

Making Cheese

Can we make cheese in the same way that Neolithic people did?

The Neolithic time was the first period in which people would have had access to milk to enable them to make cheese. This was because they kept cows that had been domesticated. In earlier periods of the Stone Age people wouldn't have had milk, as milking cows would have been extremely difficult. It is important to point this out, as cheese would have been available in Neolithic times, but not in previous periods of the Stone Age.

Learning Overview

WHAT: Identify that animals, including humans, need the right types and amount of nutrition (Year 3 Animals Including Humans). Prepare and cook a variety of predominantly savoury dishes using a range of cooking techniques (Key Stage 2 Design & Technology).

HOW: By following an ancient method to replicate how Stone Age people might have made cheese.

OUTCOME: Pupils will learn why dairy foods, including cheese, are important in our diet. They will also make cheese in a way similar to how it might have been made 4,500 years ago.

Resources

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|  Activity Sheets 6a and 6b |  Cheese packaging or magazine advertisements for different types of cheese |
|  Access to the internet |  2 litres of whole milk |
|  Large saucepan |  Stove |
|  Thermometer |  Mixing spoon |
|  Cheese cloth (or clean shirt) |  Squeeze of lemon juice (or 1 teaspoon of rennet mixed with a little water) |
|  Large bowl |  Heavy book |
|  Tray | |

Vocabulary

Calcium, protein, rennet, curdle, curds, whey.

Health and Safety

Check for food related allergies or dietary guidelines in advance.

The milk must be heated by a responsible adult to avoid the risk of scalding.

If tasting, ensure that the cheese has been made under hygienic conditions.

Place any uneaten cheese in a fridge and use within two days.

Setting the Scene: How is cheese made?

1. Ask pupils how many different types of cheese they can name and about their favourite type of cheese. They could examine packaging or food magazine advertisements for different types of cheese. They might even visit websites for well-known supermarkets and search for how many different types of cheese are currently available to purchase.
2. Discuss how cheese is an important part of our diets because it contains milk and provides us with things such as calcium, some vitamins and protein to help make our teeth and bones strong. It is suggested that we eat two or three small portions of dairy food each day to help contribute towards a balanced diet.
3. Ask if anyone knows how cheese is made or what the ingredients in cheese are. Discuss suggestions from the class and explain that cheese is often now mass-produced and processed in factories, however, the basic process has stayed the same for thousands of years.
4. Share with pupils how legend has it that the first cheese was made accidentally when an Arabian merchant put his supply of milk into a pouch made from an animal's stomach. As he set out on a hot day's journey across the desert, the milk mixed with the rennet (a substance found in the animal's stomach) causing it to curdle and separate into curds (lumps of cheese) and whey (liquid).

What do scientists tell us?

5. Scientists believe that people were making cheese long before the legend of the Arabian merchant. Refer back to Activities 1 and 5 in order to recap with pupils how scientists have found evidence of traces of different types of food absorbed in the clay pots at Durrington Walls. As well as pork and beef, remind pupils that dairy fats have also been found and this leads scientists to believe that Stone Age people were processing dairy products into cheese. Scientists also conclude that cheese would have not only been more digestible but would have kept for longer and been easier to transport than milk.
6. Explain that fragments of unusual pots with tiny holes dotted around them, perhaps baked while pierced with strands of straw, have also been discovered at Stone Age sites. Evidence of milk fats absorbed into pieces of this type of pottery has led scientists to believe that they were used as sieves to separate fatty curds from liquid whey when making cheese.
7. As a class, watch English Heritage's tutorial video on how Stone Age people might have made cheese:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVx-O9ZYa3A>

Exploring the Evidence – Have a go!

8. Explain that, with adult supervision, the pupils are going to have a go at making prehistoric cheese, in the same way as shown in the video.

9. Pupils should wash their hands, prepare their work area hygienically, gather the ingredients and equipment, as shown on Activity Sheet 6a, and then follow the instructions to make cheese. Children can suggest how they might flavour cheese once it is made. They can think about the ingredients that might have been available to Stone Age people, eg salt, herbs.

And finally...

10. Pupils could record the different stages of their cheese making by drawing, writing or adding photographs to Activity Sheet 6b. They could record their observations and make any notes or suggest improvements to the method followed and the outcomes achieved.



Fantastic Fact

The team of scientists studying pottery from Durrington Walls have found that pots discovered in places where people lived were used for cooking meat, such as pork and beef, whereas pottery from important ceremonial spaces was used mainly for dairy. This suggests that the people that built Stonehenge offered up cheese, milk and yoghurt to their gods during religious ceremonies, keeping 'impure' meat for feasting amongst themselves.



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