

# *Kūčiukai* Christmas cookies in civic education, language, technology and mathematics classes in Lithuania

**Age of students:** 14 to 15 years old

*Kūčiukai* cookies are prepared and served during the winter holidays. For young people in Lithuania, they taste like Christmas. Before the start of the holiday season, German, English, Russian and Lithuanian language teachers used a recipe for this traditional dish to teach new vocabulary and improve students' oral and written communication skills. During the technology class, learners followed the recipe to bake their own *Kūčiukai* cookies. In mathematics, they calculated the cost of making them. The origins of this winter tradition were discussed in civic education. Learning by doing proved to be an inclusive and engaging activity for all, including students with physical disabilities.

# Learning objectives

## English, German, Russian and Lithuanian languages:

- ▶ Enriching students' vocabulary;
- ▶ Improving written and oral communication skills.

## Technology:

- ▶ Acquiring practical baking skills.

## Mathematics:

- ▶ Applying mathematics to everyday situations.

## Objectives related to the ICH element:

- ▶ Raising awareness of living heritage and the *Kūčiukai* biscuits as ICH;
- ▶ Deepening the knowledge of Christmas-related traditions in the local communities.

# Preparation

## Description of the ICH element and the way it is practised today:

*Kūčiukai* are small, sweet biscuits or pastries served for *Kūčios*, the traditional Christmas Eve dinner in Lithuania, celebrated every 24 of December. Traditionally, families would prepare them at home from leavened dough and lots of poppy seeds. There are many different names for them and each region has its specific way of preparing the dish. With time, particularly in recent decades, the tradition of baking them at home has changed and families mostly purchase *Kūčiukai* from supermarkets, ready to eat. Today, making *Kūčiukai* is no longer a common practice and the tradition of kneading the dough in one's own kitchen, an activity that typically involves grandparents or parents together with their children, is slowly fading away.

## Linkages between the ICH element and the school subject:

Students prepared *Kūčiukai* biscuits in their technology class. Baking the biscuits at school was a new activity that many students had never done before, though it was related to the skills that the subject aims to develop. The group activity was designed to be appropriate for students with physical disabilities, allowing for everyone to participate and enjoy the teamwork and the unique taste of these sweet pastries.

The *Kūčiukai* biscuits were integrated into language lessons as students explored the specific vocabulary and traditions associated with the preparation and serving of the dish. The pupils used what they had learned to come up with acrostics related to the subject.

- ▶ In mathematics, the recipe served as an example for a calculation of the cost of producing the *Kūčiukai* biscuits.

## Involvement of learners in the preparation of the activity:

One of the students helped the history teacher select the living heritage element. Choosing a practice that is familiar to everyone at school was the main consideration in making the decision. The other learners took part in the activities conducted at school.

## Involvement of bearers and local community in the preparation and/or implementation of the activity:

Both teachers and learners considered themselves to be bearers of the tradition, as *Kūčiukai* biscuits are a common feature of Christmas Eve celebrations. However, as baking them at home is no longer a widespread practice, it was a learning opportunity for everyone involved, teachers and students alike.

# Description of the activity

The activities were planned to take place just before the winter holidays in order to be as relevant and pleasurable as possible for the students. Teachers introduced the traditions related to *Kūčiukai* cookies at the beginning of the lesson along with a recipe. They then worked with students to translate the recipes and discuss the way these cookies are made and the meaning they hold for the pupils. The students also composed acrostics related to the new things they had learned about the *Kūčiukai* traditions, as well as gave creative group presentations to their classmates, some of which were filmed and shared as a side project.

**K**eeping your friends close  
**U** are making them feel good  
**C**losing gap between young and old  
**I** am making us feel good  
**U** sing food as a tool  
**K**icking off the bad mood  
**A**re you with us now?  
**I** am certain that you are!

In the technology class, students were given all the ingredients along with the *Kūčiukai* recipe. With the help of their teacher, learners worked in groups to prepare and bake the cookies. According to the evaluation, this was the students' favourite activity as it allowed them to learn in a hands-on manner. They also appreciated the opportunity to work as a team in an activity that was accessible to pupils with physical disabilities. Of course, being able to eat what they had prepared made it even more enjoyable!

During the civic education class, the teacher talked about the roots of the name *Kūčiukai* and introduced students to the origins of this living heritage practice.

Meanwhile, in mathematics class, students used the information in the recipe to calculate the cost of preparing and baking *Kūčiukai*.

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# Learning outcomes

The classroom activities improved students' knowledge about living heritage in general and the meaning and preparation of *Kūčiukai* Christmas biscuits in particular. It allowed teachers to meet the learning objectives for each subject while strengthening the students' cohesion and teamwork skills. For teachers, it challenged them to adopt new methods and collaborate across disciplines.

Students assessed all activities positively, especially the technology class in which they baked the *Kūčiukai* biscuits by themselves. In relation to the language classes, one student stated that it was 'an interesting way to study and practise foreign languages'.

The interactive activities helped to shape a sense of identity for students. It also built self-confidence and solidarity between students with and without physical disabilities, cultivating respect and appreciation for diversity.

Reflecting on the activity, many members of the school community viewed baking traditional dishes like *Kūčiukai* cookies as an excellent practice related to the safeguarding of living heritage. Some even suggested that baking classes be included in the school calendar.





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