

Lesson 4 Every Culture Counts

Reading 1

Dumplings: A Celebration of Diversity

Walking down the street in winter, you are alarmed by the sight of smoke. Upon closer inspection, you realize that it isn't smoke but steam. You follow the steam and delicious smell, and they lead you to a local dumpling shop. You take a bite of the soft, white bun filled with various meats and vegetables. The flavors explode in your mouth. The bitter cold is no more.

My job as a food columnist has taken me to all four corners of the earth. If there's one thing that ties the world together — and highlights its regional differences — it's food. One such food is the dumpling. A dumpling can be generally defined as a food that is cooked by wrapping dough around various ingredients such as meat and vegetables. People around the world often take dumplings for granted as an everyday food. They exist in almost every culture from baked empanadas in Argentina to fried spring rolls in Vietnam, yet each culture has its own unique recipe and style.

There are various opinions about the origin of dumplings. Some say that dumplings were invented because they were a great way to preserve and store ingredients in the days before refrigeration. The dough acted as a barrier, preventing the ingredients inside from spoiling. Others think that dumplings were created for portability. People could take them on trips and didn't even need utensils to eat them. Whatever the origin is, dumplings have become a beloved food for people all around the world. Now I'd like to share with you some interesting dumplings from my travels.

Xiaolongbao

mouth-watering soup in every bite

Picture a dumpling filled with rich steaming soup at a Chinese restaurant. This elaborate and beautiful dumpling is xiaolongbao. Also called a “soup dumpling,” xiaolongbao is a round, basket-shaped dumpling often filled with pork and soup. Well-made xiaolongbao has 18 folds on top, which reflect the wishes of the Chinese people. In China, the number 18 is believed to bring wealth. You may want to quickly put this lucky dumpling in your mouth, but the soup inside is so hot that it can easily burn your mouth. To safely enjoy xiaolongbao, first place it on a spoon. Then make a small hole in the side of the dumpling with your chopsticks to drain the soup. Next, drink the soup in the spoon. Finally, once the dumpling has cooled down, eat the delightful treat in one bite.

Manti

a tiny treasure from Türkiye

If you are looking for the perfect Turkish comfort food, look no further than manti. Similar in name to mandu, manti is a small dumpling usually filled with ground lamb or beef. From the size of a fingernail to a thumb, it is the smallest dumpling in the world. When it comes to manti, the people of Türkiye think that the smaller it is, the better. Some chefs are so skilled at making small manti that they can place 40 pieces on a spoon! Manti is usually served with yogurt, chili oil, and butter. Have you ever tried hot dumplings with cold yogurt? It may sound like an odd pairing, but if you try it, you will be pleasantly surprised by the complex flavors that combine to create an intense taste. It is a Turkish treasure that is waiting to be discovered!

Tortellini

dumpling meets pasta

Italy is famous for its many different types of pasta.

Among them, tortellini qualifies as a dumpling as well. Tortellini is a ring-shaped dumpling filled with cheese or meat. Can you guess which part of our body resembles the shape of tortellini? Legend has it that an innkeeper made tortellini in the shape of the belly button of Venus, the beautiful Roman goddess of love. Whether this legend is true or not, one thing for certain is that tortellini is widely loved today. Every October, the city of Bologna holds a tortellini festival to celebrate this beloved dumpling. During this festival, local chefs compete to create the best tortellini, and visitors can sample a variety of recipes and styles.

The wide variety of dumplings shows us the rich cultural diversity across the globe. What's more, dumplings link different parts of the world together. While the ingredients, recipes and cultural traditions may differ, they are all tiny hot pockets of deliciousness that bring smiles to people around the world. Dumplings represent the shared human experience of enjoying delicious food.

In a sense, the world is a dumpling and we are the ingredients. Just as the different ingredients of a dumpling come together to create a wonderful taste, the various cultures are what make the world a better place. So go and enjoy your dumpling!

Reading 2

The Beauty of Diverse Languages

The world is a symphony of languages with each note carrying culture, identity, and heritage. From the dynamic hand gestures that accompany the Italian language to the beautiful nasal tones of the Thai language, every language is unique and valuable.

Today, there are over 7,000 languages spoken around the world. This linguistic diversity represents not only the unlimited potential of human creativity but also a great opportunity to enrich our understanding of the world.

There exists an inseparable relationship between language and culture. More than just a means of communication, languages are mirrors of the ways of a people. For instance, the Navajo people in the southwestern United States have a close relationship with nature and this is reflected in their language. It has words that can represent nature-related phenomena such as leaves gently moving in the wind and dirt moving on the ground. Some words can even express intricate detail such as the sound and direction of water flowing.

Languages also play an essential role in the preservation of cultural heritage. When a language prospers, so do the values and traditions that it carries. Take the Maori language of the native people of New Zealand, for example. By the 1980s, only 20 percent of the Maori people spoke it, putting their language and culture in danger. To address the issue, the New Zealand government declared Maori an official language in 1987. This move, coupled with recent efforts to promote and revitalize the Maori language, seems to have fueled a strong rebirth of traditional Maori practices.

Furthermore, languages are the key to understanding other cultures and the wisdom they contain. Learning a new language provides us with insight into the beliefs and norms of a different culture. We begin to realize that different people have different ways of life from ours, yet they all live good lives. This understanding, in turn, teaches us to have tolerance, empathy, and respect for people of different cultures. The diverse languages of the world are a representation of what sets us apart as human beings. These languages reflect culture, maintain traditions, and expand our horizons. Let us make sure that this symphony of languages continues to play so that everyone can see the beauty of the diverse world we live in.