INTERCULTURAL OUTREACH

CULTUREGUIDE

Austria

Series 1
Elementary (K–6)
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Kaiserschmarrn

Austria is well known for its delicious meals and foods: tortes, pastries, breads, and chocolates. For instance, *Kaiserschmarrn* [ki-ser-sh-mon] is a traditional Austrian food, usually a dessert, known to all Austrian chefs—from the family kitchen cook to the exquisite restaurant chef. The legend of the dish’s creation provides an understanding of traditional Austrian society and the lifestyle of the monarchs.

Starting Points

1. Look at pictures of different treats from the United States and other countries (i.e., doughnuts, shortbread, cherry danish, milkshakes, candy bars, trifle, tarts, nougat, bonbons, truffles, etc.). Be sure to include an example of Kaiserschmarrn. Guess what country each sweet originated in. Kaiserschmarrn originated in Austria and is one of many Austrians’ favorite treats.

2. On an overhead projector, look at various pictures of American food, then pictures of traditional Austrian dishes, such as *Schnitzel* [shnit-zell], *Goulash* [goo-lahsh], or *Frankfurter Wurst* [frank-furt-er wurst]. Then look at a picture of Kaiserschmarrn (see Food Visual 1). As you see each picture on the overhead projector, guess what it is. These foods are Austrian favorites—especially Kaiserschmarrn. Although they originated long ago, people still enjoy eating them.

3. Can you think of any legends that explain how recipes were invented or why we eat certain foods in the United States? Compile a list of ideas on the board. One of the most common treats in Austria, Kaiserschmarrn, has a legend that explains how the recipe was invented.

Information

Kaiserschmarrn, directly translated as “the emperor’s pancake,” is a delicious traditional food served all over Austria. Looking like an oversized pancake ripped into many pieces, Kaiserschmarrn also includes raisins, cinnamon, sugar, spices, and even a little liquor for the adults. It is traditionally served with a fresh spoonful of plum marmalade and is sprinkled with powdered sugar.

Kaiserschmarrn Legend

Behind many traditional meals throughout the world is a time-honored legend; Kaiserschmarrn is no different. Centuries ago, a new cook was hired for the emperor of Austria. For the cook’s first meal, he wanted to make the emperor’s favorite dish, which was similar to a large, thick pancake, almost as big as the frying pan itself. The cook was eager and excited to please the emperor, but while he was cooking, something went terribly wrong. As he went to flip the cake for the final time, the pancake
ripped in two. The emperor was known to have a quick temper and the cook worried that the unsatisfactory meal would be the cause of his death. He quickly decided to try something new. The cook tore the huge pancake into pieces. He added raisins, the emperor’s favorite, and liquor, along with different spices and other ingredients. He served his new creation with plum marmalade. To his delight, the emperor loved it! He loved it so much he wanted the cook to make it again and again. Soon the story spread throughout the land and people across the country began making Kaiserschmarrn, the emperor’s favorite.

Kaiserschmarrn Recipe

You will need:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 eggs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salt (just a pinch)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 C 2% milk or fresh cream</td>
<td>1 C 2% milk or fresh cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>½ C + ¼ C (or 10 T) flour</td>
<td>½ C + ¼ C (or 10 T) flour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ C sugar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ C butter (not margarine)</td>
<td>¼ C butter (not margarine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ C raisins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powdered sugar (for sprinkling)</td>
<td>powdered sugar (for sprinkling)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fruit marmalade or pie filling</td>
<td>fruit marmalade or pie filling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preparation

1. Separate egg yolks from whites.
2. Combine milk, salt, egg yolks, and flour in a medium bowl. Stir until smooth.
3. Beat egg whites in a separate bowl until the whites are stiff. Fold in sugar gradually.
4. Fold egg-white mixture into the batter.
5. Heat butter in a large frying pan. Pour batter into pan and sprinkle with raisins.
6. Cover the pan with a lid and cook for approximately three minutes over medium-low heat until bottom is light brown (be careful not to burn it!).
7. Carefully turn over the omelete and cook the second side until brown.
8. Tear the omelete with two forks into little pieces and divide into serving bowls. Sprinkle generously with powdered sugar.
9. Serve immediately with warm fruit marmalade (raspberry or blackberry pie filling can also be used).

Yield: about 6 servings

The Monarchy and Food

The Austrian monarchy lived a life of luxury and refinement in enormous palaces like Schönbrunn and Hofburg [hoaf-burg], and they had everything they desired at their fingertips (see Food Visuals 2 and 3). The dining table at the summer residence, Schönbrunn, stretched along the entire hall (fitting at least 100 people) and was decorated with the finest fashions, silvers, fruits, and delicacies. Despite the selection, not everyone chose to eat very much: Emperor Franz Josef ate only small portions, and his wife, Sissi, barely touched her food. If you were a guest of Franz Josef at the palace, you had to eat quickly, because as soon as the emperor was finished, everyone at the table had to stop eating. Often guests returned home still hungry.
However, this extravagant lifestyle was not typical for the majority of the empire’s residents. As is the case throughout the world and history, while the monarchy and nobility ate luxuriously, the masses hungered.

Nevertheless, food has a significant impact on the traditions, lifestyle, and culture of all Austrians. Austrians are proud of their heritage and their rich, traditional cuisine. Mothers and grandmothers take great pride in passing along family recipes and ensuring that the younger generation knows how to cook time-honored dishes like Apfelstrudel [ap-fell-strew-dull], Schnitzel, and Kaiserschmarrn (see Food Visual 4).

Refrigerators in Europe are typically small compared to standard refrigerators in the United States: as a result, many Austrians purchase food daily from local open-air markets or shops (see Food Visual 5). Austrians travel to the markets every day, or every other day, to buy fresh bread, fruits, vegetables, meats, and cheeses—it is no wonder that Austrian food is so delicious!
Activities

1. In small groups, write out a play about how the cook created Kaiserschmarrn. Perform it for the class.

2. Create a legend about how your favorite food was originally created, without researching the topic. Then research how the food was actually created and share your findings with the class.

3. Record a journal entry for the legendary cook describing the night he accidentally created Kaiserschmarrn.

4. Austrians, like most Europeans, eat with the fork facing downward in their left hand and the knife in their right hand. Bring an Austrian dish (preferably Kaiserschmarrn) to share and practice eating with the fork in your left hand.

5. Bring in a favorite family food, then tell your classmates how you made it and what it means to your family.

Discussion Questions

1. What can we learn about a culture or lifestyle simply by looking at its traditional or contemporary diet?

2. Why or how is food a significant aspect of a nation’s culture? What are some examples of food that reflect the culture of the United States? Of Austria?

3. Why do cultures have legends about different aspects of life? Why do people continue to tell or believe these legends?

4. What are some traditional foods in the United States? Do these foods have any myths about how they were created? If so, do the legends reveal anything about traditional American culture?

5. Do you think the myth about Kaiserschmarrn is true? Why or why not? What could be some other explanations for how it was invented?

6. What are some advantages to the way Austrians shop for food? What are some disadvantages? Would you like to shop that way?
Food Visual 1: Schnitzel
Food Visual 2: Kaiserschmarrn