

Connecting Food and Stories

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Read the “Directions” sheets for step-by-step instructions.

SUMMARY

In this activity, children and adults will read or listen to a short news story about the food in a Japanese American internment camp, then create their own meals using some of the same ingredients.

WHY

Connecting a familiar food to a historical event will help bring to life one part of the day-to-day experience in the internment camps. The experience of eating food prepared from a camp recipe helps children think about how food traditions are connected to stories.

TIME

- 40-90 minutes, depending on recipe and discussion

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in kindergarten through fourth grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **Assembly center:** fairgrounds, racetracks, and other public places where Japanese Americans were held after being removed from their own homes
- **Barracks:** a large, poorly built structure in which many families in the camps lived
- **Caramelized onions:** onions cooked slowly until they are richly browned and slightly sweet
- **Internment camps:** a barbed wire fenced-in area built by the U.S. government to imprison the Japanese Americans
- **Julienne:** vegetables or fruit cut into short, thin strips, also called “matchsticks”
- **Sauté:** fry quickly in oil or fat

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GET READY

- Read *Baseball Saved Us* together. This book tells the story of a Japanese American community coming together to build a baseball field in an internment camp during World War II. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/internment2/internment_reading.pdf).
- Read the Step Back in Time sheets.

YOU NEED

- Directions sheets (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- ThinkAbout sheet (*attached*)
- *Baseball Saved Us* book (*optional*)
- Kitchen and stove
- Computer with Internet
- Ingredients and tools for cooking

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/>.



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Step Back in Time, page 1 of 2

For more information, visit the National Museum of American History website <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/>.

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The next day, the United States government went to war with Japan. The government was afraid that Japanese Americans might threaten the country's safety. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed a law that allowed the military to remove Japanese Americans from some parts of the country, and move them to new places.



In the spring of 1942, scenes like this were repeated in every Japanese American community along the Pacific Coast. [Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of National Archives]

The Japanese Americans weren't given a lot of time to pack, sell, or store their things. Families were allowed to take only what they could carry. Some families were lucky enough to have neighbors or friends to care for their things. Others had to leave behind family pets, special toys, and many memories.



Two children and their father await baggage inspection at an assembly center in 1942. [Dorothea Lange, Courtesy of National Archives]

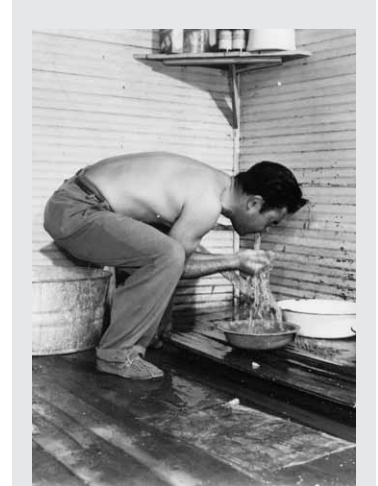
Assembly centers were the first stop for these Japanese Americans before the **internment camps** were ready. The **assembly centers** were not designed for housing—in fact, some people had to live in horse stalls! The food was bad, the living space was dirty, and there were not enough doctors to take care of all the people. Sadly, some had to stay in assembly centers for months before moving to an **internment camp**.

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The **internment camps** were located far away from other people and towns. They were fenced in and guarded by soldiers. Families lived in rough buildings called **barracks** where many people stayed together in a small space. They were cold in the winter and hot in the summer. The bathrooms and kitchen were in separate buildings from the bedrooms, so adults and children had to wait in line to take a bath or get a meal.

Even though the Japanese Americans lost many of their basic rights, they tried to create a community within the camps. Kids went to school and formed Boy Scout troops, played on sports teams, and went to dances. Grown-ups had jobs, played cards, and formed clubs like the Parent Teacher Association.



A man washes his face in a basin. There was no running water at the camps. [Courtesy of National Archives]

Assembly center: fairgrounds, racetracks, and other public places where Japanese Americans were held after being removed from their own homes until permanent internment camps could be built

Internment camps: a barbed wire fenced in area built by the U.S. government to imprison the Japanese Americans.

Barracks: a large, poorly built structure in the camps in which many families lived

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Directions

For adults and kids to follow together.

1. Read aloud or listen to a story about the food in the camps (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=17335538>).

2. Do you eat any of the same foods that Japanese Americans ate in camp? What do you think it would be like to “eat hot dogs for days,” like the man in the story? Why do you think hot dogs and Spam were so common in the camps?

3. Look closely at the pictures in the news story. Visit the online exhibition, **A More Perfect Union**, to see more pictures of people eating in the camps (http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/non-flash/internment_conditions.html).

4. If you were going to go to a new place for a long time, what foods would you miss most? Would you take any foods with you? What would they be? Which ones do you think would travel the best?

For more activities about Japanese American internment and *Baseball Saved Us*, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/>.

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For adults and kids to follow together.

For Japanese Americans in internment camps, one of the biggest adjustments families had to make was how they ate. No one had their own kitchens, and the food provided by the Army was different from what they ate at home.

Read the instructions carefully before beginning to prepare or cook. Be sure to wash your hands before and after handling food, especially raw meats and eggs.

Cooking words to know for this recipe:

Sauté: fry quickly in oil or fat

Caramelized onions: onions cooked slowly until they are richly browned and slightly sweet

Julienne: vegetables cut into short, thin strips, also called “matchsticks”

Tools:

Sauté or frying pan

Sharp knife

Cutting board

Whisk

Small bowl

Wooden spoon

Rubber scraper

Ingredients (serves 2):

½ white or yellow onion

1 tablespoon soy sauce

2 hot dogs

3 eggs

2 cups cooked white rice

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Preparation:

1. Wash your hands. This is one of the most important steps!

2. Slice off the root and top ends of the onions, and peel off the papery outer layers. Cut in two, and put one half away to use later. Chop the onion into small pieces.

3. Open and rinse the hot dogs. **Julienne** the hot dogs using a clean knife and cutting board. Cut the hot dog in half and lay it cut side down to keep it from rolling. Cut lengthwise into strips about $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick.

4. Wash your hands. You should always do this before and after handling food, especially raw meats and eggs.

5. Crack the eggs into a bowl. Use a whisk to scramble the egg yolk and egg whites together.

6. Wash your hands again! They can never be too clean in the kitchen.

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Cooking:

1. **Sauté** the chopped onions with a tablespoon of soy sauce, stirring with a wooden spoon. Cook at medium heat until they are **caramelized**. (Depending on how strong your stovetop burner is, you may need to reduce the heat to medium low to prevent the onions from burning or drying out.)

2. After the onions are finished, add the hot dogs and cook for 2–3 minutes. Stir occasionally.

3. Add the beaten eggs to the onions and hot dogs and mix together. Chase the eggs around the pan using a rubber scraper so that they cook evenly for about 1–2 minutes.

4. Serve on top of cooked white rice.

ThinkAbout

- Enjoy your meal! As you eat, think about how your life is different from a child who might have eaten the same meal in an internment camp.

Tip Share your meal with friends or family. Explain why you are cooking with hot dogs or Spam, and share what you learned.

- In what other recipes do you think you could add hot dogs? How would it change the recipe? Would it make it better, or worse?
- Imagine eating hot dogs every day for a week. Is that something that you'd want to do? Why or why not?

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Spam Musubi, page 1 of 3

For adults and kids to follow together.

Living in internment camps changed the foods families ate and mealtime traditions. Lacking traditional ingredients for sushi and sashimi, Japanese Americans in the camps had to get creative, and Spam became a part of the family dinner. Some kept eating it even after the war was over!

Read the instructions carefully before beginning to prepare or cook. Be sure to wash your hands before and after handling food, especially raw meats and eggs.

Cooking words to know for this recipe:

Spam: a fully cooked luncheon meat

Musubi: a block of rice topped with Spam and wrapped in **nori**

Nori: paper-like dry, roasted seaweed

Rice press: this tool helps form the rice into the shape of a slice of Spam

Tools:

Sauté or frying pan

Small bowl

Sharp knife

Wooden spoon

Cutting board

Rubber scraper

Whisk

Rice press (*optional*)

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Spam Musubi, page 2 of 3

Ingredients:

2 cups uncooked short-grain white rice

2 cups water

6 tablespoons rice vinegar

¼ cup soy sauce

½ cup white sugar

1 12-oz. container of **Spam**

5 sheets sushi **nori**

Preparation:

1. Wash your hands. This is one of the most important steps!

2. Soak uncooked rice in water for 4 hours. Drain and rinse.

Cooking:

1. To cook the rice: in a saucepan, bring to boil 2 cups of water. Add rice and stir. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes. Stir in rice vinegar, and set aside to cool.

2. Combine the soy sauce and sugar in a separate bowl. Stir together until the sugar is completely dissolved.

3. Slice the **Spam** lengthwise into 10 slices, and marinate in the sauce for 5 minutes.

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4. Wash your hands. You should always do this before and after handling food, especially meats and eggs. (Even fully cooked meat products, like **Spam**!)

5. In a large skillet, cook the slices of **Spam** for 2 minutes per side, or until lightly browned.

6. Cut the **nori** sheets in half and lay on a flat work surface. Place a **rice press** in the center of the sheet, and press the rice tightly inside. Top with a slice of **Spam**, and remove the press. Wrap the **nori** sheet around the rice and **Spam**, sealing the edges with a small amount of water.

Tip You can also form the rice by hand into the shape of the meat slices. It should be about 1-inch thick.

7. Before you eat, wash your hands again! They can never be too clean in the kitchen.

8. Enjoy your meal!

Tip This recipe can be served warm or room temperature.

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ThinkAbout

- Have you ever eaten **Spam** before? What did you think of the taste?
- Why do you think **Spam** was a common food given to Japanese Americans in internment camps?

Tip Read the information on the label (look especially at the expiration date), and think about how it's packaged.

- Imagine your favorite thing to eat. What would you do if the main ingredient didn't exist? What other foods could you substitute that might taste different, but just as good?

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Read the “Parent Guide” and “Directions” sheets for specific instructions.

OBJECTIVES

The student will be better able to:

- Follow recipes/instructions.
- Name one or more food eaten in Japanese American internment camps.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Follow directions
- Name specific dish or dishes made.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

- 1G. Explain change and continuity over time.
- 3H. Explain causes in analyzing historical actions.

K-4 Historical Content Standards

- 1A. The student understands family life now and in the recent past; family life in various places long ago.
- 7A. The student understands the cultures and historical developments of selected societies in such places as Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.

IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

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21st Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/internment/>.



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