

Unit 3 Food and Drink (E's and O's)

Talking Point

This can be done in a few ways – as a whole class activity or in small groups. As a class, make a list on the board of pupils' favourite foods. Or, in small groups ask the pupils to create a list of their favourite foods. Discuss what kinds of foods that pupils have listed would not have been available 500 years ago?

Activity 1

As a class or in a small group, read through these rules of St Benedict about food and drink in a monastery.

- 1 Two kinds of cooked food should be offered on each table. In this way someone who cannot eat one kind of food can eat the other.
- 2 No one should eat the meat of four-footed animals except for the sick.
- 3 Half a bottle of wine a day for each is enough.

Now study the following list of different kinds of food. Could Scottish monks and nuns in the Middle Ages have these things to eat and drink? If not, why not?

Food	Yes/No/Sometimes	Reason
Red meat		
Offal (animal insides)		
Fish		
Potatoes		
Cabbage		
Peas		
Eggs		
Pasta		
Tomatoes		
Chicken		
Turkey		
Pigeons		
Fruit		
Ale		
Brown bread		
Oatcakes		
Herbs		

Activity 2

What would you choose from this menu? Why?

Monastery dinner

11.30 Refectory

Pottage (boiled vegetables with oats to thicken and herbs for flavour)

Followed by:

Fish – fried, poached, baked, roast, or salted

OR

Sheep entrails in ale with breadcrumbs

OR

Cheese flan

OR

Custard with eggs and currants

Activity 3 Literacy

Write a school dinner menu. What differences are there between your menu and the monastery menu?

Plenary

What have you learnt about food and drink in monasteries? Do you think you would like to eat and drink like a monk or nun?

KEY

Food	Yes/No/Sometimes	Reason
Red meat	No	No meat from animals with four legs allowed.
Offal (animal insides)	Sometimes	A cheat as not considered meat by some monks.
Fish	Yes	Not meat, so allowed. Sometimes from fish ponds. In winter, often salted.
Potatoes	No	Not yet introduced from South America.
Cabbage	Yes	Very common in pottage.
Peas	Yes	Very common in pottage.
Eggs	Sometimes	Not on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and fast days. Some of the eggs were pigeon eggs.
Pasta	No	Not yet introduced from Italy.
Tomatoes	No	Not yet introduced from South America.
Chicken	Sometimes	Not on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and fast days.
Turkey	No	Not yet introduced from North America.
Pigeons	Sometimes	Not on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and fast days. Some monasteries had doocots where pigeons were kept for their eggs and meat.
Fruit	Yes	But Scottish monks complained to their HQ in France that it wasn't fair because the French had lots to choose from and the Scots had very few.
Ale	Yes	Some monks were allowed a gallon a day but this was low alcohol and safer than drinking water.
Brown bread	Yes	Two loaves a day. A course bread that could also be used for plates.
Oatcakes	Yes	Oats are a common crop in Scotland.
Herbs	Yes	To add flavour to boring pottage.

Online resources

Medieval Irish Cabbage Pottage – 3 mins 50 secs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HmqIBh7TBM>

Daisy cooks medieval pottage – 1 min 30 secs (child uses chopping knife and cooks on open wood fire!)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnLzalnPs_k

What's for dinner in a medieval monastery? Colouring sheet to download.

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/members-area/kids/kids-rule-makes-and-bakes/whats-for-dinner-monasteries/>