

Tayta's Secret Ingredient



Teacher Notes

Tayta's Secret Ingredient, is a picture book targeted at children aged 5-8 years. It is suitable for many settings and can be used to encourage discussion and dialogue about our world's diverse cultures and traditions. It is also a wonderful story to read at home where discussions about family history and cultural food can be explored and themes of identity and self can be examined.

Tayta's Secret Ingredient introduces readers to a Lebanese grandmother whose secret is shared by grandmothers and mothers around the world.

Questions to ask BEFORE reading the story.

- What do you think the secret ingredient might be?
- Do you know what Tayta means? What do you call your grandmother?
- What do you think Tayta will cook with her secret ingredient?
- Do you enjoy baking/cooking? What is your favourite dish to cook?
- Do you make special treats or food for special occasions? What kind of food is it?

Questions to ask AFTER reading the story.

- What is Tayta's secret ingredient? Why can't Billy share it with Ms. Bloom?
- Does anyone you know bake with the same ingredient as Tayta?
- What types of cultural food do you enjoy making and eating with your family?
- Do you do anything special to celebrate Harmony Day?

Discussion Questions

- Billy's family is from Lebanon. They wear traditional clothes on special occasions and cook Lebanese food and treats in their home.
- Do you have cultural clothes at home? When do you wear them?
- Do you cook and bake special cultural foods? Can you name and describe a few?
- Did your family migrate to Australia from another country? Where did they migrate from? What customs and traditions do they still celebrate?

Activities

- Get a map of the world and find Lebanon.
- In groups, find other countries where your grandparents or parents (or you) are from.
- Work out how far away they are from Australia.
- What are things that can be different from Australia in those countries? Apart from the clothes and food, as shown in *Tayta's Secret Ingredient*, the weather, the language, the landscape, the houses, the customs and traditions can all be different. Draw an image of yourself (or someone you know) in another country, wearing traditional clothes.

Try baking your own batch of *Kaak* using this recipe from *Hadia's Website*: <https://hadiaslebanesecuisine.com/newsite/recipe-items/lebanese-sweet-kaak/>

Ingredients:

- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup sunflower oil
- 1/3 cup / 70 g. / 2.5 oz. unsalted butter
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon baking soda, or baking powder, read the tips above to see your personal preference
- 3 tablespoons anise seeds
- 1 tablespoon mahlab
- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds, optional
- ¾ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup water, you may need to 1 or 2 tablespoons more water
- 1 cup white sesame seeds

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 200°C/400°F.
2. **First off start clarifying the butter**, if you are using ghee, skip this step. In a small saucepan, melt butter over medium-low heat. Skim off the white foam that appears on top. Transfer to a small glass container, and set aside for about 10 minutes. You will notice that the milk solid sediment will precipitate to the bottom and a golden liquid will appear on top. Pour the golden liquid which is called the clarified butter to a small bowl, and get rid of the white solids on the bottom.
3. In a large bowl, mix the flour, salt, clarified butter, oil, sugar, egg, anise seeds, mahlab, vanilla extract, baking soda and water, and knead just to obtain a sticky dough. If the dough is on the dry side, add 1 tablespoon water and mix to incorporate. If the dough is too sticky sprinkle just a bit of flour and knead just to integrate the ingredients together.
4. Divide the dough into equal balls, roughly the size of a ping pong ball, or even smaller. roll each round dough between your palms, until they form an elongated rope shape about 7cm/ 2.5 inches long. Dip in sesame seeds, making sure to coat both sides.

5. To make the ring shape kaak, rub each ball with the palm of your hands, forming a 7 cm or 2.5 inches long rope like dough. Pinch the end of the elongated rope together, forming a circle, I prefer the round kaak. Dip in the sesame seeds, making sure the sesame covers the kaak on both sides. Place on parchment lined cookie sheets, keep some space between one kaak and another. Bake to a pale golden colour, about 20-25 minutes. Keep an eye on your oven, and remember that ovens are different! Happy eating!



About the author

Amal Abou-Eid is a passionate educator, mother and author of multiple self-published books. Amal started writing children's books when she realised she couldn't find books for her children with characters and stories that related to their Muslim Lebanese Australian identity. She believes in the power of representation and inclusion in books and writes stories which depict characters and events her family and community can identify with and relate to. She hopes her stories can educate, entertain and empower others to tell their stories, too.



About the illustrator

Cara King is a Melbourne-based illustrator and graphic designer. She has illustrated around 10 books since 2016, published both traditionally and for self-publishing authors. Cara enjoys painting in watercolour, scribbling with pencils and dabbles in a bit of digital art too. She has a love of nature, travel and animals and shares her home with her husband, 2 boys, 5 chickens, some fish, bees and a toy poodle.



Blurb

Billy loves Harmony Day. He loves the colours, the clothes and especially the food. This year Tayta is making *kaak*, a Lebanese treat, for Billy to share with his class but he can't share the recipe because Tayta bakes with a secret ingredient.

Tayta's Secret Ingredient is a heart-warming intergenerational story about everyday life in multicultural Australia, where a curious boy takes centre stage alongside his beloved baking grandmother.