

**4-H at
HOME**



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ASK AN ELDER: WHAT IS YOUR CHILDHOOD FOOD STORY?

Find out how the ways we interact with food have changed over time.





Ask an Elder: What Is Your Childhood Food Story?

Find out how the ways we interact with food have changed over time.

About the Activity

What's for dinner? The answer to that question has changed over the years. In this activity, you will interview someone who grew up at least 30 years ago to get a sense of how advertising, costs, accessibility, and trends have affected their food choices at different points in their life. What did older adults eat, plant, and cook when they were growing up decades ago, and what changes have they noticed? Let's find out.

Supplies

These simple supplies are all you'll need for this activity.

- Sample talking points
- Food Pyramid and MyPlate
- An Elder's Story of Food Systems Worksheet
- Note-taking tools
- Video-enabled, internet-connected device for a video call (optional)

Grades: 6-12

Topic: Food Systems, Civic Engagement

Time: 1 hour





Activity Steps

1

Find somebody in your family or community (it can be a parent, grandparent, relative, neighbor, or teacher, for example) who is at least 30 years older than you, and ask to have a 30-minute interview about food with them.

DID YOU KNOW? The USDA released the Food Guide Pyramid in 1992 as a visual guide to nutritional recommendations. Over time, recommendations changed, and in 2011 the USDA released the MyPlate diagram, which illustrated the latest evidence-based nutritional guidance.

2

To prepare for the interview:

- Choose a comfortable setting with few distractions. Or find a good time and place to talk to them on a video call.
- Introduce yourself and explain that the interview is for a 4-H project for you to learn about food culture and food systems from a person from a different generation.
- Let your interviewee know that the interview will take around 30 minutes.

DID YOU KNOW? Since the 1970s, Americans are spending more on food away from home while less on food at home. However, this trend reversed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as people were eating more at home.

3

For the first few minutes, use the USDA Food Guide Pyramid and MyPlate to guide the first part of the interview (see sample talking points companion sheet to this activity).

DID YOU KNOW? Globally, people have been consuming more calories as time goes by. From 1961 to 2011, Americans' consumption of vegetable oils more than doubled, accounting for a more than 26% increase of calorie consumption over that 50-year span. Check out this interactive website to see changes in people's diet over time around the world.

4

For the second part of the interview, ask your interviewee about their experiences regarding food culture and food systems. Talk about how cultural backgrounds and time periods influence the types of food they eat, their food traditions, and changes they have witnessed in the food system (see sample talking points).

DID YOU KNOW? Comfort food is food that brings you joy and satisfaction, connecting to emotion, memory, and culture. It can be your family meal or a traditional dish unique to your heritage. It can bring you back to a familiar sense of home if you are in a new place, or to traditional foods that come from your heritage or region.

5

Use your notes to compare your interviewee's experiences with your own experiences on the worksheet. For example, reflect on changing attitudes toward food choices.





Test Your Knowledge

QUESTION 1

Is culture part of the food systems?

- a. No. What we eat is not related to our cultures.
- b. Yes. Culture can influence our taste and food preferences.

QUESTION 2

Which of the following describes changes in people's daily diet from 1961 to 2011?

- a. People's diet did not change.
- b. People were eating 50% less fruits.
- c. People's daily calories consumption increased by 26%.

QUESTION 3

Which food group is found in the Food Pyramid but not in MyPlate?

- a. Grains
- b. Vegetables
- c. Dairy
- d. Oils and sweets

QUESTION 4

What is not a characteristic of comfort food?

- a. It can remind you of home.
- b. It can bring you happy memories.
- c. It can make you feel stressed.
- d. It is often related to your culture.

Reflection Questions

Bonus questions for after the interview

- What new ingredient or dish from the conversation do you want to try?
- What are some major differences between MyPlate and the Food Pyramid? How do those updates influence your and your interviewee's food choices?
- If you were born in the same year as your interviewee, how might your food be the same or be different from now? Why?



Investigate & Explore

Take your new knowledge to the next level.

America has been known as the melting pot of cultures as people migrate to this land of opportunity from all over the world. Food is also part of this journey: some may keep it original while others adapt to the new culture; some ingredients are unique to one culture; some cultural cuisines share the same ingredients but use different ways

to prepare. Are there any cuisines outside of your culture that you and your family enjoy? Where is your favorite place to eat food outside of your culture? The next time you go out to eat, try talking to the owner of the restaurant and find out any interesting stories!

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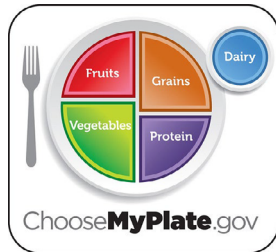
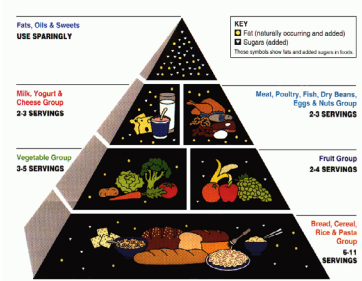


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Instruction: Use the USDA Food Guide Pyramid and MyPlate to guide the first part of the interview (3-5 minutes).



- 1 Did you follow these guidelines in choosing healthy foods?
- 2 What are some examples of food you choose to eat based on each food group?
- 3 What portion of each food category did you eat in the past? Has that changed over time?
- 4 Why did you think the food guide was changed from Food Pyramid to MyPlate?

Instruction: For the second part of the interview, ask your interviewee about their experiences regarding food culture and food systems (25-27 minutes).

- 1 **Cultural Background:** What is your ethnic or cultural background? How has this affected the types of foods you eat? As a child, could you always find food that fit your culture or background? Can you find those foods now?
- 2 **Food Types:** As a child, did you eat mostly processed or home cooked meals? Did you eat at restaurants or fast-food chains frequently? Why or why not? Is it the same now?
- 3 **Traditions:** What were your family traditions around eating together, cooking together, or growing food together? Did you have a garden or a farm? How did you typically purchase food – did you go to a single grocery store? Did you get different products from different community members? How did historical events impact your access and use of foods (examples might be droughts, economic downturns, or changes to the neighborhood)?
- 4 **Food System Changes:** What are some things in the food system that have changed:
 - i. How has the cost of milk changed? Was milk delivered?
 - ii. What skills around growing and preserving food did you learn – how has that changed? Did anyone in your family do food preservation, grow, or raise food?
 - iii. Are there people in the family who have been farmers or cooks – how has that changed? What other food systems jobs did family members do?

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Fats, Oils & Sweets
USE SPARINGLY

KEY
 ● Fat (naturally occurring and added)
 ▣ Sugars (added)
 These symbols show fats and added sugars in foods.

Milk, Yogurt & Cheese Group
2-3 SERVINGS

Meat, Poultry, Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs & Nuts Group
2-3 SERVINGS

Vegetable Group
3-5 SERVINGS

Fruit Group
2-4 SERVINGS

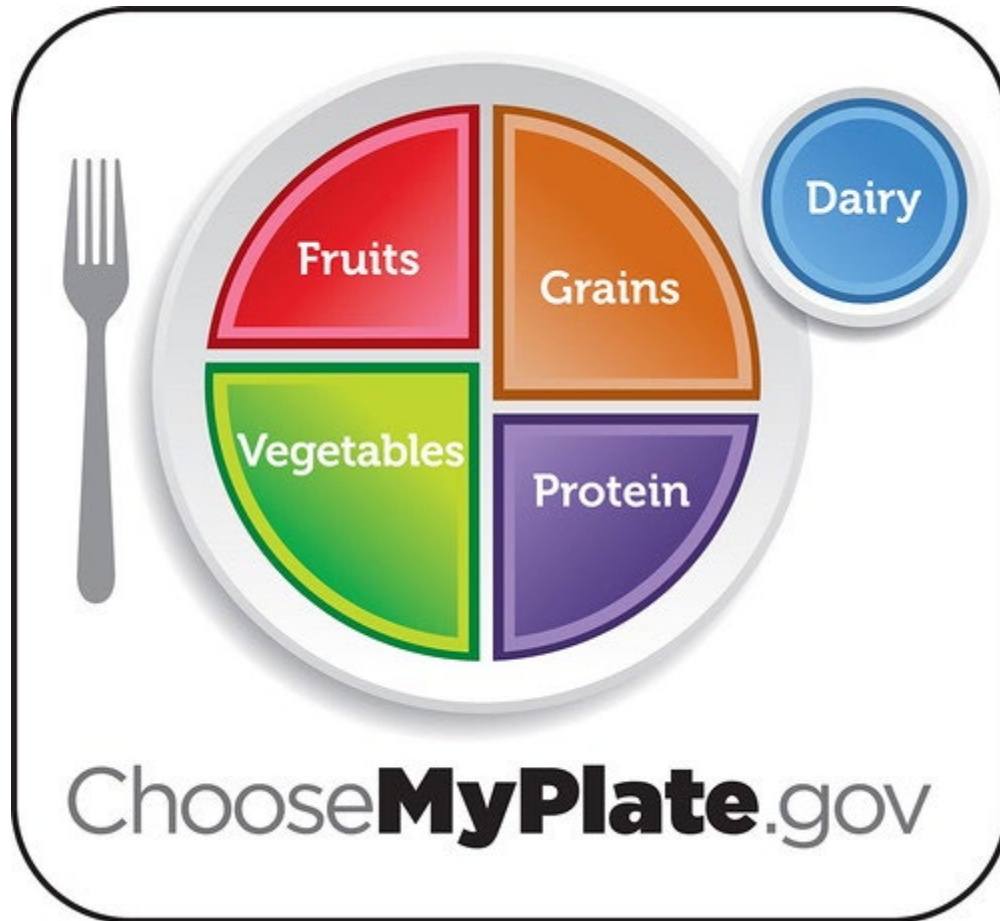
Bread, Cereal, Rice & Pasta Group
6-11 SERVINGS

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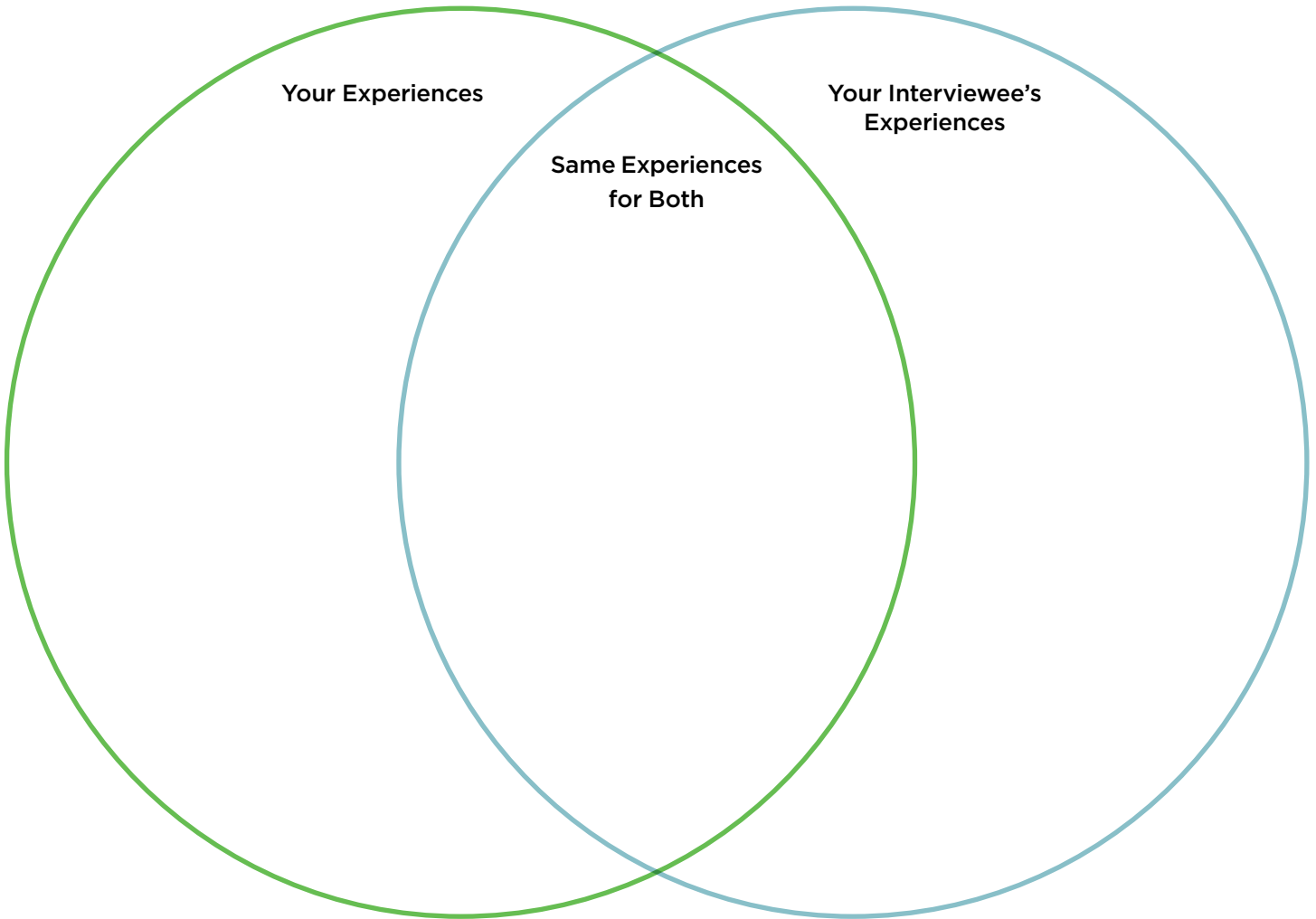


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Instruction: Use the Venn Diagram below to compare your interviewee's experience with your own experience regarding how the food system has changed in terms of belief, culture, value, and knowledge.



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