



Dishes made this semester by students in the "Food and Culture" course at Fort High have included pitas and lentil soup as a dish representative of Egypt, left, and various stir-fry noodles and pork for Japan (above). The course teaches other countries' culture, history, and geography while also giving students an opportunity to make a significant dish from that country—and taste something they otherwise might not have been able to. —Submitted photos

FFHS students getting taste of international cuisine

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Some students at Fort Frances High School are taking a tasting trip around the world this semester—all from the comfort of their classroom.

The Grade 11 "Food and Culture" course, being taught by Shannon Westover, has been allowing students to try their hand at making a wide variety of dishes from across the globe.

"We've looked at nine different countries so far," Westover told the Times in an e-mail.

The class started here in Canada by making poutine with maple beans, then moved

on to the United States, then Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Some of the dishes they've tried have been paella and empanadas for Spain, sushi for Japan, pasta and focaccia for Italy, and gyoza and wonton soup for China.

"Google is certainly my friend with searching for new recipes and ideas," Westover admitted.

"Some recipes I've made personally in the past but others are completely new to me," she noted.

Westover said the curriculum doesn't specify which countries the class needs to cover, but she has tried to "visit" as many as possible in one semester.

"I wish the course was year-

round or [had] longer, double period classes because time flies in this course," she remarked.

Along with cooking the food, the class also does a "cultural exploration" of each of the countries it is looking at.

This includes examining the culture of the area, as well as stereotypes, geography, customs, habits, values, and language.

"It's really neat because you get to learn about different countries and their cultures," said Samara Payne, who currently is taking the course.

"But it gets really exciting when we get into the kitchen to cook up some cultural recipes.

"It brings you out of your

comfort zone sometimes, too, trying new spices and foods like curry spices, or lentils, miso soup, or sushi," she added.

Rainy Luoma-Johnson said another benefit is being able to bring home some of the food to share with friends and family to take their taste buds on a trip.

"We even did some classes focusing on the taste and uses of different herbs and spices," Westover said.

"Again, we couldn't cover them all but I was happy to see most students be willing to bite into a fennel or cumin seed to test the flavour."

A few times a month, the students will make extras and present a opportunity for Fort High staff to purchase lunch.

The money raised by this goes back into the course to fund more unique groceries required for the course, like nori sheets (seaweed), saffron, and basmati rice.

"The staff at FFHS has been really supportive in this lunch offering and we've had a great response in participation," Westover enthused.

She admitted it's been hard sometimes finding the ingredients needed for some of the dishes, and has had to buy them while visiting Thunder Bay or Winnipeg.

But she always has made it work.

"I think the students in the course really enjoy being able to cook recipes right from

scratch, and we've always made our own spice blends, grinding them up and mixing them ourselves," Westover noted.

Westover added this is the first cooking class she's ever taught but as a "foodie," she's already completely fallen in love with it.

She also loves learning about new cultures and sharing it with the students.

"I really hope we're able to run this course again next year," Westover said.

"In the future, I'd like to bring in members from the community who may be interested in sharing their culture and traditions with the students," she noted.