

Tastes of the Diaspora

Sephardic foodways and material culture as evidence of migration

Subject	History, Anthropology, Language
Grade level	Secondary and undergraduate (adaptable)
Duration	One 60-minute class period
Skills	Source analysis, cultural-exchange literacy, spatial reasoning
Tools	Sephardi Spaces database and world map, ChatGPT/Copilot, StoryMaps

Overview

Sephardic foodways traveled with families as communities moved, and the dishes record where people lived and whom they met. Borekas, pastel, huevos haminados, roscas, and the Ladino words that name them moved from Iberia through the Ottoman world and on to the Americas, taking on local ingredients while keeping a distinctive culinary grammar. Students analyze a dish as a primary source and trace how its ingredients, names, and techniques record a community's movement.

Learning objectives

Students will be able to:

- Read food and its vocabulary as historical evidence of migration and cultural exchange.
- Trace how a dish changed as a community moved between regions.
- Use the Sephardi Spaces database and world map to connect foodways to specific places and family histories.
- Design a small digital exhibit or illustrated recipe card documenting a dish's journey.

Materials and tools

- Sephardi Spaces database and Sephardi world map.
- One or two Sephardic recipes with their Ladino names and regional variants.
- AI tools for etymology, ingredient-origin research, and drafting: ChatGPT or Copilot.
- Optional: StoryMaps for a visual exhibit of a dish's migration.

Connection to Sephardi Spaces

Students ask the AI research assistant, "Find Sephardic figures connected to trade or a specific city," then use the world map to see the ports and routes that carried ingredients and recipes. Linking a family in the database to a place on the map anchors a dish in a documented migration story rather than a generic tradition.

Lesson sequence (about 60 minutes)

Warm-up (10 min). Show an image of a dish, for example borekas. Ask where it might come from and what its name suggests.

Guided analysis (15 min). Using an AI tool, students trace the etymology of the dish's name and the likely origin of two key ingredients. Chart which are Iberian, Ottoman, or from the Americas.

Mapping (20 min). In pairs, students plot the dish's journey on the Sephardi world map and identify one database figure connected to a city on that route.

Share-out (15 min). Each pair presents a one-slide “recipe passport”: origin, route, one borrowed ingredient, and one connected person or family.

Assessment

- Deliverable: an illustrated recipe card or single-slide exhibit documenting the dish's migration.
- Rubric focus: strength of evidence for the route, accuracy of ingredient origins, and clarity of the database connection.

Extension and differentiation

- **Extension:** Students build a class “diaspora cookbook” StoryMap with each dish geolocated.
- **Support:** Provide a completed ingredient-origin chart and a shortlist of map cities.
- **Cross-curricular:** Pair with language study to analyze Ladino culinary terms and their roots.