

Writing about Family and Food

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In this workshop, we will consider some of the roles of food in our family experiences. For example, how has food helped to define family events and places? How do we associate certain foods with specific family members? What special roles do certain foods play in holidays and rituals? How have our relationships with specific foods changed over time?

Some Resources

Apps, Jerry. *Food and Memories*. Wisconsin PBS.

Apps, Jerry. *Old Farm Country Cookbook*. Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2017.

Berkeley, Ellen Perry, editor. *At Grandmother's Table: Women Write about Food, Life, and the Enduring Bond between Grandmothers and Granddaughters*. Minneapolis: Fairview, 2000.

Bloom, Lynn Z. *Recipe*. Object Lessons Series. Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.

Family Dinner. Andrew Zimmern's food show on The Magnolia Network.

The Lost Kitchen. Erin French's show on The Magnolia Network.

Martin, Janet Letnes, and Suzann (Johnson) Nelson. *Cream Peas on Toast: Comfort Food for Norwegian-Lutheran Farm Kids (and Others)*. Caragana Press, 1994.

No Reservations. The late Anthony Bourdain's food/travel show.

Some Quotations about Food

1. "Food is our common ground, a universal experience."—James Beard, American author
2. "If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him... the people who give you their food give you their heart."—Cesar Chavez, American activist
3. "Do you have a kinder, more adaptable friend in the food world than soup?"—Judith Martin (Miss Manners)
4. "We dare not trust our wit for making our house pleasant to our friend, so we buy ice cream."—Ralph Waldo Emerson, American philosopher and writer
5. "Life expectancy would grow by leaps and bounds if green vegetables smelled as good as bacon."—Doug Larson, American journalist
6. "I come from a family where gravy is considered a beverage."—Erma Bombeck, journalist
7. "You don't win friends with salad."—Homer Simpson

Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. Which of the quotations above resonate most with you?
2. What are some favorite family foods?
3. What is your very favorite family food? Why?
4. What is the recipe for your favorite family food?
5. What are your earliest memories of food?
6. When you were a kid, what foods were you served when you were sick? Flu? Cold?
7. What family members do you associate with that food? Why?

8. What family places come to mind when you think about that food? Why?
9. What family events come to mind when you think about food? Why?
10. What food item makes you think about a specific family member? Why? What are those thoughts?
11. What food item makes you think about a *specific* family event? Why? What are those thoughts?
12. What food item makes you think about a *specific* family place? Why? What are those thoughts?
13. What food items make you think about a specific holiday? Why? What are those thoughts?
14. What are the cultural origins of that food? You may need to do some research.
15. If your ancestors emigrated from their country of origin to the United States, did food play a role in that?
If so, what was that role? You may need to do some research for this.
16. What emotions are evoked when you think about that food?
17. What is the nutritional value of that food? You may need to do some research.
18. Why is that food important to you and/or your family?
19. How does the food taste? Has that changed for you over time?
20. Tell your favorite story about that—or another—food.
21. What family photos come to mind when you think of that—or another—food?
22. How do family members talk about that food?
23. What holidays or rituals—if any—do you associate with that—or another—food? Why? How?
24. If your family no longer makes that food, how does it make you feel?
25. If you have canned or preserved foods with your family, describe what that experience was like.
26. Do you have specific memories about preparing or serving foods with family members?
27. If any family foods were grown in a family garden, what are your memories of growing that food?
28. Do any foods make of you think of any of the four seasons? Why? What are those thoughts?
29. What is your favorite comfort food? Why?
30. What food would be most difficult to give up because of family memories?
31. Do you have vivid family memories about not-so-tasty foods? What family members, places, or events do you associate with that food?
32. How have your relationships with specific foods changed during your lifetime?
33. Have any of your family or friends kept recipes secret?
34. Have any of your family or friends measured ingredients with the heart instead of with measuring cups and spoons?
35. If you observe a vegetarian or vegan diet, what caused you to make that life choice?
36. If you stopped observing a vegetarian or vegan diet, what caused you to stop?
37. What food from your childhood do you miss the most? Why do you no longer eat it?
38. What are your favorite memories of school lunches?
39. Some people etch family recipes on gravestones. Which family recipe would you immortalize in this way?
40. Draw a food web. Start by writing the word “food” in the middle of the page. Draw a circle around it. Not draw lines that radiate from that circle. At the end of each line, write a word that comes to mind when you think of the word “food.” Circle each. Continue the process for some of the words that radiate from the word “food.” You will end up with an elaborate web.
41. What are your experiences with Jell-O?
42. What are your favorite food scenes from movies or television shows?