

How Tacos Conquered America and The Story of Spaghetti and Meatballs

The story of how two beloved dishes became popular in the U.S.

About the Story

Lexile: 990L

For qualitative complexity factors,
go to the Story tab.

Learning Objective: to compare and
contrast information from two articles

Key Skills: problem and solution, cause and
effect, compare and contrast

Essential Questions:

- What role does food play in our lives?
- How have immigrants shaped America?
- How does something become popular?

Standards:

The article and lesson support these
Common Core anchor standards:
R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.9, W.2, SL.1,
SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—
including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at scope.scholastic.com.

Audio:

- Article read-alouds
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- "How Pizza Conquered America" and "Sushi Takes Over"
- "Love at First Crunch"
- "Mac and Cheese Mania"
- "Hot Dog World"

Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Writing Planner: Tacos and Spaghetti
- Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Choice Board
- Quiz*
- **Core Skills Workout:**
Text Evidence*
- Contest Entry Form

*Available on two levels

Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1. Preparing to Read

15 minutes

Do Now: Journal (5 minutes)

- Imagine you can eat just one food for the rest of your life. Out of the list below, which food would you choose? Why? What kinds of experiences and memories do you associate with this food?

tacos
spaghetti and meatballs
hamburgers
apple pie
doughnuts

- Take a poll of student responses and invite volunteers to share their writing.

Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice**. Review the definitions and complete the practice activity as a class. Highlighted words: *courses, economy, entrepreneurial, expertise, patent, staple, traditional*. Optionally, print or share the interactive link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity before class. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud are embedded in the interactive slides.

2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

“How Tacos Conquered America”

- Have a volunteer read the **As You Read** box that appears on page 11 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the article once as a class. Optionally, have students listen to the read-aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.

“The Story of Spaghetti and Meatballs”

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box that appears on page 14 of the magazine or above the article on the digital story page.
- Read the article as a class or independently. Optionally, have students listen to the read-aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- As a class, discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions, some of which apply to both articles.

Close-Reading Questions (20 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

- 1. What problem did Juvencio Maldonado face? How did he solve it?** (problem and solution)
In Maldonado’s restaurant in New York City, the cooks struggled to fry tortillas for their customers. It was slow, unpleasant, and often dangerous work, as the cooks had to turn the tortillas by hand, one at a time, as they fried in hot oil. Maldonado didn’t want to lose his workers, so he created a device that allowed them to safely fry seven tacos at once.
- 2. How did Maldonado’s invention help increase the popularity of tacos?** (cause and effect)
Maldonado’s mechanical taco fryer, along with a number of similar fryers that came out around the same time, saved cooks time and trouble. Tacos could be churned out quickly and easily, which led to them being served at more restaurants. In fact, tacos could be made so quickly that they became a perfect food to serve in fast-food restaurants, which had just begun to appear throughout the U.S. Within a few decades, two new Taco Bells were opening each week.
- 3. What did the arrivals of tacos and spaghetti and meatballs in the U.S. have in common?** (compare and contrast)
The roots of both foods can be traced back to other countries, and both were brought to the U.S. by immigrants who came here in search of work and opportunities. Tacos were brought to the U.S. by laborers from Mexico, who came to the U.S. for railroad, mining, and agricultural jobs. The dishes that eventually combined to make spaghetti and meatballs were brought to the U.S. by Italian immigrants who took jobs as laborers, merchants, and street vendors.
- 4. How did tacos, pasta with tomato sauce, and meatballs change after arriving in the U.S.? Why?** (cause and effect, compare and contrast)
The children and grandchildren of Mexican immigrants added new flavors to tacos, experimenting and replacing traditional fillings with ingredients available in U.S. supermarkets. Today, there continue to be endless variations on tacos. Meatballs became much bigger than they were in Italy, as meat was cheaper and more plentiful in the U.S., and also because social workers encouraged Italian immigrants to eat more

meat. Meatballs eventually came to be served with pasta and tomato sauce all in one dish as Italian immigrants adapted to a faster-paced American life. What would have once been eaten as separate courses over a period of several hours was now served together on the same plate. Today, there are many variations of both the pasta and the meat in spaghetti and meatballs.

5. **What do Taco Bell and Chef Boyardee have in common?** (compare and contrast) *Both Taco Bell and Chef Boyardee offered affordable, fast, and convenient versions of beloved foods. In the same way that fast-food tacos helped popularize tacos across the country, Chef Boyardee turned spaghetti and meatballs into a go-to weeknight meal for Americans across the country.*

Critical-Thinking Questions

(10 minutes)

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.

1. **In a 2012 *New York Times* editorial, Rachel L. Swarns wrote “food is never just food.” What do you think she meant? What can food do other than provide nourishment?** *Answers will vary, but students may say that Swarns was referring to the way that food can reflect the person who made it; bring people together, such as at family get-togethers; provide income for farmers and restaurant owners; celebrate someone, such as with a birthday meal; carry on our cultures, traditions, and identities; and raise ethical or environmental issues.*
2. **Revisit your response to the Do Now. In what ways, if any, do you see the food you chose—and food in general—differently after reading this article?** *Answers will vary.*

3. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Writing Planner: Tacos and Spaghetti**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the prompt on page 15 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

Connected readings from the *Scope* archives:

- Paired Texts: [“How Pizza Conquered America”](#) and [“Sushi Takes Over”](#) (September 2018)
- Short Read: [“Love at First Crunch”](#) (December 2020/January 2021)
- Short Read: [“Mac and Cheese Mania”](#) (September 2019)
- Infographic: [“Hot Dog World”](#) (May 2021)