8-2016

Food for Thought: Books about Cooking and Eating

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Recommended Citation
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Books about Cooking and Eating

"Who says food fanatics have to be old?" — Shaun Dreisbach, Teen Vogue

The current food revolution has taken young adult literature by storm. In recent years, social media platforms geared toward sharing food talk, recipes, and restaurant recommendations have proliferated, as have cooking shows and televised cooking competitions, many with "junior" versions (Chopped Teen and MasterChef Jr., for example). For teens whose appetites for food culture have been whet by such pop-cultural influences, the enormous range of cookbooks and food-related books for young adults and teens presents a veritable literary smorgasbord.

YA novels engage with the food theme through culinary settings and plots, often involving a family restaurant and/or a high-stakes cooking competition. Biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs take food memories as their inspiration; graphic novels visualize non-fictional literary personae alike, cooking serves as a hobby, a comfort, an avenue for self-expression, a creative outlet, a means of disability, bullying, fitting in, coming out, grief, and other themes important to teens and young adults of today. For fictional and non-fictional literary personae alike, cooking serves as a hobby, a comfort, an avenue for self-expression, a creative outlet, a means of socialization, a confidence-booster, and, for some, a life saver.

Across genres, the universal language of food enables insight into disability, bullying, fitting in, coming out, grief, and other themes important to teens and young adults of today. For fictional and non-fictional literary personae alike, cooking serves as a hobby, a comfort, an avenue for self-expression, a creative outlet, a means of socialization, a confidence-booster, and, for some, a life saver.

While these titles are sure to excite teen foodies, inspire future professionals, and encourage amateur chefs, they will also appeal to a general readership, promising to engage a wide range of literary tastes.

NOVELS

Curtis, Vanessa. The Baking Life of Amelie Day. Capstone, 2015. 176p. $10.95. 978-1-623-70-506-0. Top of the Top Shelf Fiction for Middle School Readers 2015. VOYA February 2016. Thirteen-year-old Amelie “lives to bake.” When she makes the quarterfinals of the Teen Baker of the Year competition in New York City, she is determined to attend. Amelie’s not like “most kids”—she has cystic fibrosis (CF)—but that doesn’t stop her from going to school, bonding with best friend Jenna and boyfriend/Chief Taste Tester Harry, or working at a local grocery store. It will block her path to a Teen Baker triumph, though, if her mother (“CF Police”) gets her way! Bold choices lead to unexpected consequences and important life lessons in this heartwarming book that enlightens readers as to the effects of CF.

Indian Spice, a roti shop in Queens, New York, is a “bee hive” of activity where eighth-grader Anjali Krishnan tests out culinary creations. Real-life chef and cookbook author Ramin Ganeshram (see Future Chefs, below) brings Anjali’s world to life, describing flavors and aromas that make one hanker for Trinidadian fare: pastelles, stuffed cabbage leaves, aloo pies, and more. The novel includes recipes (like “Deema’s Easy Curry Chicken” and “Shrimp Burger Pitas”), encouraging readers to connect with the story by cooking. For Anjali, food is an obsession and a respite from the trials of life—academic stress, income and gender inequalities, social challenges, etc. An opportunity to appear on the Food Network creates strife among the Krishnans that is both unique and relatable. This novel will appeal to New Yorkers, first-generation Americans, and many others.

At the heart of Giff’s compelling WWII-era novel are orphan Jayna and her beloved older brother, Rob. When Rob leaves to serve as a cook on a naval ship in the Pacific, Jayna moves in with their landlord, stern but well-meaning Celine. To cope with fears for Rob, Jayna makes soup—Don’t-Think-About-It Soup, Feel-Better Vegetable Soup, Hope Soup—and dreams of running a restaurant with Rob in Brooklyn, where she believes her grandmother lives. Inspired by a recipe book and an old black-and-white photo, missing her brother and desperate for kinship, Jayna heads to New York in search of a bakery called Gingersnap (her mother’s nickname for her). But will she find family there?

Harry’s is more than just a backdrop for the story of twelve-year-old Fern and her family, whose lives revolve around the family restaurant. With her parents and older siblings consumed with business and other worries, Fern is often burdened with responsibilities beyond her years. Her mother is increasingly aloof, and Fern often feels invisible and neglected. At times emotionally challenging, the novel presents a realistic picture of a family coping with marital problems, bullying, and—ultimately—tragedy. Fern and her brother Holden are relatable characters that come together when it matters most. Readers will share Fern’s realization that "life goes on:"

Yeh, Kat. The Truth about Twinkie Pie. Little, Brown, 2015. 352p. $17. 978-0-3-6-23662-1. VOYA February 2015. 4Q 4P M
After twenty-one-year-old DiDi wins $1,000,000 in a cooking competition, she and her twelve-year-old sister GiGi move from...
a South Carolina trailer park to a town on Long Island, so GiGi can attend "the best school in the universe." They lost their mama when GiGi was a baby, but motherly DiDi often makes recipes from "Mama's Cookbook," including the titular Twinkie Pie. GiGi is settling into "Hill Prep" school when a family revelation turns her world upside down. With culinary adages (e.g. "don't go thinking about the milk and eggs when you're still sifting the flour") and recipes for life (e.g. "Turn Over a New Leaf Turnovers") this book is about finding one's own "Recipe for Success."

**BIographies And Memoirs**


In this YALSA Alex-Award-winning graphic memoir/travelogue, identity is inexorably linked to food and travel. Knisley was born in New York City to a foodie family with a wide culinary/social network; when she and her mother moved to the country after her parents divorced, her mother grew vegetables to sell at the farmer's market and worked as a chef and caterer. Knisley's recollections are wide ranging, from eating Pixy Stix en route to Mexico to later enjoying "unspeakably good" croissants in Venice. This humorously candid and beautiful book—which includes many illustrated recipes—is a tribute to Knisley's mother and to food: cooking it, eating it, and sharing it.


Frozen in Time is an adaptation of Kurlansky's biography, Birdseye: The Adventures of a Curious Man. Born in Brooklyn during the industrial revolution, Clarence ("Bob") Birdseye was an adventurous Renaissance man who exhibited a proclivity for entrepreneurship long before attaining fame as the frozen food king. In vivid detail, this book explores the biographical and historical circumstances that precipitated Birdseye's "invention" of the flash freezer—an innovation that would change the daily lives of Americans forever. This charming portrait of a fascinating and colorful character is suitable for recreational and academic reading. It

**IT's acaDeMic**

Frydenborg, Kay. **Chocolate: Sweet Science and Dark Secrets of the World’s Favorite Treat.** Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. 272p. $18.99. 978-0-544-1766-2. This comprehensive exploration of chocolate flows chronologically from the origin of the cocoa tree thousands of years ago to its cultivation by the Olmec civilization around 1900 B.C.; it chronicles chocolate's use among the Maya and Aztecs, its role in the Spanish conquests in South and Central America, and its eventual spread to Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and beyond. Frydenborg contextualizes some big names in chocolate—Nestlé, Lindt, Cadbury, Hershey—and examines the technical aspects of the chocolate-making process. She also explores the darker side of chocolate production, discussing subjegated populations, slavery, abuses, death, and forced child labor. The book includes informative sidebars, colorful photographs, a timeline, a bibliography, resources, and recipes. It is ideal for high school students for recreational reading and classroom use.

Kallen, Stuart A. **Medieval Food and Customs.** Reference Point, 2015. 80p. $28.95. 978-1-60152-718-9. One of five volumes in the Library of Medieval Times series, this book explores how trade, wars, climate, social structures, famine, the rise of market towns, and other factors affected food production and distribution during the medieval period (c. 476-1500 A.D.) It offers first-person accounts and detailed descriptions of medieval meals, from the humble victuals of a lowly serf to the extravagant fare of an aristocrat. It also examines the methods that were used to feed "the army of people" who lived in castles, from dukes and duchesses to lady's maids and musicians. Kallen includes colorful illustrations, sidebars defining unfamiliar vocabulary, a timeline, a bibliography, and research resources. This is suitable for middle and junior high school classroom and library collections.

international geography, religion, culture and history, all through the lens of food. It includes a brief “getting started” section, a glossary, an index, maps, and recipes with easy-to-find ingredients. Recipe notes are both culturally enlightening and practical. As a preface to the recipe for simsenmuyah (sesame candy), for example, the authors note, “Sweets are an important part of Eid al-Fitr, also known as the Candy Holiday, and almost all Muslim children love simsenmuyah. It is very healthy, quick and easy to make with only 3 ingredients, and keeps well without refrigeration.” This book is appropriate for high school and college libraries and personal collections.

**COOKBOOKS**


Ganeshram’s work on *Stir It Up* (see above) led to the creation of this book. More than a cookbook, *FutureChefs* is a celebration of its teen contributors and the food they create. It includes beautiful, glossy photographs and mouth-watering recipes for all courses created by teens from “across the nation and the world.” Each recipe includes a biography of its contributor, a discussion of what cooking means to him or her, and an explanation of how the recipe was conceived. The book features some amazing young adults—bloggers, local food advocates, community volunteers—many of whom have overcome incredible challenges. URLs for contributors’ blogs are listed in the back of the book, so readers can follow these future chefs as they progress in their careers.


*The Green Teen Cookbook* is all about “going green”—with sections on organic foods, environmentally conscious cooking, healthy eating, vegetarianism, locally produced food, and seasonal ingredients. Marchive and McElroy offer a colorful compilation of economical recipes submitted by teens from around the world. Recipes include “DIY Kitchen Staples,” like vinaigrette dressing and pesto, as well as breakfasts, soups, salads, sandwiches, snacks, main courses, and desserts. Each recipe includes its author’s name, photograph, and a short quote. Appendices include “Equivalents and Cooking Terms,” recommended websites and blogs, and resources for finding farmers’ markets and CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture programs).


*The Cookbook for Teens* includes an extensive introduction and recipes that accommodate a range of culinary abilities and ambitions. Recipes often suggest store-bought alternatives to homemade ingredients. (When making Tasty Lasagna, for example, one can substitute jarred tomato sauce for the homemade variety.) The recipes have catchy and often alliterative names (“Humble Humus,” “Pesto! It’s Pesto”) and encourage cooks to work with what they have on hand. Many make use of “cubed ingredients” (e.g. dry rather than fresh herbs) and offer lots of options. The High Rise Hero can be made with an English muffin, a hamburger bun, a bagel, or a crusty roll. Directions are clear and straightforward. This is a useful resource for beginners.

*Clueless in the Kitchen* contains no "scary terminology ... strange ingredients ... [or] complicated procedures," and its from-scratch recipes are "simple without being stupid." Raab offers great tips for the novice cook, including menu recommendations for specific social situations, such as when "your best friend is depressed" (soup, bread, salad, hot fudge pudding, and ice cream). Recipes are tagged with icons that indicate not only dietary considerations (vegetarian, gluten-free, egg-free, dairy-free), but also whether a recipe is inexpensive ("Cheap Eats"), comforting ("Mom Food"), impressive ("Cooking to Impress"), etc. Teens and adults will enjoy Raab's accessible language—she suggests, for example, that you "act casual when people go crazy" after you serve your homemade pancakes, and describes a recipe as "colorful, tasty and cheap! It's all good."


Teens may recognize Samuelsson from his television appearances on *Top Chef Masters* and *Chopped*. As well as a chef, he is a restaurateur whose memoir has been adapted for a YA audience (see *Make It Messy* above).

*Marcus Off Duty* provides invaluable tips about cooking techniques ("broiling fish isn’t a good time for multitasking") and ingredients ("use the dill stems; just chop them fine"). It also offers cultural insights indicative of Samuelsson’s international background ("salmon with dill is the Swedish equivalent to American meatloaf"). Recipes reflect his signature style: unusual combinations of ingredients with global influences—from Fennel-Matzo Ball Chicken Soup to Roast Beef Tenderloin with a Coffee-Chocolate Crust. It includes menu suggestions, "Music to Cook By", a table of contents, and an index. This is perfect for older teens.


This visually appealing book from the Super Skills "how to" series focuses on ten essential cooking techniques, including using knives; peeling and grating; crushing and juicing; and frying, sautéing and browning. It includes descriptive illustrations, color photographs, and recipes for yummy-looking dishes that teens (and adults) will want to make, such as Chocolate Chip Cookies and Mini Pita Pizzas. Helpful tips are interspersed throughout the book, such as "Be careful with chilles!" and "Wash your hands after handling raw meat." The book includes convenient cross-referencing for techniques (e.g. "see p. 13 for grating cheese"), an index, and a glossary of equipment.

**ALSO CONSIDER**


"This is a warm, well-plotted book, full of eccentrics, who all have dreams, and are looking for ways to bring their dreams to life."—Top Shelf Committee


"Filled with easy recipes and beautiful color photographs of delectable desserts that are almost too pretty to eat."


"Gladys Gatsby might be only twelve-years-old but she is wise beyond her years, especially when it comes to anything food related."

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**All Four Stars.** 304p. $7.99 Trade pb. 978-0-14-242636-4.


"Mix the Food Network with a teen reality show, and the result is a recipe for a delicious debut by Fioare."


"Our idea was to spin the globe once a week, and wherever Talia’s finger landed, we would cook a meal from that place."—Mark Kurlansky


"These books practically flew off the shelves of this reviewer’s library while on display."

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**Teen Cuisine.** Marshall Cavendish, 2010. 208p. $22.95. 978-0-7614-5715-2. VOYA October 2010. 3Q 3P M JS

"The more than fifty recipes in this well-organized and visually attractive cookbook should appeal to beginning chefs of all ages."

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"Rachel Lee is an angst-ridden eighth grader who loves baking."

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**The Dirt Diary, Book 1.** 2014. 256p. $6.99 Trade pb. 978-1-4022-8636-0.


"Sophie has been raised in the family’s Italian-Greek restaurant and cooking has become her passion."