mother no less / ingredients than oil and flour, drippings and / bits, you beside her not yet a man" (15). When choosing a recipe to embed in a poem, think about your purpose: what do you want to get across to readers in having them (literally or imaginatively) prepare a particular recipe? Do you want them to see the relationship between life and death as Howard Dinin does in writing about preparing an egg sandwich for someone who is dying? Do you want to share a poignant memory? Do you want to agitate? comfort? surprise? critique? All the poetic elements: the sounds, similes, metaphors, line lengths and breaks, and form are ingredients that should come together for a particular purpose.

Describe the process of preparation and—if applicable—the eater's response. Sensory images and strong verbs—these are the foundation of both poetry and recipes. Describe the ingredients and setting through sensory images—the colors and textures and tastes and smells. Don't fall into the trap of overusing empty adjectives and adverbs: if something is delicious, show it through words that express that deliciousness; if it's rotten or fetid, show the reader why. The "directions for preparation" in Sherman Alexie's poem "13/16" include "OPEN CAN" and "EXAMINE CONTENTS / / OF CAN FOR SPOILAGE" rather than showing the reader how to fry fresh salmon—which his community

Sample Assignment: Writing a Recipe Poem

has "lost"; through this contrast and description, Alexie makes a critique (211-12). In contrast, readers know the Insalata Pomodoro that Kathy Fagan describes is delicious because "children and adults sopped up the juices with fresh-baked bread" and "tilted the bowls to their wet mouths" (243). Through both the images (juices, bread, bowls, mouths) and verbs (sopped up and tilted), readers see the eager guests enjoying the food. Use your images and verbs to help the reader feel or see or understand something.

Pay particular attention to your ending. Bill Kloefkorn ends his poem with a sense of anticipation: it's "time to give way to what the boy has been / / waiting so long for: faces in a circle at the table, the hesitation, the nod. / The beginning" (16). Ted Kooser, in contrast, ends his poem with a sense of accomplishment and feeling of satisfaction: "Sit back and watch / the liquid clear to honey yellow, / bottled and ready for the years, / and smile. You've done it awfully well" (334). These poems bookend *Books That Cook*: *The Making of a Literary Meal*, reflecting the editors' purpose: to give readers a sense of anticipation at the beginning and a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction at the end—the same feelings one experiences at the beginning and ending of a meal. As you think about the ending of your poem, consider the feeling with which you hope to leave readers.

Now, taking all these elements into consideration, write—and then share—your recipe poem.

Sample Assignment: Writing a Recipe Poem

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Sample Assignment: Writing a Recipe Poem

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Introduction

READINGS

"Puffballs: Finding the Inside" from *Secrets of the Tsil Café* by Thomas Fox Averill; "Whistle Stop, Alabama" from *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* by Fannie Flagg; from *The Food Taster* by Peter Elbling; "Poison Egg" by Tenaya Darlington; "Half-Life" by Paul Hanstedt; "Potatoes and Love: Some Reflections" from *Heartburn* by Nora Ephron; "All the Old Tales are Tales of Hunger" by Caitlin Newcomer; and "Burn" by Jennifer Cognard-Black.

SUMMARY

As cookbook historian Margaret Beetham has stated so succinctly, "[T]here is a relationship between eating and reading" (15). Yet there is also a relationship between cooking and fiction. For just as cooking a dish or making a meal is creative—a synthesis of highly disparate elements into a delicious, miraculous whole—cooking is also an amalgam of fact and fancy. In any moment of cooking, the "reality" of raw ingredients must be imagined as the "fantastical" of a finished product, a dish that might be depicted in a cookbook, in an on-line recipe-sharing app, on a culinary TV show, within the glossy pages of a foodie magazine, or simply in the mind's eye. Cooking requires imagination. Cooking is also a creative act. Like a jazz musician, a cook improvises upon a theme, making changes and substitutions along the way (say, maple syrup in lieu of caramel) and altering the recipe if there is no parmesan cheese in the drawer or if a dinner guest is allergic to onions. The cook also needs to visualize the ultimate scene of eating—that idealized brunch, dinner, or dessert shared by characters sitting around a common table, on a picnic blanket, or in front of a sunset. Like a novel reader trying to guess the ending of a whodunit or a fiction writer working her way towards a credible denouement, that final moment of delivering the attractive, finished food to the table is a vision always behind the eyes of any cook standing at his chopping block, peering into his fridge, consulting a cookbook, or stirring the pot on his stove.

To add bona fide recipes to a piece of fiction is to heighten the central tension of any short story or novel: that the lie tells the truth. In fiction, readers are asked to suspend their disbelief, enter into the world of the story, and understand that while the setting, the plot, and the characters are invented, what's revealed about humanity and the human is true. Recipes complicate and extend this contradiction. For instance, the Buttermilk Biscuit recipe that comes at the end of *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (included in *Books That*

Introduction

Cook) is a recipe attributed to a fictional character named Sipsey Peavey, a cook at the beloved Whistle Stop Cafe, and offered to the reader by another woman, Evelyn Couch, who is one of the four central characters of the novel. On the one hand, Sipsey and Evelyn never existed, so this biscuit recipe is merely another fiction: a set of instructions handed down by no one to no one. On the other hand, however, an actual, flesh-and-blood reader may follow Sipsey's instructions for baking biscuits, feel their fine meal on the fingertips, smell them browning in the oven, smother them with butter or honey or both, and bite into a very real representation of the book. In doing so, a pivotal scene from Flagg's novel that's reprinted in *Books That Cook*—a scene between two other important characters, Idgie Threadgoode and Ruth Jamison—is made actual and three-dimensional, cooling and fragrant on a plate.

In this particular scene from *Fried Green Tomatoes*, unbeknownst to anyone else, Idgie invites her crush, Ruth, to a picnic out in the country. The year is 1924, and the setting is rural Alabama. While Ruth sits on a blanket, Idgie tells her that she wants to show Ruth something. Idgie then risks life and limb extracting fresh honey from an old oak tree, getting covered "from head to foot" in thousands of bees in the process (82). Ruth, scared "out of her wits," starts crying, upset that Idgie would do something so risky just to get a bit of honey for their biscuits. As she says to Idgie, "It's just that I don't know what I'd do if anything ever happened to you. I really don't" (82). Here is the first admission on Ruth's part that she cares for Idgie, which is even more meaningful than a typical declaration of love since this is the American South of the 1920s, and one woman is declaring her devotion to another. And yet there's no censure in this scene. Instead, there's sweetness: honey on homemade biscuits. Idgie looks up "into the clear blue sky that reflected in her eyes, and she was as happy as anybody who is in love in the summer time can be" (83).

So for a reader who gets up from this story to bake Sipsey's recipe—the same recipe used to supply Idgie's picnic—the flour-and-shortening biscuits, golden and redolent in that reader's kitchen, don't just symbolize "that ol' love bug" that "done bit Idgie" (in Sipsey's words). They actually become that love: a love which is powerful and also potentially dangerous in a world where a romance between two women would have been considered peculiar at best, immoral at worst. As this fiction is baked and consumed into fact—the word made flesh within the reader—that reader must grapple with the implications of such transformation by carrying its politics into his or her own, lived moment.

Short Foodie Fictions

SUMMARY

While including recipes works in a similar way across all fictional genres—turning an imaginary story into one that's potentially lived and real—there is a distinct difference between a short story and a novel that incorporates them. A short story is a unique vehicle for culinary storytelling. It has affinities with the one-act play, the lyric poem, the essay, and the TV show: genres that are meant to move, to arrest, to enrapture, and/or to provoke their audiences in a single reading or viewing. As Edgar Allan Poe wrote in his essay on writing creatively, "The Philosophy of Composition": "If any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression—for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed" (545). A short story, then, is a totality. Read in a single sitting, it has a unity of effect. It encompasses a whole world, distilled.

Yet a short story isn't merely condensed. It's also flexible, able to contain multitudes. In terms of form, there is the oxymoron of the "long short story" in diametric opposition to flash fictions or the current rage for microfictions. There are "proems"—a cross between a short story and a poem—as well as post-modern approaches to storytelling, in which stories are told in a nonlinear, interrupted, and/or circular fashion that often blends distinct kinds of writing into one piece (for example, fictional newspaper quotations set against slivers of interior monologue set against snatches of song lyrics set against a brief sequence of dialogue). And, too, the content of short stories varies widely. There are detective stories, comic and romantic and horror and fantasy stories, minimalist pieces, realistic pieces, and stories told through stream-of-consciousness. Regardless of form or content, however, inserting recipes into short fictions of any kind transforms them into short foodie fictions.

Having students read the short fiction within *Books That Cook*—including "Poison Egg" by Tenaya Darlington, "Half-Life" by Paul Hanstedt, "All the Old Tales are Tales of Hunger" by Caitlin Newcomer, and "Burn" by Jennifer Cognard-Black—allows for class discussions of at least three types of short foodie fiction: realistic, fairytale, and historic. Darlington's and Hanstedt's stories are traditional in their form and style; they are character-driven pieces that ask hard questions about the strengths and weaknesses of familial bonds and how food and meals can bind family members together as well as create discord among them. In turn, "All the Old Tales are Tales of Hunger" is a re-working of the well-known fairytale of Little Red Riding Hood, though Newcomer's version contains multiple choices for how the plot might unfold and doesn't come to an easy conclusion.

Short Foodie Fictions

In this way, Newcomer's piece mirrors the orality of original fairytales—how they were passed down from one raconteur to the next, changing form and substance along the way—and also prompts the question of who the villain is, and who the hero, in any fairytale. Finally, Cognard-Black's story "Burn" is a fictionalization of a real-life affair between the novelist Edith Wharton and a rascal journalist named Morton Fullerton. Though "Burn" is based on Wharton's real-life letters to her lover, Cognard-Black's story is about a moment that never actually happened, in which the jilted Wharton burns down Fullerton's Berkshire farmhouse.

Considering both the form and content of each of these short stories, students might discuss how embedded recipes affect the storytelling, both in its style and seeming purpose. They could consider why a writer such as Darlington or Newcomer would add recipes to traditional genres such as realistic fiction or fairytales. And, too, students might think about how these particular recipes are provided to the reader. Are they included at the end, incorporated into the narrative's exposition, or revealed through dialogue? What difference does it make if the recipe is set apart or woven within the story itself, both for the characters and for the reader? And why have these respective authors chosen these particular dishes: Darlington's quail-egg omelet; Hanstedt's Thai pork cakes; Newcomer's baked apples; and Cognard-Black's Roman punch and mango cake? Are these recipes symbolic? What images and sense-based responses do these dishes bring to mind? What kinds of cuisines are reflected in such foodstuffs—their ethnicities, their histories, their class levels? Why did the authors choose to draw upon these particular cuisines as part of the stories they're trying to tell?

Long Foodie Fictions (aka Novels)

SUMMARY

In addition to focusing on the pieces of short fiction in *Books That Cook*, another way to utilize the collection in the literature, writing, and/or food studies classroom is to assign at least one full-length novel in tandem with readings from the anthology. Students might read the whole of *Secrets of the Tsil Café* by Thomas Fox Averill, *The Food Taster* by Peter Elbling, *Heartburn* by Nora Ephron, or, of course, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* by Fannie Flagg. Each of these novels brings to the fore distinct aspects of the American novel, particularly in terms of genre and theme.

For instance, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* isn't merely a novel about an American romance between two women in the early part of the twentieth century. It's also a powerful novel of social change. In addition to evoking homophobia, the novel engages such fraught social issues as racism, classism, sexism, bullying, prostitution, the mentally challenged, the pressures of American beauty culture, and violence against women, blacks, and the homeless. Yet it's also a novel that could be called utopian, for the fictional town of Whistle Stop, Alabama is the one place in the narrative where people are treated as people, regardless of their race, class, ability, age, gender, or sexuality. Although the various narrators within the text never make it overt that Whistle Stop is a kind of utopia, it's provocative to discuss this aspect of the book with students and to link the food and recipes served at the Cafe to why and how Whistle Stop is a safe haven within the larger historic context of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in Birmingham, Alabama and Valdosta, Georgia across the eras of World War I, Great Depression, and World War II.

Indeed, to underscore the texture of American history that serves as backdrop for the action of Fried Green Tomatoes, the novel also adopts a fascinating form, presenting the story as "real." Akin to Dracula and other novels organized as a series of supposedly historic manuscripts, *Fried Green Tomatoes* offers its narrative through newspaper clippings, bulletins, and recipes as well as traditional storytelling (i.e., realistic scenes with dialogue). The novel also moves between the past and the present, juxtaposing a strong and unusual relationship between two modern-day women (Evelyn Couch and Ninny Threadgoode) against one between two women of the past (Idgie and Ruth). In this way, students can consider how the author, Fanny Flagg, is trying to bring the world of Whistle Stop into the present moment of contemporary American society. Asking students to discuss how and why Whistle Stop becomes the idea that binds together Evelyn and Ninny, allowing them to grapple with prejudice and violence within their contemporary moment, makes for a rich and compelling discussion. Importantly, too,

Long Foodie Fictions (aka Novels)

is to ask why food is used as the means of sparking and recording the memories of Whistle Stop. What does food symbolize to the various characters: Evelyn and Ninny, but also Idgie, Ruth, Sipsey, and others? And how does Fried Green Tomatoes move beyond a merely sentimental notion of down-home food making and sharing when a murder victim—Ruth's abusive husband—is butchered and sold as plates of bar-be-cue at the Cafe? To encourage students to rethink the novel's scenes of cannibalism as scenes of communion also makes for an interesting and lively classroom debate.

If *Fried Green Tomatoes* is a novel of social change, *Heartburn* is a political novel in the guise of a romantic comedy. First and foremost, *Heartburn* is a roman à clef: a novel about the real-life, disastrous marriage between Nora Ephron (the screenwriter and director of *When Harry Met Sally, Sleepless in Seattle, You've Got Mail,* and *Julie & Julia*) and Carl Bernstein (the Washington Post journalist of Watergate fame). Through this fictionalized account of her marriage to Bernstein, Ephron airs her dirty laundry about how her husband cheated on her with Margaret Jay, the wife of the then British Ambassador, passing it off as a novel about a New York cookbook writer married to a philandering DC journalist. In doing so, Ephron is updating an earlier form of the novel from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which authors had their characters, often thinly veiled real-life aristocrats, write letters to each other about their sexual exploits, thus exposing scandals to an audience voracious for such titillation. The epistolary roman à clef became a way of embedding personal politics within the pages of seeming fiction, and students might benefit from considering how, in *Heartburn*, recipes (rather than letters) become a kind of political capital for the main character, Rachel Samstat. For just as Ephron wields the novel itself as a kind of weapon against her ex-husband, her main character (and second self) Samstat wields recipes and the foods she makes from them in multiple ways—including quite literally at the end of the novel when she hits her womanizing husband right in the kisser with a key-lime pie.

The excerpt from *Heartburn* that's in *Books That Cook*—called "Potatoes and Love: Some Reflections"—is a good starting point to consider the comic uses of food within literature. Here, Ephron turns the humble potato into the symbol of a lover: one that starts in the flutter of early romance (a complicated recipe for Swiss Potatoes or Potatoes Anna) and yet ends with the pangs of betrayed love (a comfort-food recipe for Mashed Potatoes). Talking with students about how food can be used as symbols within novels—as well as the basis of comedy—is an excellent means of transitioning to discuss Heartburn as a whole, a novel that's saturated with various foods that symbolize both hearts and how they burn.

Long Foodie Fictions (aka Novels)

Just as Heartburn is comedic, Peter Elbling's *The Food Taster* is similarly humorous, although in a distinct way. Elbling's novel isn't a roman à clef; rather, it's another example of historical fiction akin to Cognard-Black's story "Burn," although this time, Elbling does not adopt an historical figure as his main character. Instead, he sets his novel in Renaissance Italy at a moment in which food and foodways were changing dramatically. For instance, around 1400, the fork was introduced in Italy, and by 1600, it had became a common culinary accoutrement among the aristocracy. Around the same time, too, napkins started to be used during meals. The excerpt from Elbling's novel offered in *Books That Cook* speaks to these revolutions at the table. Here, the novel's narrator, Ugo DiFonte—the official food taster for the despot Duke Federico of Corsoli, Italy—pays attention to the atypical table manners of a wealthy merchant, Bento Verana of Firenze, a man Federico visits on his way to Milano. Ugo notes that Verana and the other Firenze eaters "employed squares of cloth called napkins to wipe their mouths, ate from gold plates, and covered their mouths when they belched" (102). But Duke Federico, boorish and vapid, is frustrated by these new customs, complaining, "There are so many things to remember. . . . I cannot enjoy the food!" (102). In turn, Verana rejoins, "But conversation is the real food, is it not?" (102).

A useful way to discuss *The Food Taster*, then, is to ask that students think about how foodways change over time, linking that change to similar revolutions in the realms of art, music, science, engineering, or even the novel itself. Having students interrogate their own assumptions about what it means to be a well-mannered or a brutish eater is a means of extending Ugo's literal job as a "taster" to the metaphoric question of what it means to "have taste," both within this novel but also as a modern-day American. Verana's question, "But conversation is the real food, is it not?," is a way of questioning Duke Federico's lack of good taste. After all, the Duke thinks only of the materiality of food, not its symbolic, thematic, or imagistic qualities.

In addition, studying *The Food Taster* also enables students to consider food within its historical moment and to do research on the development of food habits and traditions in Europe and America. As Ugo moves through the plot of *The Food Taster*, he witnesses radical alterations in the preparation and consumption of food in Italy, thereby imparting some knowledge of this history to readers. Students, then, might find it fascinating to research some of the innovations in cooking and eating that occurred in Renaissance Europe across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and discuss Elbling's choice to include authentic Renaissance recipes within his book, especially since Renaissance food isn't exactly a cuisine one can find easily at a local restaurant.

Long Foodie Fictions (aka Novels)

Importantly, too, the whole reason Ugo has a job as a food taster is that, from time-to-time, dukes and other members of European royal courts were, in fact, poisoned. In Elbling's novel, then, there is an uneasy tension between food that sustains and food that kills. To open one's mouth is a risk at the same time that it's a requirement. Thus, another way to think more deeply about this novel is to wonder why Elbling includes recipes at all when a central focus of the novel is worrying whether food is toxic. These tensions between life and death, sustenance and poison might give rise to fascinating discussions among students about humans' need to eat coupled with their simultaneously fear of the intimacy and vulnerability involved in taking a foreign foodstuff and putting it directly into their mouths.

Of the four novels represented in *Books That Cook*, the one by Thomas Fox Averill, *Secrets of the Tsil Café*, is perhaps the most accessible one for many students. This novel is a bildungsroman: a coming-of-age story about a boy whose parents are both chefs—his father for a restaurant he owns (called the Tsil Café), his mother for a catering company she owns (called Buen AppeTito). A novel rife with secrets—a kind of riff on the idea of "secret recipes"—Fox Averill's narrative explores how unspoken and unacknowledged acts within families can fracture and even potentially destroy relationships between parents and children. Students often empathize strongly with the novel's first-person narrator, Wes Hingler, who has to negotiate his own identity against the fierce opinions and eccentricities of his parents. The excerpt of *Secrets of the Tsil Café* within *Books That Cook*, "Puffballs: Finding the Inside," provides a way of initiating a discussion about the roles of secrets and silence within family dynamics, for here Wes discovers that his mother had an affair with his father's half-brother Domingo. Linking familial secrets to what it means jealously to guard a "secret recipe" allows students to make productive connections between the novel's recipes and its characters.

Importantly, too, this excerpt provides an unusual use of the recipe form: a recipe for finding pawpaws. Not a traditional recipe at all, the directions for finding pawpaws is instead a means of taking a scene from this novel—an amicable moment between Wes as his father Robert—and putting it into the structure of a recipe, with a list of ingredients that are character attributes, such as "a quick eye" and "an appetite," and a set of instructions that furthers the plot rather than producing a dish: "Return to car without fruit in hand," directs Wes; "the memory of gorging on pawpaws in the woods is better than trying to do anything with your harvest once in your kitchen" (39). To ask students how the recipe form—with its ingredients list and set of instructions—can be turned into something else entirely is to underscore a central argument of *Books That*

Long Foodie Fictions (aka Novels)

Cook: that recipes are pieces of literature unto themselves. An in-class exercise or writing assignment might be to have students put a memory from their own lives—having to do with their own parents or guardians—into the form of a recipe and then discussing how this transforms the memory in unique ways.

Regardless of the genre or thematics of any of the four novels excerpted in *Books That Cook*, after analyzing the use of recipes within a full-length novel or two, it is compelling to ask students to cook some or all of these foods and then bring the dishes to class. (To assuage anxious cooks, a teacher might cluster students in cooking groups, one group for each dish.) Once the foods are brought, enjoyed, and discussed, a teacher might ask how the novels have altered again as a result of having a chance to see, smell, touch, and consume an actual dish out of the fiction. How might a reader understand a novel and its characters in a distinct way as a result of "eating" these words? The assignment below is a means of connecting the making of a recipe out of a novel to writing about the wider cultural development and resonance of that dish.

Sampe Fiction-Based Assignment: A "Dish History"

SUMMARY

The dish history assignment makes odd bedfellows of etymology, cultural context, and personal experience. Through these three lenses, you will find rich, fascinating layers of meaning from the dish that you will cook, share, and eat with your peers. This dish history will enable you to consider your dish not only as foodstuff but also as image, symbol, and metaphor.

Choose a recipe. Of course, the first thing you should do is choose a recipe to prepare from your book!

Consult a dictionary. Then, you should go on-line and look up the words that are in the title of your recipe within the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Make sure to examine the etymology of each word and think a bit about where the root or roots of this word come from. An example: a popular feminine candy shape during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a "bonbon." Here's the etymology of that word from the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

> The French word for 'good' is *bon*; adopted in ME. from OF., in the form *bon, bone, boon*. q.v.; also used in certain French phrases. Fr. bonbon = good-good; a name originating in the nursery; cf. *goody*.

This etymology reveals that the word is French, from the Old French word "bon," meaning "good." It also reveals that the word is infantile, a silly word originally used to teach children what a "goody" or a "sweet" is, generally speaking.

Next, to begin thinking about the wider cultural context that informs your dish, look at the actual definitions of the word beyond the etymology, especially the contextual examples from literature and history that are provided, as well as obscure uses of the term. In particular, you might look for applications that surprise or confound you.

Do your homework. Then do a little homework about the dish's historical/cultural history. "Homework" may be limited to web browsing, but make sure your websites are worthy: those that end in .edu and .gov are going to be the most reliable, whereas corporate and news organizational websites (NBC, the *New York Times*, etc.) are the next best. Personal websites and blogs usually have little value, and Wikipedia is not a legitimate source for this assignment. There are, however, cloth-and-paper books and journals in libraries as well, so check out what you might find there, too.

Make t personal. Finally, consider your own experience of preparing, cooking, sharing, and eating this dish with your fellow students. This assignment express-

Sampe Fiction-Based Assignment: A "Dish History"

ly asks you to link your personal experience with this dish (through the senses, through metaphor) to the larger implications of this dish (through symbol, allusion, theme, and the like).

Write up your ideas and insights about this dish, utilizing what you've gleaned from history (etymology, cultural context, historical background) as well as from experience (preparing, cooking, sharing). The dish history should be at least four double-spaced pages.

Sampe Fiction-Based Assignment: A "Dish History"

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