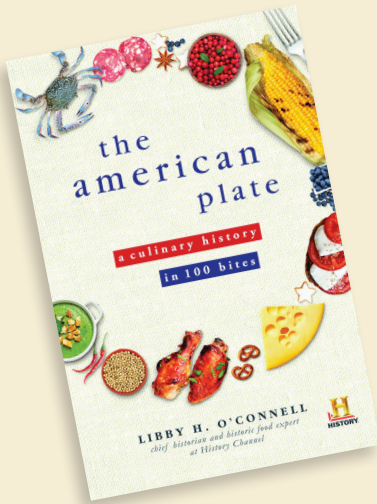




## The American Plate: A Culinary History in 100 Bites



From the chief historian at HISTORY® comes a rich chronicle of the evolution of American cuisine and culture, encompassing Columbus's arrival to today. Dr. Libby H. O'Connell takes readers on a mouthwatering journey through America's culinary evolution into the vibrant array of foods we savor in *The American Plate: A Culinary History in 100 Bites*.

In *The American Plate*, Dr. O'Connell reveals the many ways that cultures and individuals have shaped our national diet and continue to influence how we cook and eat. From the surprising origins of Hershey Bars to the strange delicacies our ancestors enjoyed, such as roast turtle and grilled beaver tail, students can learn about the American past through an exploration of food. Students will gain insights into race, culture, immigration and social change in American history by examining one or more of the "bites" in this thoughtful and engaging book.

### CURRICULUM LINKS:

*The American Plate* has valuable material for American history, social studies, food, cultural studies and current events courses. Educators can use sections of the book in U.S. history course units on topics ranging from the early colonies through the contemporary period. Segments from the book can be adapted to fit a variety of age levels from middle school through college. In addition, *The American Plate* has several recipes that would be great for classroom and after-school activities. (Note: There are some references in the book suitable only for adults, and a few recipes contain alcohol. Educators should read the sections to determine age-level appropriateness before assigning them to students.)

Visit [libbyoconnell.com](http://libbyoconnell.com) to learn more about *The American Plate: A Culinary History in 100 Bites*, find updates and get links to order the book.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Libby O'Connell is the chief historian and SVP, Corporate Social Responsibility for HISTORY® and A+E Networks. She is a historian, educator and Emmy®-winning producer. She is the executive producer of more than 40 short films currently displayed in museum exhibitions across the country.





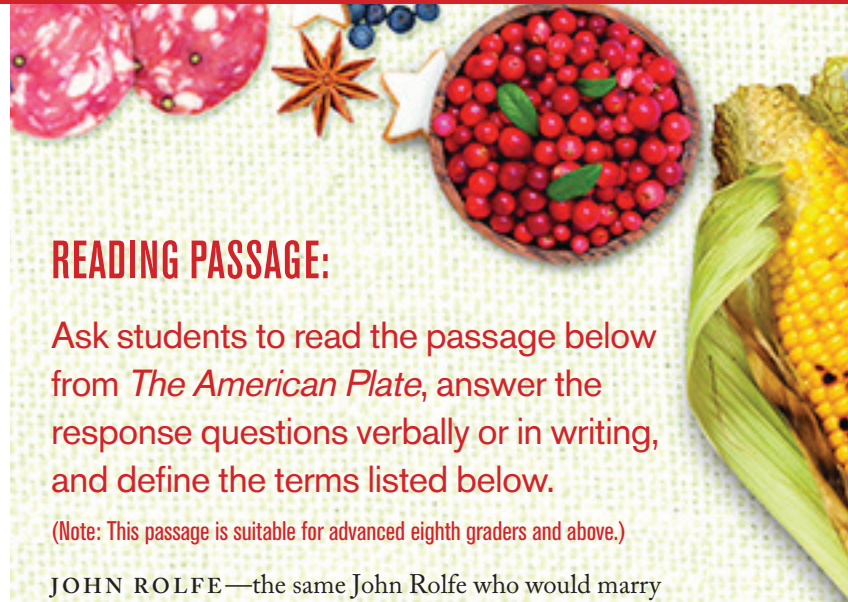
## TERMS TO DEFINE:

Before or after reading sections of *The American Plate*, students can define the terms below to gain background context for the material.

<b>Culinary</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Indigenous</b>
<b>Culture</b>	<b>Foodways</b>	<b>Pastime</b>
<b>Custom</b>	<b>Heritage</b>	<b>Rations</b>

## ACTIVITIES:

- Bites of History.** *The American Plate* explores many key moments in American history through the lens of food. For background information, give students a few “bites” from the book to read. Then ask students to choose one food that plays a role in the American past and to research its history. Students can write an article or create an illustrated presentation about the item they picked.
- Historic Recipes.** *The American Plate* contains many historic recipes from throughout American history. Ask students to research a recipe from the American past. It can be from a particular era, such as the Civil War, or even from their family history. These recipes can be designed and gathered together into a recipe book to share with others.
- The Great War: The Home Front.** In *The American Plate*, readers learn about World War I, otherwise known as the Great War, through a culinary perspective. (See the recipe in this guide for Red Cross War Cake, and also pages 184–185 of the book for more information.) Learn NC has an excellent online collection of World War I posters: [learnnc.org/lp/editions/ww1posters/](http://learnnc.org/lp/editions/ww1posters/). Ask students to view posters 21–23 and discuss the role of food during World War I. What role were children asked to play?
- Snacking on History.** *The American Plate* discusses the history of Cracker Jack, one of the nation’s first snack foods. Copy pages 156–157 of the book to distribute to students to read about this snack food. Then ask students to write a short history of another snack food of their choice.
- Hungry History.** Students can read one of the History.com Hungry History articles (see link at the end of the guide.) Students can then write an article of their own, based on research, about an important food item and its history.



## READING PASSAGE:

Ask students to read the passage below from *The American Plate*, answer the response questions verbally or in writing, and define the terms listed below.

(Note: This passage is suitable for advanced eighth graders and above.)

**JOHN ROLFE**—the same John Rolfe who would marry Pocahontas—planted the first tobacco seeds in the Virginia colony and harvested a new type of treasure. Tobacco quickly became a cash crop, so profitable that most other farming was neglected. The labor-intensive “noxious weed” required cleared fields and many hands before it could be shipped across the Atlantic, where it fetched eye-popping prices.

The early settlers in Jamestown, Virginia, arrived ill-equipped for agriculture and quickly alienated the Powhatan Indians who had thrived along the Virginia coast, practicing milpa agriculture and enjoying the stunningly rich seafood supplies of the Chesapeake area. The English hoped to find vast mineral wealth like the Aztec and Incan plunder of their Spanish rivals. But soon the fortunes of the Virginia Company looked grim indeed on that front.

There were no mega mineral lodes to be found in the Chesapeake region. Poorly nourished and sickened by bad water, the Englishmen accomplished little more than causing trouble. Then in 1614, Rolfe exported the first four barrels filled with the large brown leaves of tobacco, which sold for a fat profit in London and inflamed the hopes of the settlers. Fortunately for these men (and they were mostly men), maize and pork needed much less work than that demanding but extremely profitable cash crop.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What crop did John Rolfe plant in Virginia, and why was it such an important transformation?
- We learn in this passage that tobacco is “labor-intensive.” What do you think this term means in the context of colonial Virginia?
- Based on this passage, what kinds of foods did the settlers eat in Virginia?

## TERMS TO DEFINE:

<b>Cash Crop</b>	<b>Lode</b>	<b>Milpa Agriculture</b>
<b>Noxious</b>	<b>Plunder</b>	



## HISTORIC RECIPE

### WORLD WAR I RED CROSS WAR CAKE

The American Red Cross promoted this cake recipe, promising that the end product could reach the Western Front and retain its freshness. The dried fruit helps keep it moist if it has to be shipped across the Atlantic. Try soaking the raisins in orange juice for a few days or a week before you make the cake. Your doughboy will thank you.

#### NOTE TO EDUCATORS AND PARENTS:

This is a fun historic recipe to make with your class or your children. You may want to double or triple the recipe if you are serving a large group.

#### INGREDIENTS

- \* 2 cups brown sugar
- \* 2 cups hot water
- \* 8 ounces raisins (about 1 package), chopped
- \* 2 tablespoons lard (*You can use butter instead.*  
*Do not use vegetable shortening.*)
- \* 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- \* 1 teaspoon cloves
- \* 1 teaspoon salt
- \* 3 cups all-purpose flour
- \* 1 teaspoon baking soda

#### DIRECTIONS

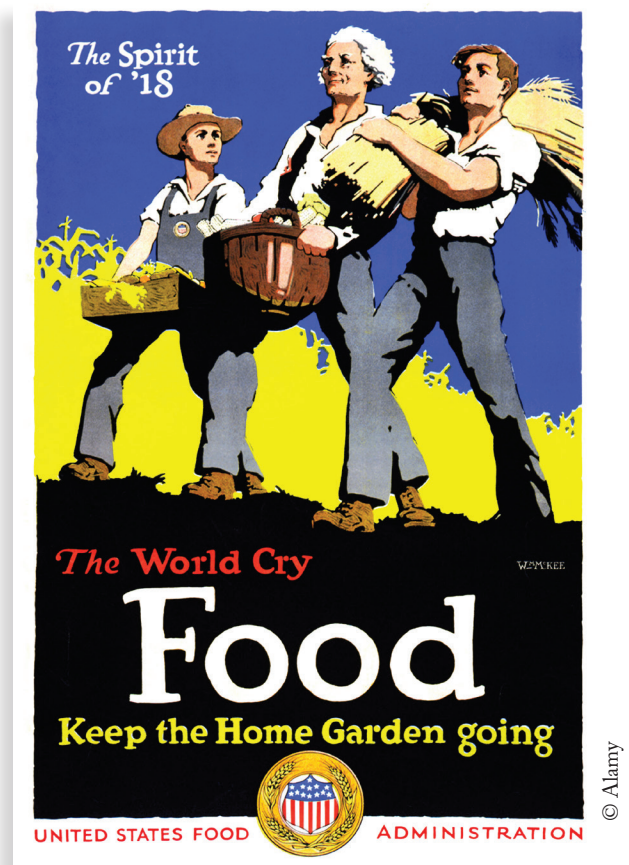
Put sugar, hot water, raisins, lard, cinnamon, cloves and salt into a large pot. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring frequently, then reduce the heat to medium low and cook at a low boil for 5 minutes. Remove from heat and cool. Preheat oven to 350°F. Stir in flour and baking soda. Mix well. Grease 2 mini-loaf pans. Pour batter into the pans and bake for 45 minutes. (*This is the exact recipe from World War I. I'd recommend using bundt pans instead of mini-loaf pans.*)



## THEY AIN'T THE PILLSBURY DOUGHBOY... SO WHO ARE THEY?

Why were U.S. Army soldiers called doughboys during World War I? Actually, enlisted men in the army and the marines were called doughboys as early as the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848, but it was a somewhat pejorative term at that time. By World War I, the label was used almost affectionately. Its origins are unclear.

The term may refer to the dusty faces of the troops as they marched in Mexico; the dough the troops made for their rations; the pale white faces of newly enlisted men, who often hadn't been tanned or sunburned by long treks in the sun; or even the Mexican word *adobo* (a pickle or marinade). In the next generation of American soldiers, beginning in World War II, the doughboy became the GI, which stood for "government issue." GI was also an abbreviation for military equipment made of galvanized iron.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think this poster was created during World War I?
2. Why do you think Americans were encouraged to create home gardens?

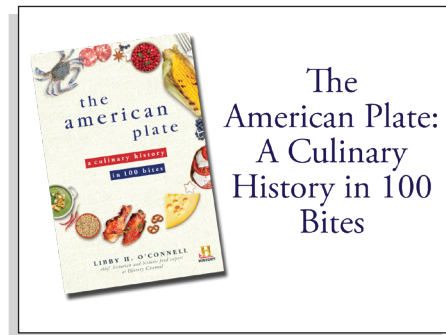




## ADDITIONAL WEBSITES:

**THE AMERICAN PLATE**

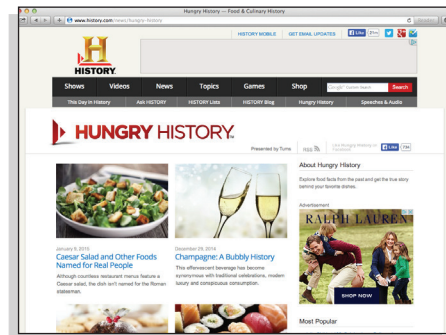
libbyoconnell.com



The  
American Plate:  
A Culinary  
History in 100  
Bites

## HUNGRY HISTORY™ ON HISTORY.COM

history.com/news/hungry-history



## SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY

*FOOD: Transforming the American Table 1950–2000*

americanhistory.si.edu/food



## DID YOU KNOW: ROSIE THE RIVETER ATE MEAT LOAF

Rosie the Riveter symbolized the women workers newly welcomed into the defense industries during World War II to replace the men stationed abroad. She would have undoubtedly brought meat loaf sandwiches for lunch at the munitions factory. Between 1940 and 1945, with massive numbers of enlisted men leaving industrial jobs vacant, the number of women workers rose by 50 percent, from 12 million to 18 million. Civilian women became railroad workers, streetcar conductors and engineers. They worked in steel mills and other heavy industries. My mother drove an oil truck in Chicago and then worked in a troop transport. I bet she ate meat loaf, too.

## RELATED VIDEO:

**ASK HISTORY™: WHO WAS ROSIE THE RIVETER?**

history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter

“Between 1940 and 1945,  
the number of women  
workers rose by 50 percent.”