

The Humble Beginnings of the Hamburger

Objective

Students will read about different claims about the origins of the hamburger. Students will compose a tall tale, opinion, or informational passage based on the new information they read.

Background

Americans consume 25 billion hamburgers every year. We crave these patties of ground beef, placed between slices of bread and topped with cheese, bacon, guacamole, mushrooms, sour cream, chili, grilled onions and every combination of ingredients imaginable. Some even like them plain. Per capita consumption of ground beef is estimated at close to 30 pounds a year.

Who invented the hamburger? Most people assume it was invented in Hamburg, Germany. Nineteenth century German immigrants did bring a style of cooking beef steak to the US that was very similar to the way we cook hamburgers now. Steak cooked “in the Hamburg style” was sliced very thin and fried.

Yale University, in new Haven, Connecticut, is one place that lays claim to the origins of the humble hamburger. According to Yale legend, the hamburger’s inventor was Louis Lassen, the owner and operator of Louis’ Lunch, a popular lunch spot near the university campus. One day a customer came in needing a quick lunch. Lassen had a broiled meat patty on hand and simply slapped it between two slices of toasted bread.

St. Louis, Missouri, claims the first burger was served in that city. On April 30, 1904, a food vender selling beef patties at the World’s Fair ran out of plates. He convinced the vender next to him to sell him a supply of bread and began selling his meat patties between two slices of fresh bread.

Residents of Seymour, Wisconsin, hold a “Home of the Hamburger” celebration every August 5. Residents of that town claim their own Charlie Nagreen as the hamburger’s inventor. Better known as “Hamburger Charlie,” Nagreen was said to have been only 15 years old on August 5, 1885, when he first began frying his hamburger patties in butter and selling them from an ox-drawn cart at the county fair.

Oklahoma has its own claim to the hamburger’s origin. On the Fourth of July, 1891, Oscar Weber Bilby built an iron grill at his home in Bowden, Oklahoma, shaped some freshly-ground angus meat into round patties, and fried them on the grill until they were juicy and done. He served them to his friends on his wife’s homemade buns along with freshly-churned ice cream and hand-mixed root beer. The meal was so delicious that the Fourth of July feed became an annual event, sometimes bringing in a crowd of 125 people.

Most of the argument over who invented the hamburger centers around what makes a hamburger a hamburger. Some say it’s not a

Oklahoma Academic Standards

GRADE 3

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Reading and Writing Process: R.2. Critical Reading and Writing: R.1,7; W.1,3. Research: R.1,2,3,4; W.1,2,3

GRADE 4

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Reading and Writing Process: R.2. Critical Reading and Writing: R.1,7; W.1,3. Research: R.1,2,3; W.1,2,3

GRADE 5

Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Reading and Writing Process: R.2. Critical Reading and Writing: R.1,7; W.1,3. Research: R.1,2,3; W.1,2,3,4

hamburger unless the meat is fried. Some say those who simply placed the meat between slices of bread can't really claim to have invented the hamburger as we know it. The debate will continue, but as far as the general public is concerned, the hamburger will go down in history as one of the best ideas ever.

Procedures

1. As a pre-reading activity pass out the Anticipation Guide, included with this lesson, and complete with your students.
 - Students will make a check next to the statements they agree with or believe to be true.
 - Students will discuss the statements and their choices in groups.
 - Hand out the “Humble Beginnings of a Hamburger” reading page. As students read the passage they will make note of the paragraph(s) and sentence(s) that support their choices. Students will write the paragraph and sentence number in the space under each statement.
 - In small groups students will decide which statements should be marked as true, based on what they read.
 - Lead a classroom discussion and try to come to a consensus on which statements can be supported as true. Discuss whether making predictions before reading helped students focus better on the reading passage.
2. Lead a class discussion on what makes a story a tall tale.
 - Students will list tall tales they have heard or read (Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill, etc.)
 - Brainstorm to find some common factors that make these stories tall tales. List the characteristics on the chalkboard. (Character of story has extraordinary strength or abilities; common feats are exaggerated; hardships involving the character are always overcome.)
 - Ask students if any of the claims from the Reading Page about hamburgers sound like tall tales.
 - List characteristics that make the claims like and unlike tall tales.
3. Students will create original tall tales about the humble beginnings of the hamburger or write opinion pieces about the origins of the hamburger based on the information presented on the Reading Page.
4. Students will research to find origin stories of other common foods, e.g., ice cream cones, hot dog, pizza, etc.

Extra Reading

- Aesop, *The Aesop for Children*, Dover Read and Listen, 2008.
- De La Fontaine, Jean, *Fables*, Dover Fine Art, 2012.
- Durant, Alan, and Mei Matsuoka, *Burger Boy*, Clarion, 2006.
- Fujikawa, *Fairy Tales and Fables*, Sterling, 2008.
- Hurston, Zora Neale, and Christopher Myers, *Lies and Other Tall Tales*, Harper Collins, 2005.
- Mora, Pat, and Raul Colon, *Dona Flor: A Tall Tale About a Giant Woman with a Great Big Heart*, Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2005.
- Osborne, Mary Pope, and Michael McCurdy, *American Tall Tales*, Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2013.
- Sherman, Josepha, and David Boston, *Trickster Tales, Forty Folk Stories From Around the World*, World Storytelling, 2005.

Vocabulary

Angus—any of a breed of usually black hornless beef cattle originating in Scotland

consume—to eat or drink up

Hamburg—N Germany on the Elbe

hamburger—a sandwich consisting of a patty of hamburger in a split round bun

immigrant—a person who comes to a country to live there

per capita—by or for each person

Name _____

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Anticipation Guide

Before reading “The Humble Beginnings of the Hamburger,” make a prediction about each statement below.

Put a check mark beside each statement that you agree with or believe to be true. This is your prediction. Do not worry about being right or wrong.

During or after reading the passage, add new check marks or cross through those about which you have changed your mind. You may have to put on your thinking cap and “read between the lines.” Use the space below each statement to note the paragraph and sentence where you found information to support your thinking. For instance paragraph 3, sentence 2, could be recorded as 3-2.

STATEMENTS:

___ 1. People in Missouri discovered that the best way to eat a hamburger patty was between buns.

___ 2. Hamburgers were first invented in Hamburg, Germany.

___ 3. The best idea ever was the invention of the hamburger.

___ 4. German immigrants to the US cooked beef steaks like we cook hamburger patties today.

___ 5. Wisconsin’s claim to the hamburgers origin is a young boy.

___ 6. Of the five claims in the passage, Oklahoma’s is clearly the best.

___ 7. There is debate about what actually makes a hamburger a hamburger.

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Oklahoma has its own claim to the hamburger’s origin, as told by his great grandson:

My great-grandfather, Oscar Weber Bilby invented the hamburger on July 4, 1891. the story has been passed down through the generations like a family Bible. Grandpa himself told me that it was in June of 1891 when he took up a chunk of iron and made himself a big ol’ grill. Then the next month on the Fourth of July he built a hickory wood fire underneath that grill, and when those coals were glowing hot, he took some ground Angus meat and fired up a big batch of hamburgers. When they were cooked all good and juicy, he put them on my Grandma Fanny’s homemade yeast buns—the best buns in all the world, made from her own secret recipe. He served those burgers on buns to neighbors and friends under a grove of pecan trees . . . they couldn’t get enough, so Grandpa hosted another big feed. He did that every Fourth of July, and sometimes as many as 125 people showed up. They served this new sandwich along with their tasty home-made root beer which was also carbonated with yeast. People would come from all over the county on July 4th each year to consume and enjoy these treats. To this day we still cook our hamburger on Grandpa’s grill, which is now fired by natural gas.

Most of the argument over who invented the hamburger centers around what makes a hamburger a hamburger. Some say it’s not a hamburger unless the meat is fried. Some say those who simply placed the meat between slices of bread can’t really claim to have invented the hamburger as we know it. The debate will continue, but as far as the general public is concerned, the hamburger will go down in history as one of the best ideas ever.

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom is a program of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Oklahoma State Department of Education.