

Study Guide for Ken Albala's *Three World Cuisines*

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Chapter 1 "Historical Background"

Pre-Reading

Choose a favorite dish from Italian, Chinese, or Mexican cuisine. List the ingredients (as best you can), and describe their origin as best you can (for example: "Oranges. Come from China").

Post-Reading

Once you've done the reading, revisit your response and describe how different that dish would be if the Columbian Exchange had never happened. Describe the dish in detail. What would the new ingredient list be based on what would have been available? (This may require outside research.) Would the existence of your dish even be possible?

Explain.

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala's Chapter 1. Then, answer the following in your own words:

1. Explain why Albala suggests early humans were "gatherer hunters" rather than "hunter gatherers." Summarize gatherer hunters' relationship with nature.
2. Explain how hunting and gathering made for an efficient lifestyle.
3. Explain food's role in creating social structure for early humans.
4. Describe some ways hunter gatherers could cook without pots and pans.
5. Explain why the term "The Agricultural Revolution" is misleading.
6. Explain some possible causes for the agricultural revolution.

7. List and describe three reasons why the agricultural revolution was not necessarily a “healthy” development.
8. Explain how grain (both dried and fermented) and religion are connected.
9. Compare and contrast the cooking of Archestratus with that of Apicius. In terms of style, what might be a modern-day equivalent of each?
10. Summarize humoral physiology and how it relates to health.

Illustrate by making up an example of a disease and recommended food for healing not mentioned in the book.

11. Describe early Christians’ approach to food. Give an example of a remnant of that legacy you can see today.

12. Describe how Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophy were translated to the table.

13. Summarize the Chinese medical system and how it relates to food.

Illustrate by making up an example of a disease and recommended food for healing not mentioned in the book.

14. Explain the causes of the population surge between the years 1000 to 1300 CE in Europe.

15. Describe the impetus for the Columbian Exchange. Describe some of the key foods that traveled because of this development in each of the three cuisines.

16. Describe how mole is representative of global cuisine. Think of another example of a dish that serves as a similar hub of world cuisine.

17. Describe the impact of the Industrial Revolution on each of the three cuisines.

Application (Blog) Assignment

Choose a time period from one of the three cuisines. Briefly describe the period and the available foodstuffs and technology. Then create a menu consisting ONLY of foods available during that period and cooked with the appropriate technology. You may need to do some outside research to construct your menu. Explain how your dish is representative of the era and cuisine. Finally, cook something (even if it's something simple) from your menu (in a modern-day kitchen) and post a photo or video. Evaluate its success. What did you learn from cooking that you didn't learn in reading the material alone?

Chapter 2 “Technology, Utensils, and Techniques”

Pre-Reading

In the chapter, Albala writes, “All the senses are engaged when one feels the tactile warmth of the tortilla in one's fingers and as the aromas waft upward when the bundle is brought close to the mouth. In a certain way, cutlery distances one from the immediacy of eating, placing a cold barrier of metal between the diner and the food.” Think about how our experiences with food are shaped by the available technology of the kitchen and dining room. Choose a dish that you think could be enhanced by adding or eliminating a utensil or piece of equipment in the kitchen or dining room. Explain.

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala's Chapter 2 and answer the following in your own words:

1. Summarize the connection between the physical characteristics of cuisine in relation to tabletop items (plates, bowls, forks, chopsticks). Give an example to illustrate.

2. Compare and contrast various fuels used for cooking. Indicate the only one prevalent before the Industrial Revolution.
3. How does Albala define cooking in this chapter? What important aspects of cuisine does this definition omit?
4. Construct a table to differentiate among the following terms: conduction, convection, radiation, induction. Give an example of each.
5. Define velveting and give an example of a food that is cooked with this method.
6. Describe how knives were made before the advent of metalwork.
7. Describe the function of the quern. How could it be used in contemporary cooking?
8. Distinguish between the term “brasier” as used in the French kitchen with a “brazier.” Describe a dish that you think could be well suited to cooking in a brazier.
9. Describe the main techniques for forming clay cooking pots.
10. Explain why pots went from having round bottoms to flat.
11. Explain why ovens were not common household fixtures throughout most of history.
12. In this chapter, Albala uses the characteristic cups of the three cuisines as a window to culture. Summarize this approach. Think of an example of another common item that could be similarly analyzed.
13. Describe the origin of the Western place setting.

Application Assignment

In this chapter, Albala contends that, “In thinking of cooking in general, it is useful to keep in mind that the intersection of fuel source, technique, and tools ultimately explains how ingredients are transformed and is the basic structure upon which cuisines are built” (p. 71).

Choose a dish from one of the three cuisines. Making reference to the chapter, describe how the available fuel, tools, and technology allowed this dish to come into being. Be specific in identifying these elements. Provide a recipe. Then speculate on how, were one of these elements (fuel, technique, or tools) changed, the dish would have evolved differently. Be specific in your response.

Chapter 3 “Grains and Starches”

Pre-Reading

Think about the role of grains in your life. Think back over the last three days. List the grains you consumed and what the main preparation was. For example, if you had spaghetti and meatballs on Monday night, you might write:

“Monday: wheat in the form of spaghetti and breadcrumbs as filler in meatballs”

Post-Reading

Return to your original response. Think about all the grains you read about that are not a major part of our food system. Choose one and show how it could have replaced one of the more ubiquitous grains that you ate. What would be the benefit of making such a swap? Think about this from culinary, sensory, nutrition, and environmental perspectives.

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala’s Chapter 3 and answer the following questions in your own words:

1. List the main starch for each cuisine.

2. Explain how Albala distinguishes between a meal and a snack. Give your own example of each.
3. Explain what Albala means when he writes that the foundation of Italian cuisine is based on a “happy genetic accident.”
4. List and describe four ways that grains can be prepared. Give a modern-day example of each.
5. Describe the likely taste, texture, and appearance of the earliest breads. How would they be fermented, formed, and baked? What is the closest modern-day equivalent?
6. List and describe some Italian breads.
7. Summarize the relationship between bread color and status.
8. You may have heard the legend that Marco Polo “discovered” pasta in China. Explain why this is clearly not the case.
9. Compare and contrast how pasta is served in Italian cuisine versus how it is served in the United States. Give an example of each to support the distinction.
10. Explain how China came to use wheat (especially in the north) but does not have a bread baking culture as Italy does.
11. Explain the connection between instant ramen and a traditional Chinese noodle.
12. Explain why wheat gluten would be an important ingredient in Chinese Buddhist cuisine.
13. Describe two key reasons why rice became a staple crop in China.
14. What’s the problem with the higher status given to white rice in China?

15. Explain why the term “steamed rice” is somewhat of a misnomer.
16. List and describe five products made from rice.
17. Explain the origin of the term “corn.” What would be a more accurate name?
18. Describe the process of nixtamalization. What is the benefit from culinary and nutrition perspectives?
19. Describe how corn is used in Chinese cuisine.
20. Complete the following table, giving an example of a food preparation from each of the three cuisines. The first is filled in as an example:

	Italy	China	Mexico
Wheat			
Rice			
Corn			Tortilla

Application (Blog) Assignment

Buy some whole grains of any type. Examples are wheat berries, whole oats (not oatmeal), groats (buckwheat), quinoa, amaranth, etc. You may need to go to a natural foods store or big supermarket as they are not big sellers at 7-Eleven. Cook something with the whole grain (look at Albala’s recipes to get some ideas). As you do, be conscious of the tools you have at your disposal and try to think of what our ancestors would have had to do to help make the grain palatable. Feel free to use the technology at your disposal to “process” the grain if desired.

Post a picture or video of your finished dish along with your answers to the following:

1. What did you cook?
2. Have you made it before?
3. What decision went into your selection of this grain?

4. Describe the cooking process.
5. What challenges would people from early history have had in cooking this grain? How did you overcome them?
6. Evaluate the finished product.
7. What did you learn from this exercise?

Chapter 4 “Vegetables”

Pre-Reading

Think about the role of vegetables in your life. Think back over the last 24 hours. List the vegetables you consumed and what the main preparation was. For example, if you had sautéed escarole on Monday night, you might write:

“Monday: sautéed escarole and garlic”

Post-Reading

Return to your original post. Choose a meal where vegetables did not figure prominently.

Explain how your meal would have differed if you had a traditional laborer’s diet from one of the three cuisines.

Describe, citing specific vegetables mentioned in the chapter.

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala’s Chapter 4 and answer the following in your own words:

1. How has the role of vegetables in the diet changed over time?
2. Explain in what ways the Mediterranean diet (and vegetable-heavy diets of China and Mexico) are overly nostalgic.

3. Describe how Brassica are cooked in each of the three cuisines.
4. Explain why root vegetables have had an important function in subsistence diets.
5. Give an example of how alliums are used in each of the three cuisines.
6. Explain the origin of the term “salad.”
7. Give an example of the importance of beans in each of the three cuisines.
8. Give an example of an important fungus from each of the three cuisines and discuss its culinary use.
9. Explain how chili was adopted differently in each of the three cuisines. How did it fit into Chinese and Italian cuisine where it is not indigenous?
10. List the main members of the solanacea family and indicate their origins.
11. Explain how some vegetables can be substitutes for meat, both in terms of nutrition and culinary properties, and give an example.

Application (Blog) Assignment

Go to a produce store and choose a vegetable with which you are unfamiliar. Do some research to learn more about it. Using Albala’s recipes and outside research as a reference point, cook (or otherwise prepare) the item in the style of one of the three cuisines or another cuisine if you prefer (you don’t need to follow a recipe but can).

Post a video or photo of your results and a recipe. Reflect on the process—what did you do with the item? How did you decide? What ideas did you have that influenced the preparation? What did you learn about this food? What would you have done differently? What will you do next time? Will you cook and eat it again?

Chapter 5 “Fruits and Nuts”

Pre-Reading

Choose one of the three cuisines and describe the use of fruits in that cuisine.

Post-Reading

Based on your reading, how have your impressions changed?

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala’s Chapter 5 and answer the following in your own words:

1. Why does Albala state that "fruits and nuts might appear peripheral to the core of culinary practice"?
2. Describe how berries probably played some role in human evolution.
3. List five preservation and processing techniques for berries.
4. List and describe some uses of berries in each of the three cuisines.
5. Explain why berries do not figure more conspicuously in Chinese or Mexican cuisine.
6. List and describe five uses of grapes in Italian cuisine.
7. Explain the origin of the Italian tradition of serving peaches in wine and a present-day analogue.
8. Explain why Albala labels the apple a "classical fruit."
9. Compare and contrast a medlar and an apple.
10. List and describe four culinary uses for persimmons.
11. Explain the reason and process for curing olives.
12. Summarize the spread of citrus.
13. List and describe six culinary uses of almonds.
14. List and describe four culinary uses for peanuts.

15. List and describe six unfamiliar fruits or nuts that you learned about in this chapter.

Application Assignment

Research fruit preservation in one of the three cuisines. Preserve a fruit by candying, fermenting, drying, salting, pickling, or another method. Describe and photograph the process, finished outcome, and possible culinary uses. Share with the class!

Extra credit: Visit a produce store or supermarket and find a fruit or nut mentioned in this chapter with which you were previously unfamiliar. Buy it and bring it to class for tasting.

Chapter 6 “Meat, Poultry, and Dairy Products”

Pre-Reading

Think about the role of animal protein in your life. Think back over the last three days. List the meat and poultry you consumed and what the main preparation was. For example, if you had spaghetti and meatballs on Monday night, you might write:

“Monday: ground beef, veal, and pork in the form of meatballs”

Post-Reading

Return to your original post. Think about all the meats and poultry products you read about that are not a major part of our food system.

Choose one and show how it could have replaced one of the more ubiquitous proteins that you ate. What would be the benefit of making such a swap? Think about this from culinary, sensory, nutrition, and environmental perspectives.

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala’s Chapter 6 and answer the following in your own words:

1. Explain how the cultural consumption or avoidance of certain meats

is not simply a matter of the nutritional quality of the meat.

2. Explain the origin of the term “venison” and how it is used today.
3. To generalize, what are cooking guidelines for wild venison?
4. Explain how despite common conceptions there was probably no lack of edible animal protein in most parts of the world in the past.
5. Describe how dog meat is typically prepared in Chinese cuisine.
6. Describe how horsemeat is typically prepared in Italian cuisine.
7. Explain how sheep and goats manage to “convert what is otherwise unusable energy into food.”
8. Explain why beef was not a regular food in agricultural regions with high-population density.
9. List and describe five common Mexican cheeses.
10. To what does Alcala attribute the importance of pork in China?
11. Describe a possible origin of the term “marination.”
12. Describe how rabbit is typically cooked in Italian cuisine.
13. Describe how swans and peacocks were served in Europe in the past.
14. Explain why using historic chicken recipes often will not work with today’s chickens.
15. Describe the preparation of Peking duck.

Application (Blog) Assignment

Cook one of Alcala’s recipes. Notice that the format is very different from a typical home-cooking recipe. Focus on the meat, poultry, and dairy or fish and shellfish chapter, but if you prefer a recipe from another chapter for cost or dietary reasons, that’s OK. Prepare the recipe and

document its preparation. Post a video or pictures of your recipe along with your answers to the following questions:

1. What did you cook?
2. Why did you select that recipe?
3. Where does it come from?
4. How did Albala's recipe differ from a "typical" home recipe?
5. Choose an historic time period when your dish might have been

prepared. Thinking about that time, how would differences in ingredients and equipment affected the outcome of the product?

6. What advantages in the dish's preparation do you have that a cook from the time period would not have had?

7. Evaluate the finished dish for flavor, texture, and appearance. How do you like it? What would you improve?

8. What did you learn from actually cooking the recipe rather than just reading it?

Chapter 7 "Fish and Shellfish"

Pre-Reading

Choose a historical period earlier than a century ago. How do you think fishing was done during that time?

Post-Reading

Based on your reading and outside research, what fishing techniques and technologies were used during that period?

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala's Chapter 7 and answer the following in your own words:

1. Construct a table of the major fish-eating regions of Italy, Mexico, and China.
2. List five ways to preserve fish.
3. Describe four fishing methods mentioned in the text.
4. Give an example to illustrate how even when fish was not readily available, it was valued in each of the three cuisines.
5. Explain the relationship between rice cultivation and fish in China.
6. What are the culinary distinctions between large fish like tuna, swordfish, shark, and sturgeon and smaller fish?
7. List and describe a large fish preparation in each of the three cuisines.
8. What factors contributed to the decline of whaling?
9. Summarize how codfish came to be important in Mediterranean cuisine despite its absence from that sea.
10. Compare and contrast stockfish and baccala.
11. List five regional preparations of baccala.
12. Define bottarga. How is it used?
13. Explain the connection between fish and New Year's celebration in China.
14. Explain why fish is typically cooked whole in Chinese cuisines.
15. List and describe five fish preparations in Mexican cuisine.
16. Compare and contrast flatfish with roundfish from a culinary perspective.
17. List and describe a use of small fish in each of the three cuisines.
18. Summarize the connection between carp and Japanese sushi.
19. Describe how ceviche is "cooked."

20. Compare and contrast ceviche and escabeche.
21. Describe a shrimp preparation in each of the three cuisines.
22. Explain the connection between snails and corn tortillas in Mexico.
23. List a preparation for frog in each of the three cuisines.

Application Assignment

Research the origin of fish on Fridays and other fast days in the Catholic tradition. Prepare a fish- or seafood-based traditional fast meal from Mexican or Italian cuisine. Document the process. How does this particular dish relate to what you know about the cuisine in general?

Chapter 8 “Fats and Flavorings”

Pre-Reading

Research Elizabeth Rozin's concept of flavor principles. Write a flavor principle for a region included in one of the three cuisines and explain why you included the flavors you chose.

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala's Chapter 8 and answer the following in your own words:

1. Describe four functions of fats in food.
2. Give two reasons why Albala laments the rise of soy and other vegetable-based oils.
3. To what does Albala attribute the popularity of pork fat?
4. Distinguish among *lardo*, *strutto*, and *lardo battuto*.
5. Define caul fat and describe its use.
6. In colonial Mexico, how did Aztec views and uses of fat differ from those of the Spanish?
7. Summarize the process for making butter.
8. Summarize the process for making olive oil.

9. Why does Albala label light olive oil a "travesty?"
10. Describe the use of sesame oil in Chinese cooking.
11. Summarize the process for producing "vegetable" oil.
12. Why are oils like canola, cotton seed, and safflower used in the three cuisines?
13. Compare and contrast herbs and spices.
14. Explain the dual purpose herbs and spices have served in all three cultures.
15. List five uses of herbs in Mediterranean cooking.
16. How is epazote commonly used in Mexican cooking?
17. Summarize the political and economic importance of spices in history.
18. Explain how we came to find cinnamon in chocolate or Asian spices in moles in Mexican cuisine?
19. Describe the main uses of spices in Italian cuisine.
20. Summarize the spread of chili and some possible reasons.
21. Compare and contrast ginger and galangal.
22. List and describe a vinegar from each of the three cuisines.
23. Summarize the connection between salt and economic development.

Application Assignment

Prepare an herb and/or spice blend representative of one of the three cuisines. Bring it to class with a recipe and exchange samples.

Explain how your blend is representative of some flavors of the cuisine. Use yours or a classmate's blend in cooking. Document the experience and evaluate the result.

Chapter 9 “Beverages”

Pre-Reading

In this chapter, Albala states, "...there is not much to say about [sweet sodas] from a perspective of gastronomy" (p. 318). Do you agree? Provide an example to support or refute this assertion.

Reading and Reading Guide

Read Albala's Chapter 9 and answer the following in your own words:

1. How do humans differ from other mammals with regard to milk consumption?
2. What are three advantages of fermented beverages over water?
3. Explain the key difference in water consumption in each of the three cuisines.
4. Describe the process for preparing a traditional Mexican chocolate beverage.
5. Summarize the process that led from chocolate as a beverage to its use in confections.
6. Describe the traditional types and method of brewing Chinese tea.
7. What are the customs and manners involved in the service of Chinese tea?
8. Prepare a table describing various types of Chinese tea.
9. Explain the conjecture as to the reason for coffee's popularity in Northern Europe.
10. Describe the customs for coffee drinking in Italy.
11. Explain why beer might be more accurately considered a food rather than a beverage.
12. Explain why rice wines are actually beers but why the name "wine" seems fitting.
13. Describe the process for brewing *posolli*.
14. Define *pulque* and *atole*.
15. Explain why "wine is in a sense a product of nature."
16. Summarize the major steps in winemaking.

17. List three ways wine is used in Italian cooking.
18. Summarize the thinking that led to the invention of cordials.
19. Describe the process for making tequila.

Application Assignment

Bring a bottled beverage from one of the three cuisines to class.

Research it. Taste it and offer samples to classmates. How does this particular product situate itself in what you know about the cuisine as a whole?