

Spotted Puppies Railway Cakes



GUIDING QUESTIONS

What are some ways food is more to you than just “fuel” to get through the day? Can we be more thoughtful about the way we purchase, prepare, and eat food?

1. WASH HANDS (5 minutes)

Ask students to wash hands. Divide them into three groups and assign each group to a table. Reiterate safety rules for using the Charlie Cart.



2. INTRODUCE THE LESSON (10 minutes)

Today we will make a type of quick bread called Spotted Puppies Railway Cakes. This recipe is usually made in one loaf, called Spotted Dog, and is a variation on Irish soda bread, which tastes something like a scone. You will work in table groups to read and complete the recipe as a team.

This recipe comes from a chef in Ireland named Darina Allen. These cakes were very special to her. After we make them, we’ll read a story she wrote about why they were so important. Afterward, you’ll write a food memory of your own that shows the significance of a specific food in your family.

Eating is something all people do, everywhere in the world. It is something that connects us to all of those people, and to our families and friends. Food is more than just fuel to get you through your day. In many parts of the world, even here at home, some people don’t have enough food to eat. So taking time to enjoy your food, and choosing food that is good for your body and for your planet, is a way to show respect for those who don’t have what you have.

Spotted Dog was special to the author of our story, and I think you’ll find this smaller version (Spotted Puppies) pretty special, too. Use the recipe, and work together as a table group to make the cakes. Let’s get going.

3. MAKE SPOTTED PUPPIES RAILWAY CAKES

(10 minutes hands-on time, 20 minutes bake time)

REMIND STUDENTS HOW TO MEASURE ACCURATELY

Ask a student to demonstrate how to measure dry ingredients properly. Fill the spoon or cup and scrape the top flat with a tot knife or scraper. Ask another student to demonstrate measuring liquid ingredients. Fill the liquid measuring cup and hold to eye level to ensure liquid is at the right mark.

MAKE DOUGH

- Work together: Combine $\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour, the baking powder, sugar, and salt in a large mixing bowl. Mix thoroughly with a whisk until all the dry ingredients are completely combined.
- Add the currants or raisins and stir to distribute.
- With scrapers and tot knives, cut the butter into small pieces, add to the flour mixture, and work into the dough using a fork until the butter is the size of small peas. The butter should still be in small chunks, covered completely with flour.
- Add the heavy cream. Stir the mixture with a fork until it just comes together. Encourage students not to overwork the dough.
- With clean hands, gather dough into a ball and split in half.

FORM CAKES

- Dust cutting mats very lightly with flour. Show how to dust hands with flour if the dough is too sticky, or add a tiny drop of cream if dough is too dry. In two groups, using hands, pat each dough half into a disk, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. Cut each disk into 5 equal wedges. (*Hint: Make a peace sign.*)
- *The pieces need to be about the same size so they cook evenly. When wedges are ready to bake, place them on the parchment-lined platter at your table and assign one person from your table to bring them to the cart.*

BAKE CAKES

Line two baking sheets with parchment. Preheat oven to 350°F with convection ON. Arrange cakes on two baking sheets. Use the top and bottom racks. Bake 20 minutes, swapping position of baking sheets halfway through, until cooked through and golden brown.

WHILE CAKES ARE BAKING

Distribute copies of the story and ask students to read it in pairs. Reflect on the story with these questions:

- *What was important to the author about Spotted Dog Railway Cakes?*
- *How does the author make a connection between “pin money” and the food they eat on special occasions? Why is this important?*
- *What can you imagine from her description of bringing the bread out to the field? Describe the scene, the people. What might they have been wearing or doing? How does this description make you feel? Does it remind you of anything?*

Using the Spotted Dog story as your mentor text, write a story about a food that is important to you and your family. Use these questions to get started:

- *What makes the author’s writing so powerful? How did she make her story come to life?*
- *How can you incorporate this craft into your story?*
- *Tell us about the food and the time you ate/eat it. Do you help make it?*
- *Share some of the ingredients or tradition of the food.*
- *Describe the food in a way that makes the reader feel hungry!*

4. EAT AND DISCUSS (10 minutes)

Clean up and set tables. Serve each student a cake.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Share aloud about the foods you selected for your story. Does your story have anything in common with the Spotted Dog story? What are some similarities and differences?

5. CLEAN UP (5 minutes)

Spotted Puppies Railway Cake



A STORY ABOUT SPOTTED DOG RAILWAY CAKES

During my childhood, many people in Ireland were poor and their daily staple would have been whole wheat bread. White flour was more expensive than brown, so white soda bread was considered to be more luxurious—a treat for special occasions.

At times of the year when work was harder, such as harvest or threshing, or maybe on a Sunday when visitors were expected, the woman of the house would add a bit of sugar, and a fistful of dried fruit and an egg to the white bread to make it a bit more special. Nowadays this does not seem like a big deal but back then any money the woman of the house got from selling her eggs was considered her “pin money,” used for little luxuries such as hatpins. Putting whole eggs into the bread was one egg less that she could sell, so it represented much more than it would for us today.

This bread was called spotted dog or railway cake. When it was still warm, she’d wrap it in a kitchen towel, and bring it out to the fields with hot sweetened tea in glass bottles wrapped in newspaper or cloth to insulate them. The farm workers would put down their tools and sit with their backs to the haystacks. She’d cut the bread into thick slices and slather on yellow country butter.

—From *The Forgotten Skills of Cooking*, by Darina Allen. Kyle Books, 2010.
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Spotted Puppies Railway Cakes



SEASON: **WINTER**

MAKES: **10 SMALL CAKES**

You will need: Parchment paper

INGREDIENTS

Note: Use organics whenever possible.

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour, plus $\frac{1}{4}$ cup for dusting rolling pin and cutting mat

$1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons baking powder

1 teaspoon finely granulated white sugar

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt

2 tablespoons raisins or currants

2 tablespoons cold unsalted butter

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream

PREPARATION

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Combine $\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour, the baking powder, sugar, and salt in a large mixing bowl. Mix thoroughly with a whisk until all the dry ingredients are completely combined.
3. Add the raisins or currants and stir to distribute throughout.
4. Cut the butter into small pieces, add to the flour mixture, and work into the dough using a fork until the butter is the size of small peas. The butter should still be in small chunks, covered completely with flour.
5. Add the heavy cream. Stir the mixture with a fork until it just comes together—don't overwork it.
6. With clean hands, gather the dough into a ball, and split in half.
7. Dust a work surface very lightly with flour. Dust hands with flour if the dough is too sticky, or add a small drop of cream if dough is dry and crumbly.
8. With your hands, pat each dough half into a disk $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. Cut each disk into five equal wedges.
9. Arrange the cakes on the lined baking sheet. Bake for 16 to 20 minutes, or until golden brown.

Serve warm.