



**Grades 10 to 12 | ADST (Food Studies)**

# **Activity Plan: Exploring South Asian Canadian Culture through Food**

**SOUTH ASIAN CANADIAN  
LEGACY PROJECT**



**SOUTH ASIAN  
STUDIES INSTITUTE**  
*University of the Fraser Valley*

**UNIVERSITY  
OF THE FRASER VALLEY**

# Activity Plan: Exploring South Asian Canadian Culture through Food

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## Activity Plan: Exploring South Asian Canadian Culture through Food

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### Overview

#### Big question

How is food an expression of culture and geography?

#### Activity description

Students will discover the intersection of food and culture by exploring South Asian cuisine.

#### Grades and curricular area(s)

- Grades 10 to 12
- ADST (Food Studies)

#### Big ideas

ADST (Food Studies)	
Grade 10	Consumer needs and preferences inform food production and preparation.
Grade 11	Services and products can be designed through consultation and collaboration.
Grade 12	

#### Curricular competencies

ADST (Food Studies)	
Grade 10	Observe and research the context of a meal preparation task or process.
	Choose an idea to pursue, using sources of inspiration and information (ADST).
Grade 11	Observe and research the context of a meal and/or recipe preparation task or process.
	Identify, critique, and use a variety of sources of inspiration and information (ADST).
Grade 12	Observe and research the context of a meal and/or recipe preparation task or process.
	Take creative risks in generating ideas and add to others' ideas in ways that enhance them.
	Identify, critique, and use a variety of sources of inspiration and information (ADST).

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# Materials/Resources

## Background reading

- Elois Joseph and Robert Voeks, “Indian Diaspora Gastronomy: On the Changing Use of Herbs and Spices Among Southern California’s Indian Immigrant Women,” *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems* (April 2021).
- Tulasi Srinivas, “Exploring Indian Culture through Food,” *Education About Asia* 16, No. 3 (Winter 2011).
- Alexandra Sundarsingh, “[Indian Food in Canada](#),” The Canadian Encyclopedia (September 6, 2017).

## Articles

- [What Is Cultural Appropriation?](#)
- [Addressing Cultural Appropriation in the Classroom: Tools and Resources](#)
- [The Fine Line Between Culinary Appropriation and Appreciation](#)
- [Cultural Appropriation: Why Is Food Such a Sensitive Subject?](#)
- [Cultural Appreciation vs. Cultural Appropriation: Why It Matters](#)
- [Fusion Cuisine—The ‘F’ Word](#)

## Templates

- [Know Wonder Learn Chart](#)
- [Expert Groups](#)
- [Favourite Foods Worksheet](#)

## Recipes

- [Aloo Mattar, Jeera Rice and Roti](#)
- [Chana Masala](#)
- [Naan](#)

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### Kick Off and Connect

#### Part 1: Hook

Show students images of a turmeric latte, a chai tea latte, butter chicken, ginger shots (for example, from Booster Juice), and power balls, and ask them how they are connected. Responses may include “food,” “Indian,” “South Asian,” etc.

These are all things that have been inspired by South Asia and have made their way into the mainstream.

- Turmeric latte/golden milk = haldi doodh (see [turmeric health benefits](#) and [golden milk recipe/benefits](#))
- Chai tea latte = chai or chaa
- Butter chicken [originated around 75 years ago in North India](#) but now can be seen on pizzas, in poutine, in pastas, etc.
- Ginger shots: Ginger is originally from Southeast Asia but after it was introduced to South Asia, its prevalence increased, and it was used both in food and medicinally.
- Power balls = [Pinnis](#)

#### Part 2: Discussion

Have students Think-Pair-Share for each of the discussion questions used. You may choose to have them do research on these topics to share with the class.

Possible discussion questions:

- Do you know of any other foods/concepts that have been “rebranded” in the same way as these foods have? (This can include food and concepts from other cultures as well.)  
Examples:
  - Ayurveda
  - Yoga
- Where should the line be drawn between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation?
  - Appropriation: the act of taking something such as an idea, custom, or style from a group or culture that you are not a member of and using it yourself ([Cambridge Dictionary](#))
  - Is making a food from a culture other than your own cultural appropriation? When might it become cultural appropriation?

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- Resources to support this conversation:
  - [What Is Cultural Appropriation?](#)
  - [Addressing Cultural Appropriation in the Classroom: Tools and Resources](#)
  - [The Fine Line Between Culinary Appropriation and Appreciation](#)
  - [Cultural Appropriation: Why Is Food Such a Sensitive Subject?](#)
  - [Cultural Appreciation vs. Cultural Appropriation: Why It Matters](#)
- Where can you draw the line between an inspiration, a variation, and a completely different food?
  - Are power balls the same thing as pinnis?
    - In essence, yes. They are both a quick, easy snack that provides nutrients, fat and energy, but it can be argued that a lot of food products serve the same purpose.
  - Can we say that ginger shots are inspired by (appropriated from?) South Asian cuisine and traditional medicine?
    - Would your answer stay the same if you found out that ginger isn't native to India but was introduced from Southeast Asia?
- How far back can or should you go to see if an item is “traditional”?
  - For example, chai is synonymous with India and there are variations of it in other South Asian countries, but teatime was introduced during the British Raj.

## Explore and Engage

### Part 3: Food as culture

Brainstorm individually, then discuss as a group: What is the role of food in your life?

- Examples: nutrition, culture, religion, gatherings
- Make a link between culture and food: Food is an expression of culture and, often, tradition.
- Food in India is a marker of caste, class, family, kinship, tribe affiliation, lineage, religiosity, ethnicity and, increasingly, of secular group identification ([see Exploring Indian Culture through Food](#)).

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### Optional activity

#### Step 1

Watch [Food and the Fundamentals of Storytelling](#).

#### Step 2

Discuss:

- How can food tell a story? A history?

### Part 4: South Asian food

#### Step 1

Have students complete the first two columns of the [Know, Wonder and Learn \(KWL\) Chart \(below\)](#) with what they already know about South Asian food and what they wonder about it.

#### Step 2

Have students share what they already know/wonder. Other students may be writing points in the “Learn” column of their KWL chart.

#### Step 3

Have students read [Exploring Indian Culture through Food](#), filling in the “Learn” column of their KWL chart as they read.

- Address the fact that the article looks at Indian food and culture, and South Asia consists of more than just India.
- Students will likely still have unanswered questions. They can use their devices or other resources to fill in those blanks.

#### Step 4

Have students pair up and choose a geographic area within South Asia (e.g., Pakistan, North India, Central India, South India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka). Provide each pair with the [Expert Groups handout \(below\)](#) to complete as they research and explore the expressions of culture that can be found in food as well as other customs and traditions attached to it.

- Once they have completed their research, pairs may choose to share with the whole class or just with another pair who chose a different area.
- The purpose of this activity is for students to understand the diversity of South Asia and how each region has a distinct cuisine, with some shared features that connect them all.
- Optional activity: Have students pair up with another expert group and create a Venn diagram identifying elements of overlap between their two geographic regions.

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### Part 5: Food is ever-changing

Like culture, food is always evolving. An example of this can be seen in the [diaspora](#) (the movement, migration or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland).

In Part 4, students explored the different influences of South Asian cuisines. In Part 5, they explore ways in which South Asian cuisines have been fused with other cuisines to create “fusion foods.”

#### Step 5

As a class, brainstorm examples of fusion foods. For example:

- Indo-Chinese cuisine
- Indian-style pizza – unique to the Lower Mainland (has more vegetables, herbs, and spices, including ginger and cilantro)
- [McAloo tikki burger, Dosa Masala Burger, McSpicy Paneer](#)
- [Curry Pasta from Anton’s Pasta Bar](#)
- [Fusion Cuisine and the Ascension of Cultural Cuisine](#)

#### Step 6

Ask students:

- What are some foods that you eat on a regular basis?
- Are these foods inspired by other cultures?
- Do they have ingredients or cooking methods that are perhaps not “traditional”? These may not be very apparent, and it may be a matter of simply switching out a couple of ingredients.
  - This article may be helpful: [Fusion Cuisine – The "F" Word](#)

## Wrap Up and Assess

Have students complete a final project, such as:

- Exploring their own cultures and see how some dishes that they eat on a regular basis have changed/been adapted over time. (Use the Favourite Foods Worksheet, below, but focus on one dish and research the components of it.)



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- Cooking South Asian dishes. Each group of students could research and make a dish for a class potluck. (Recipes are included below for aloo mattar, rice and roti; chana masala, and naan—North Indian/Punjabi dishes are regularly made at home. The ingredients and techniques have been adapted slightly to work better in a Food Studies classroom.)

Note: There are several ingredients and methods that may be unfamiliar to students. Provide time to research, learn, and identify the products (or substitutes).

- The potluck could also be expanded to explore foods from different cultures, with each student bringing in a dish from their own culture.
- Creating a unique and creative fusion recipe fusing their own cultural cuisine and South Asian cuisine.
  - South Asian students could create a fusion recipe with South Asian cuisine and some other type of cuisine.

## Extend and Transform

- Explore the [Slow Food](#) movement—Slow Food concepts are more commonly practised in South Asia than in Canada.
- Visit a [Gurdwara](#) to see [Langar](#)—expanding on the idea of the importance of food in religious settings (Sikh).
- Explore colonialism and globalization through the lens of herbs and spices.
  - For example, lots of spices that are used in South Asian cuisine are not native to India but were introduced to India through the spice roads and colonization (e.g., ginger).
  - Resource: [Geographic Spice Index](#)
- Explore South Asian cuisine and [Canada's Food Guide](#).
  - Students can use the Know, Wonder and Learn charts they completed in Part 4 to examine the South Asian diet from a nutritional perspective. Is this a healthy diet? How can its nutritional value be improved? Does it fit within the guidelines of Canada's Food Guide?
    - You may want to give students some choice in how they present this information. Students could make this into a more creative assignment by creating informative brochures or PSAs for the community – or they could present this as a podcast talking about nutrition, or even an essay!
  - Interesting links from provincial and national organizations:

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- [Diabetes Canada](#)
- [Heart and Stroke Foundation](#)
- [BC Dairy Farmers](#)
- Among the suggested recipes in Canada's Food Guide are [Curried Vegetable Lentil Stew](#), [Eggplant Lentil Curry](#), and [Vegetable Curry](#).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Know Wonder Learn Chart

Know	Wonder	Learn

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Expert Groups

<b>Geographic area chosen:</b>	
<b>Typical everyday meal</b>	
<b>Special occasion meal (this could be a wedding, birthday, celebration, festival)</b>	
<b>Flavours and spices that are used</b>	
<b>Special traditions attached to food</b>	
<b>Influences from other cultures</b>	
<b>Any other interesting facts</b>	

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Favourite Foods Worksheet

Think about some of your favourite foods or foods that you regularly eat at home. Are they “traditional” dishes? You may need to stretch yourself by looking at where some of these foods are grown or how they are traditionally used.

For example:

<b>Food:</b> Quinoa Biryani
Instead of using rice when making biryani (a South Asian rice dish), we will sometimes use quinoa because it is healthier and has a different flavour. This is not a grain that is typically found/grown in South Asia.

<b>Food:</b>
<b>Food:</b>
<b>Food:</b>
<b>Food:</b>
<b>Food:</b>

## Aloo Mattar, Jeera Rice and Roti

2 to 3 servings

# Aloo Mattar, Jeera Rice and Roti

**2 to 3 servings**

## Aloo Mattar

### Ingredients

- 1/4 cup (60 mL) onion, finely chopped
- 1 1/2 tsp (7.5 mL) ginger, minced
- 1 1/2 tsp (7.5 mL) garlic, minced
- 3 Tbsp (45 ml) crushed tomatoes
- 4 tsp (20 mL) oil
- 1 large potato, diced
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) green peas
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) cumin seeds
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) red chili powder, or to taste
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) turmeric powder
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) garam masala
- 2 cups (500 mL) water, plus more as required
- 1 Tbsp (15 mL) cilantro, chopped (optional)
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) salt, or to taste

### Method

1. Heat oil in a medium saucepan on medium heat. Add cumin and let it sit until it begins to crackle. (Cumin burns easily. This step takes only a few minutes, so watch closely.)
2. Add chopped onion and sauté until it is a light golden colour. Add ginger and garlic and sauté until it starts to change colour.
3. Add tomato puree and sauté for two minutes. Add chili powder, garam masala, turmeric and salt.
4. Sauté until oil begins to separate from the mixture. If the mixture starts to stick to the pot, add a few spoonfuls of water. If it is still sticking, you may need to turn down the heat.
5. Add potatoes and peas. Sauté for 1-2 minutes.
6. Add water. Stir well and cover the pot. Turn the heat up to medium-high and simmer until potatoes are cooked, about 20 minutes. Check periodically by piercing the potatoes with a fork. You may need to add a little more water if it looks a bit dry.
7. Stir in chopped cilantro. Serve hot with roti or rice.

## **Aloo Mattar, Jeera Rice and Roti**

2 to 3 servings

### **Jeera Rice**

#### **Ingredients**

- 1 tsp (5 mL) oil
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) cumin
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) basmati rice
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) black pepper
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) salt
- 1 cup (250 mL) water

#### **Method**

1. Heat the oil in a small saucepan. Add the cumin seeds and sauté for a few seconds.
2. Add the rice to the saucepan and stir-fry for 1-2 minutes.
3. Add water, salt and pepper. Boil over high heat.
4. Once the water comes to a boil, cover the saucepan and turn the heat down to low. Cook until all of the water is absorbed. Do not stir or mix, as this will break the rice.
5. Let sit covered for 5 minutes.
6. Fluff with a fork and serve hot.

## Aloo Mattar, Jeera Rice and Roti

2 to 3 servings

# Roti

### Ingredients

- 1 cup (250 mL) whole wheat flour
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup (60 to 125 mL) water, or as needed
- All-purpose flour, for dusting

### Method

1. In a medium mixing bowl, slowly add water to the flour until it comes together. Knead the dough until it feels smooth, soft and pliable. If it feels hard/tight, add a little water and knead again. If it feels too sticky or soft, add a bit more flour.
2. Cover with a damp cloth and let sit for at least 15 minutes.
3. Divide dough into 4 parts. Roll into balls with no cracks.
4. Flatten each ball with the palm of your hand, and then roll it in all-purpose flour until it forms a circle 5-6 inches across. Make sure the dough is even and thin. If it is uneven or thick, it won't puff up. If it starts sticking, dust with some more flour.
5. Heat a flat-bottomed skillet on medium-high heat. Make sure the skillet is hot enough before you place the roti in it. To test, put a pinch of flour in the skillet. If the flour turns brown within 15-20 seconds, the skillet is hot enough.
6. Dust excess flour off the rolled roti and place it in the hot skillet.
7. Let the roti cook until you see some bubbles on the top, about 15-30 seconds. Flip the roti. (The first side shouldn't be cooked too much.)
8. Cook the other side until it has nice brown spots (more than the first side).
9. Flip again (so the first side is now at the bottom), and press the roti with a paper towel, cotton cloth or spatula. The roti will puff up.
10. Flip again to cook the first side a little more.
11. Remove from the heat and eat warm with aloo mattar.



## Chana Masala

3 servings

# Chana Masala

**3 servings**

### Ingredients

- 4 tsp to 2 Tbsp (20 to 30 mL) oil
- 1 cup (250 mL) onion, finely chopped
- 4 tsp (20 mL) ginger garlic paste
- 1 cup (250 mL) tomato, finely chopped
- 1 tsp (5 mL) salt
- 1 tsp (5 mL) chili powder, or to taste
- 2 tsp (10 mL) chana masala
- 1 tsp (5 mL) garam masala
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) ground coriander
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) turmeric
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) kasoori methi
- 1/8 tsp (0.5 mL) hing (asafoetida)
- 1 1/4 cups (300 mL) canned chickpeas
- 2 cups (500 mL) water, or as needed

### Method

1. Heat the oil in a medium pan over low to medium heat. Add ginger garlic paste and sauté until the raw smell goes away.
2. Add onion and cook on low heat until the onion begins to turn a light golden colour (5-10 minutes).
3. Add tomatoes and salt. Cook until mixture turns mushy and soft.
4. Add spices and cook until the oil begins to separate from the mixture, about 10-15 minutes.
5. Deglaze the pot with some water, making sure to scrape everything off the bottom of the pot.
6. Add chickpeas and cook for a minute or two. Add water, cover and simmer for 20 minutes, until the sauce starts to thicken.
7. Serve warm with naan or rice.

## Naan

Makes 6 naan

# Naan

**6 naan**

### Ingredients

- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL) sugar
- 1/4 cup (60 mL) warm water
- 1 tsp (5 mL) active dry yeast
- 1 cup (250 mL) plus 1 Tbsp (15 ml) flour
- 1/4 cup (60 mL) yogurt
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) salt
- 1 1/2 tsp (7 mL) oil
- Oil for greasing skillet
- Butter to brush on naan

### Method

1. In a small bowl, combine the sugar, warm water and yeast. Stir to combine. The yeast should be activated when it becomes foamy, about 10 minutes.
2. Add yogurt, salt, and oil. Mix.
3. Gradually add flour until a soft dough forms.
4. Knead until the dough is smooth and shiny; about 3-5 minutes.
5. Let rest for 40-45 minutes.
6. Divide dough into 6 equal portions and roll into even circles/ovals/triangles.
7. Heat up a skillet (cast-iron is best) over medium heat and lightly grease the surface with oil to prevent the dough from sticking.
8. Place the dough in the skillet. When it puffs up and bubbles, flip it over and cook the other side. Repeat with each portion.
9. Brush the naan with butter and serve warm.