



Canteen to Classroom

International School Meals Day

It is celebrated annually on the second Thursday of March, so in 2026, it will fall on Thursday, March 12th. It's a great opportunity to raise awareness about healthy eating and the importance of nutritious meals for children globally.

If you are a teacher looking for ideas to bring International School Meals Day and plant-rich school meals into the classroom, here is a special set of resources dedicated to the theme as part of our Canteen to Classroom programme.

The International Lunchbox Challenge (KS2):

- Divide the class into groups and assign each a different country with a strong school meal tradition (e.g., Japan, France, Finland, Brazil, India).
- The groups research their country's typical school lunch ingredients, dishes, and lunchtime routine (e.g. Do they serve it on plates or trays? Do they help clean up? Is it a social, multi-course meal?).
- Students can create a presentation or a 3D model of the tray/meal.
- Create a display or a class 'International Cookbook' with the recipes/menu ideas.

Map Your Meal Tracking:

- Pick a few key ingredients (e.g. rice, tomatoes, wheat) and have students trace their global journey from farm to fork. Use world maps to highlight the countries of origin. This can lead to discussions on food miles, sustainability, and global food systems.

Food World Map Challenge (KS1):

- Introduce the seven continents using a brightly coloured, simple world map or globe.
- Gather a collection of images or actual examples of common foods that clearly come from specific regions (e.g. a banana for South America, rice for Asia, a tomato for Europe/Mediterranean).
- Students can place the food or stick the picture onto the correct continent on a giant map. Keep it simple: Bananas come from hot countries in South America!

Global Super-Dish:

- Students can discuss and design a new, perfectly balanced school meal using ingredients that come from a minimum of four different continents.
- Students can write the recipe card (including ingredients, method, and nutritional notes) and draw a picture of the finished dish.

International Food Tasting:

- Bring in safe, pre-packaged/prepared samples of healthy snacks or ingredients from different countries (e.g., edamame from Japan, plantain chips from the Caribbean, pitta/hummus from the Middle East, mango from Asia/South America). Ensure all allergy protocols are strictly followed.
- What does it look like? What does it smell like? Try some tasting (students may choose not to try - that's okay!). Students can vote with a simple thumbs up/down or place a sticker on a chart for their favourite.
- Extend by creating a scoring system or ranking the foods for appearance, smell, taste. Students can collate the results and create some tables or graphs.

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✂️ International Lunchtime Routines (KS1):

- Discuss the lunchtime routine in school. Do you think this is similar across the country? Share with the students about lunchtime routines in other countries and give them the opportunity to explore the different approaches.

1. The Japanese 'Serving Squad'

The Custom: In Japan (where school lunch is called *kyushoku*), students wear white hats and gowns and serve lunch to their classmates and sometimes their teachers. They also help clean up afterward. Lunch is considered part of the curriculum, teaching responsibility, hygiene, and respect for food.

The Role-Play Routine: Introduce the concept of a 'Serving Squad'. Provide simple props (e.g., disposable paper hats, aprons/oversized shirts). Have small groups of children practise 'serving' or 'setting up' a mock meal at their tables. Use pretend food or toy plates.

Cleanup Challenge: Practise cleaning their own area completely and quietly, just like Japanese students do. Discuss why helping makes the job quicker for everyone.

2. The French 'Four-Course Meal'

The Custom: In France, school lunch is often a three- or four-course affair (starter, main, cheese/yoghurt, and fruit). They use ceramic or porcelain plates and metal cutlery (not plastic trays!) and sit for a longer, more structured, and often quieter mealtime.

Set up a small area using real, sturdy plates and cutlery (or good quality plastic). Talk about the difference between eating off a tray and eating off a plate.

Tasting: If allergies permit, serve a simple, small 'starter' (like a tiny piece of cucumber or carrot crudité) followed by a 'dessert' (a small slice of apple) after the main meal.

Manners Focus: Practise sitting nicely, waiting until everyone is ready, and using cutlery properly, framing it as "eating like a French student."

3. Brazilian 'Heaping the Plate'

The Custom: In Brazil, lunch (*Almoço*) is the biggest and most important meal, often eaten between 12:00 PM and 2:00 PM. Dinner is usually lighter and later. Students typically file down a serving line (similar to a UK hot school dinner line) but often have more choice. They heap their plates with the main staples: a large serving of rice and a scoop of beans! Plus, some additional protein and a variety of fresh vegetables and salads.

Routine to Highlight: In the UK, school cooks usually serve the food. In Brazil, students often have the freedom to take what they want, as long as they finish everything on their plate (reducing waste). This links to the custom that their lunch is their main, most important meal.

🔍 International Ingredient Audit (KS2):

- Look at your school's actual menu for the week. Create a table with three columns: Dish Name, Main Ingredient, and Country of Origin.
- Example: Pasta Bolognese/Tomatoes/Italy (or Spain/China for other global sources) Chicken Curry/Rice/India or China (or another global producer)
- Maths Link: Students can use the data to create bar charts showing which continent provides the most ingredients for the school's meals.

🎨 Dream Canteen Design:

- In small groups or individually, students can discuss and design an ideal school canteen, considering menu, layout, furniture, ambience, and sustainability.
- Students can draw blueprints or create a model.

🗣️ Interview a Chef/Caterer:

- Invite the school's kitchen staff to talk to the class about what goes into planning and preparing the school meals.
- Students can prepare questions about sourcing, budgeting, cooking, and nutrition.

