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FOOD

THE SAMOAN APPETITE AND THE COCONUT

Samoans love to eat. They use a variety of tropical foods, but the most common food is the coconut. Every part of the coconut can be used, from the juice to the husk. There is even a famous legend that describes where the coconut came from.

Starting Points

1. Ask the students to guess what Samoans typically eat. Point out where Samoa is on a globe and show them how it is surrounded by the ocean. Discuss how much Samoans must depend on both the sea and the land for their food.

2. Discuss how the Samoan diet differs from the United States diet.

3. Show the students a coconut and discuss it. Have they ever tasted one? Think of all the parts of the coconut and how these things could be used (i.e., husk, meat, shell, milk).

Information

The Samoan Diet and the Coconut

Samoans eat a variety of food, including tropical crops, root vegetables, fresh fruit, chicken, pork, and seafood. However, the coconut is the most common food product in the Samoan diet. The niu is a young coconut that is not fully ripened. Every part of a coconut can be used in food preparation. The juice of a ripe coconut is served as a drink, or as an ingredient in many tropical dishes. The white meat of a ripened coconut is ground, then squeezed with fibers from the coconut husk to make coconut milk. The milk can be served as a dressing for different vegetables or as a key ingredient in many dishes, especially seafood dishes such as fish and octopus. The husk is used to make fire to cook food.

The Legend of the Coconut

Long ago in the islands of Samoa, there lived a girl named Sina. She was beautiful, and was loved by everyone. One day her mother brought her a pet eel named Pili. Sina was very grateful for the eel and put it in a nearby pond. As the years went on, Pili continued to grow. He became so big that Sina had to put him into a bigger pond. Everywhere she went, Pili would try to go. Eventually, Sina did not want Pili anymore, but he had fallen in love with her. She tried to escape from him, but he followed her. Out of desperation, she fled to the nearby village seeking help. She informed the men of the village that there was an eel following her. They caught him, killed him, and ate him; but before they did, Pili made a dying request. He asked that Sina bury his head in the ground so that he could grow into a tall tree.
with leaves that she could use for making baskets and mats. He also wanted the fruit to show his face. His wishes came true, and that is where the palm tree comes from and why the coconut is thought to resemble the eel’s face, with two eyes and a mouth.

**Recipe for Palusami**

*Palusami,* also called *luau* (different from the party that people go to), is a favorite Samoan dish. It is very similar to spinach in texture and is served as a side dish, much like how salad is served in the United States.

**You will need:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 coconuts</td>
<td>coconut scraper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onions</td>
<td>baking tin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taro leaves (4 for one palusami)</td>
<td>aluminum foil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salt</td>
<td>tauaga, or a thin cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breadfruit leaves</td>
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</tbody>
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**Preparation**

1. Scrape five fresh, ripe coconuts into the baking tin. Bake in the oven until brown.
2. Add approximately one cup of warm water.
3. Squeeze with a thin cloth, or tauaga, to get cream.
4. Add salt and onion to taste.
5. Lay four taro leaves flat, a large one on the bottom and three smaller ones on top.
6. Place the leaves in your hand and close it slightly to shape the leaves into a cup-like shape.
7. Pour about a cup of coconut cream inside and close the leaves to make a ball-like structure. Wrap the ball in aluminum foil (or use a fresh banana leaf softened over the hot rocks of the umu).
8. After wrapping with aluminum foil or a banana leaf, wrap with a breadfruit leaf, twisting the top to seal it while holding the ball tight.
9. Put in oven and cook for about an hour at 250° F.

**Recipe for Oka**

*Oka* is a delicacy in Samoa. It consists of raw fish or mussels combined with vegetables, onions, and coconut milk. Some fishermen make a slightly less flavorful version at sea using the fish they catch and washing the blood out with seawater.

**You will need:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 bag mussels or scaled raw fish</td>
<td>1 C chopped vegetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 C water</td>
<td>salt and pepper to taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 C pure coconut milk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 C chopped onions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Preparation**

1. Mix all ingredients together and refrigerate for at least thirty minutes.
Recipe for Saka

Saka is a staple item in Samoa, much like rice in Japan and potatoes in the United States. The word saka means “to boil.” The dish is often called faʻalifu faʻI, which means “bananas” or faʻalifu talo, which means “taro,” depending on what is used to prepare it. It can also be prepared with coconut milk.

You will need:
- 2 bunches of bananas or scraped taro
- 2 cans coconut milk
- 1 C chopped onions

Preparation
1. Add bananas or taro to a boiling pot of water. The water should just cover them.
2. Cook until they are soft, or until you can poke them easily with a fork.
3. Drain the water completely and then add coconut milk and onions.
4. Add salt to taste. Stir until the milk changes into a thicker consistency.
5. Cook together for about three to five minutes longer to allow the coconut cream to marinate the taro or bananas.

Activities
1. Have the students create a menu for a Samoan restaurant.
2. Bring coconuts and have the students try to open them. Could anyone do it? (Secret: hit it right between the eyes.) Have the students sample some of the coconut meat.
3. Prepare one of the Samoan recipes provided.
4. Have the students make up a legend about where some of the food they eat comes from.

Discussion Questions
1. How have the Samoans shaped their diet around the natural resources available to them?
2. Why and how does the coconut play a big part in the Samoan diet? Review how the different parts of the coconut are used in food preparation.
3. Discuss the legend of the coconut. Do you think it is true? Does the coconut remind you of an eel’s head? Do you have any stories about where the food you eat comes from?
4. How do Samoans prepare and cook their food differently from Americans?
THE LEGEND OF THE COCONUT

Find the words listed below in the word search. Words may be horizontal, vertical, diagonal or downwards.

COCONUT
PILI
SINA
SAMOA
VILLAGE

TRADITION
LAVALAVA
DANCE
UMU
LANGUAGE
THE LEGEND OF THE COCONUT

ANSWER KEY

Find the words listed below in the word search. Words may be horizontal, vertical, diagonal or downwards.

COCONUT
PILI
SINA
SAMOA
VILLAGE

TRADITION
LAVALAVA
DANCE
UMU
LANGUAGE
Cross-cultural Contributions Visual 1: Dancer Making Fire