Teacher's Guide



Fried Rice Surprise

Written by: Patricia Tanumihardja
Illustrated by: Shiho Pate
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About the Book

Fried Rice Surprise is a joyful, flavor-filled picture book about food, family, friendship, and creativity in the kitchen. When Fern discovers her mother's secret to making delicious meals—using leftovers and practicing the Japanese philosophy of mottainai ("too good to waste")—she decides to create a special fried rice dish inspired by her friends and their favorite foods. As ingredients from different cultures come together in one sizzling wok, Fern learns that combining different ideas, traditions, and people can create something magical.

Genre: Juvenile Fiction / Cooking & Food

Interest Level:
Ages 4–8
Grades Pre-K–3

Guided Reading: N

Themes:
Food and Cultural traditions/Creativity and experimentation / Reducing waste and sustainability / Friendship and community / Using all five senses

Before Reading

- What foods are special in your family?
- Have you ever helped cook or prepare a meal?
- What does it mean to waste less?
- How can different ingredients work together to make something delicious?

Vocabulary Preview

- **Mottainai** – a Japanese idea meaning "too good to waste"
- **Leftovers** – food that remains after a meal
- **Ingredient** – one of the foods used to make a dish
- **Repurpose** – to use something again in a new way
- **Senses** – sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing



During Reading

Pause throughout the story to discuss how Fern and Mama use observation, creativity, and teamwork while cooking.

Guiding Questions

- What makes Fern excited about lunch?
- What does Mama mean by “mottainai”?
- How do Fern’s friends influence the recipe?
- Why does Mama say different ingredients are “just like you and your friends”?

Encourage students to notice the sound words throughout the story, including “CHOPPITY CHOP CHOP,” “SIZZLE,” and “HISS.”

After Reading

Comprehension & Reflection

- What secret does Mama share with Fern?
- How does Fern personalize the fried rice for her friends?
- What does the fried rice symbolize in the story?
- What are some ways people can reduce waste in everyday life?

Social-Emotional Learning

Discuss how Fern shows care for her friends by thinking about the foods they love.

Questions

- How does Fern make everyone feel included?
- Why is it important to learn about other people’s traditions and tastes?
- How can sharing food help build community?



STEM & Sustainability Connection

Introduce the idea of sustainability through *mottainai*.



Classroom Discussion

Invite students to talk about:

- Reusing materials
- Recycling and composting
- Saving water and energy
- Finding creative uses for leftovers

Activity: Waste Not, Want Not

Students brainstorm ways to reduce waste at:

- Home
- School
- Lunchtime

Create a classroom chart of “mottainai ideas.”

Five Senses Activity

Mama explains that cooking uses all five senses.

Explore the Senses

Students identify examples from the story:

- **Sight:** colorful vegetables and spices
- **Smell:** garlic and ginger
- **Sound:** sizzling in the wok
- **Touch:** mixing and stirring
- **Taste:** spicy, savory, crunchy flavors and textures
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Extension: Invite students to describe a favorite food using sensory words.

Cultural Connections

The story highlights foods and flavors from multiple cultures:

- Japanese rice balls and nori
- Indian-inspired curry spices
- Mexican chicken tinga
- Pilaf with raisins and cashews

Discuss how recipes travel and change as people share ideas and traditions.

Optional Activity: Create a classroom recipe book featuring favorite family foods.



Creative Writing Activity

"A Little Bit of This, A Little Bit of That"

Students invent their own imaginary fried rice recipe.

- What ingredients would they include?
- Which flavors or foods represent their family or friends?
- What would they name their dish?

Students may draw and label their recipes.

Extension Activities

- **Cooking Connection:** Make simple fried rice or other leftover-based dish as a class demonstration
- **Art Activity:** Design a menu poster for "Fern's Fried Rice Surprise."
- **Math Tie-In:** Measure and count recipe ingredients.
- **Science Tie-In:** Observe how heat changes food while cooking.

Author & Illustrator

Patricia Tanumihardja was born in Jakarta and raised in Singapore. She is the author of multiple cookbooks and children's books that celebrate food, culture, and connection.

Shiho Pate is a Japanese-born illustrator whose warm, playful artwork combines traditional and digital techniques to bring stories of family and food to life.

Common Core Connections

ELA:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.1–2.1: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.3–2.3: Describe how characters respond to events and challenges.

Writing:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.K.2–2.2: Use drawing and writing to explain ideas.

Speaking & Listening:
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.K.1–2.1: Participate in collaborative conversations.

Science & SEL Connections:
Explore sustainability, conservation, and the role of the senses in observation.



FRIED RICE SURPRISE!

DESIGN YOUR APRON

What will you put on your apron? Draw and color your own!

















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WHAT WILL YOU COOK?

WHO WILL YOU COOK WITH?

