



# SOUL FOOD

**A 2ND STORY STUDY GUIDE**  
INSPIRED BY THE ORIGINAL STORY BY  
JESSICA YOUNG



2<sup>nd</sup> Story

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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome to the 2nd Story study guide.

We are a collective of story-makers and story-lovers committed to building a more empathetic world by sharing one great story at a time. We are twenty-one years old, and we believe in the unique power of sharing one's personal story.

Each season we bring our world-class podcast into classrooms across Chicago by creating dynamic study guides and lesson plans to accompany our socially relevant stories. This year, we are proud to present three stories in conversation with one another. The stories explore community, identity, and the personal journey from where and who we were then to where and who we are now.

*Soul Food* investigates family tradition and a personal journey as storyteller Jessica Young wonders how to tell her family that turkey is not on her agenda this year.

We have crafted this guide to serve you and your classroom. Within its pages are activities, an interview with storyteller Jessica Young, and additional information that will add context to this story. On our website you can find additional resources and related learning standards.

To use this guide in any capacity, please start by listening to the story, available on the 2nd Story website at [2ndStory.com/studyguides](https://2ndStory.com/studyguides).

Thank you for bringing us into your classroom.

The 2nd Story Collective



# START TALKING.

2nd Story uses first-person, true stories as an entry point for conversation. After listening to Jessica Young's *Soul Food*, you can use the following questions to begin a rich conversation with your students.

## GROUP AGREEMENTS

When sharing personal narratives, stories, and sensitive information, we begin by establishing the following agreements with participants. Before beginning your discussion, we recommend going over the following group agreements with your students. When finished, ask them, "Do you agree?" and then have them collectively and vocally respond with "I agree."

- What is learned here leaves here. What is said here stays here.
- Take care of yourself.
- Practice equity by sharing the floor.
- Stay curious.

Group Agreements can also be done (either for the first time or again) when you have your students share their stories.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Do this story feel familiar or unfamiliar to you? Why?
- What is a recent journey you found yourself on?
- How do you navigate moments when who you are differs from how others view you?

# WHO WE ARE / WHAT WE EAT A CONVERSATION WITH JESSICA YOUNG

BY MAX SPITZ, 2ND STORY COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

**Jessica Young** has been a 2nd Story company member for almost ten years. Originally from Cincinnati, Jessica has a Performance Studies degree from Northwestern University and an MFA from Columbia College Chicago. She's performed at the Mixed Roots Literary and Film Festival in LA, and been a featured essayist in various programming on Chicago's NPR affiliate, WBEZ. Jessica is also an accomplished and devoted yoga teacher, and is currently studying embodiment in religious traditions at Harvard Divinity School.



**So, tell me a little about yourself.**

**Where are you from?**

**What do you do?**

I'm originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, though I lived in Chicago for so long it feels like home. I currently live outside Boston, Massachusetts. I teach yoga, I write a lot, and I'm in divinity school right now learning about

how the human body is a tool for connection with God. I hope to keep serving others as a yoga teacher, in addition to other ways as a minister.

**How do you identify as an artist?**

I identify as a writer and storyteller. Most of my writing is creative nonfiction, but I also enjoy writing short stories.

**What role does story play in your life?**

A HUGE role. I've been telling stories since I was a young woman. In college, I studied Performance Studies, where I got a chance to experiment with using different kinds of material—fiction, nonfiction, plays, primary source material—to tell stories. Now, in divinity school, I anticipate the practice of having to speak publicly on the regular, and I think my training as a writer and storyteller will be invaluable to me in that capacity.

**Why did you want to tell this story?**

I think that practicing veganism felt like a really important cultural practice for me. Until I met and learned about Bryant Terry, veganism seemed like a practice that I couldn't access as a woman of color. Wellness and self-care aren't spaces where women of color feel particularly welcome or a part of the community, due often to their capitalist and exclusionary nature. So it's important to me to say that I have a right to take care of my black, female body. I want other folk of color to know that it's not just okay, but it is in our history and our birthright to choose to live healthy, rich lives without compromising our identity.

**You have pivotal moments with both your mother and your grandmother in this story; how do you navigate who you are with who they see you as?**

This is such a great question! When we spend time with our parents and other adults of previous generations in our lives, they can often get distracted or caught in the trap of wanting and expecting us to behave the way they want us to, and not as who we know ourselves to be. Sometimes that's no big deal, and sometimes it's really painful. I remind myself that just because my parents think I'm one way doesn't actually mean I have to behave that way—even when they try to make me.

**Your story explores the space between communal and personal identity. What do you feel has changed in these identities in the time since writing this story?**

Veganism feels so much a part of who I am at this point that it's almost a non-issue. I always bring or prepare something to holiday meals that I know I can eat when I celebrate with family, but otherwise I think very little about it. It comes up when my relatives have questions, and sometimes they are not as generous or considerate as I'd like, but I try to let that go. I love being a vegan, but it tends to be a pretty private practice, as often as possible.

**Food plays a big role in this story. Can you break down for me the difference between "nutritious food" and "good food"?**

I'm not sure that I can. I believe that good food is nutritious, that those two things don't necessarily mean different things. People often think that for food to be nutritious you have to be eating twigs and berries, but nourishment in eating can come not just for the body but also for the mind and soul. At its best, food nourishes all of you.

**You don't use the term 'soul food' in your story. Was that an intentional choice?**

I didn't intentionally leave it out of the story, but it's definitely a play on words as a title. Often soul food is a type of food claimed by the black community that describes a very particular way of eating. I used this phrase to title the story to poke at the idea that black folk only eat a particular kind of way, or that nourishment and delight can only come from a particular way of living.

## WHAT IS VEGANISM?

Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing, or any other purpose.

Learn more at [www.vegansociety.com](http://www.vegansociety.com).

**"SO IT'S IMPORTANT TO ME TO SAY THAT I HAVE A RIGHT TO TAKE CARE OF MY BLACK, FEMALE BODY. I WANT OTHER FOLX OF COLOR TO KNOW THAT IT'S NOT JUST OKAY, BUT IT IS IN OUR HISTORY AND OUR BIRTHRIGHT TO CHOOSE TO LIVE HEALTHY, RICH LIVES WITHOUT COMPROMISING OUR IDENTITY."**

**What is the hardest part about being a vegan?**

Eating out, or eating at events, can be really challenging. I've gotten good at asking for something ahead of time, or bringing a snack along when I don't know if there will be something I can eat. Initially, it can be hard to make the switch, but once you learn how to eat in a way that makes you feel healthy and happy, it's fine. But the hardest part is definitely eating out.

**In the story, you trace a direct line between your yoga practice and veganism. Were there any other factors that drove the decision to become vegan?**

Yoga was definitely the instigator for me, because it taught me to listen closely to my body, and when I did I discovered that I didn't like eating meat. Additionally, the more research I did about how animals in this country are raised for consumption, the more I realized that I didn't want to be part of a chain or an industry that was committing such cruelty to animals and to the planet.

**Traditions, especially around the holidays, are often followed absent-mindedly; what do you think we can do to update our traditions?**

I think we can start by asking why: why do we engage in this tradition? What does doing this the same year after year give us? If we don't have a better answer for this than, "because that's how we've always done it," then maybe we should consider how we might do it differently. Additionally, if we're interested in prioritizing other things—nonviolence, or a

reduction in waste—then we might consider buying and preparing only the food we need for the holiday, and not making copious leftovers that will almost certainly go to waste. Finally, I think we can look to other cultures to consider how they observe and celebrate gratitude, or other special days or occasions.

**Thanksgiving, possibly more than any holiday, is steeped in food tradition. What is your favorite vegan adaptation of a traditional recipe?**

My favorite part of Thanksgiving was always the stuffing and cranberry sauce, and while I don't have a recipe, I do have a few suggestions for how to make these meat-free. When you're preparing stuffing, you don't need to add chopped up meat (turkey, giblets, bacon, or anything else) to the stuffing to give it flavor. I really enjoy using a mix of earthy mushrooms—cremini, chanterelle, and morel (usually dried because they get pricey)—are my favorite, and you can use the liquid you soak dried mushrooms in as part of the stock. Additionally, veggie stock is great, no need for chicken or beef. Finally, you don't need to include eggs in the stuffing to help it hold together when you bake it; you can mix 1 T of ground flaxseed with 2 T water and this works as a substitute for one egg.

As far as cranberry sauce goes, I've never heard of anyone adding meat to this, but in case you're thinking about it, don't.



## WHO IS BRYANT TERRY?

Known for his activism to create a healthy, just, and sustainable food system, Bryant Terry is a James Beard Award-winning chef, educator, and author. He is currently the Chef-in-Residence at the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco where he creates programming that celebrates the intersection of food, farming, health, activism, art, culture, and the African Diaspora.

His books include *Afro-Vegan: Farm-Fresh African, Caribbean, & Southern Flavors Remixed*, *The Inspired Vegan: Seasonal Ingredients, Creative Recipes, Mouthwatering Menus*, *Vegan Soul Kitchen: Fresh, Creative, and African-American Cuisine*, and *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen*.

Learn more at <https://www.bryant-terry.com>.

# PAN-FRIED GRIT CAKES

## WITH CRISPY LEEKS, GARLIC, AND THYME

If you're curious about how one of the Afro-Vegan pioneers approaches a retake on a classic recipe, take a look below. While grits don't always require meat, classically they do usually involve quite a lot of dairy. Take a look at the recipe below from Bryant Terry for how to make a savory, vegan, take on a classic dish.

Adapted from *Design Sponge: In the Kitchen with Bryant Terry's Pan-Fried Grit Cakes*.

### INGREDIENTS

- extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large bunch of small leeks, trimmed and thinly sliced
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 cups unflavored rice milk
- 1 cup vegetable stock
- 1 cup stone-ground corn grits
- 1/2 teaspoon coarse sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme

### STEPS

In a medium-sized saucepan, combine 1/2 tablespoon of olive oil with the leeks and the cayenne. Turn the heat to medium-low and sauté gently until well browned, 10 to 15 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté until golden, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside.

In a medium-sized nonstick sauté pan, combine the rice milk with the stock, cover, bring to a boil and boil for about 3 minutes. Uncover and whisk the grits into the liquid until no lumps remain.

Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 25 minutes, stirring every 2 to 3 minutes with a wooden spoon to prevent the grits from sticking to the bottom of the pan.

Add the leek mixture, salt and thyme and stir well. Cook for an additional 5 minutes, stirring from time to time.

Pour the grits into a 2-quart rectangular baking dish or a comparable mold and spread them out with a rubber spatula (the grits should be about 1/2-inch thick). Refrigerate and allow the grits to rest until firm, about 3 hours or overnight.

Preheat the oven to 250°F.

Slice the grits into 2-inch squares.

Line a couple of large plates with paper towels. In a large nonstick pan over medium-high heat, warm 1 tablespoon of olive oil. When the oil is hot, pan-fry the cakes for 2 to 3 minutes on each side until they are golden brown and crispy on the outside (do this in several batches to avoid overcrowding the pan). Transfer the cooked cakes from the skillet to the plates to drain, and then hold them in the oven until all the cakes are cooked.

Serve immediately.

**"While grit cakes are familiar in the South, I imagine that this recipe disrupts most people's notion of what Southern/African American cooking is since it departs from the rustic presentation of the grits. Even in the South, grit cakes were traditionally eaten as a breakfast item, so I like offering a savory alternative."**

BRYANT TERRY

# THE FOOD THAT WE CONSUME

## A DIARY ACTIVITY

One consistent theme between both yoga practice and veganism is the idea of “mindfulness.” Mindfulness is an active, purposeful awareness of where you are, what you do, who you are with, and so on. In this activity, we are going to ask you to be mindful about your relationship to food.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The goal of this activity is to reconnect with our senses, take notice, and think more deeply about the food we consume. Don't focus on the calorie counts of your meals or any sort of number crunching. Please be mindful of your own safety when participating in this activity.

### SUPPLIES

- Notebook
- Writing Utensil
- Prompts

### INSTRUCTIONS

Over the next several days, choose a meal each day and respond to a few of the following prompts.

### PROMPTS:

Write a short description about the food you are eating. Is it a snack or a meal?

What time of day is it?

Where are you eating?

Who are you eating with?

Are you talking? About the meal or something else?

Are you hungry in this moment, or is there some other impetus, like a social gathering or holiday?

Do you know where this food came from? Think about this question literally and culturally/historically.

How does this food make you feel?

Are there any memories associated with this food?

Did you prepare the meal yourself? If so, how did you learn to prepare it? If not, who prepared this meal?

# SOUL FOOD & BLACK VEGANISM

BY LIZ RICE, 2ND STORY COMPANY MEMBER

In her story “Soul Food,” teller Jessica Young describes the spread at her family’s Christmas buffet: ham hocks and greens (collard and mustard), mac and cheese with bacon, roast turkey, dressing with turkey gizzards, and “chitlins for days.” Many of the items that she lists in her family’s holiday meal are iconic dishes in a uniquely American cuisine known as soul food.<sup>1</sup> Despite being associated primarily with the Black-American experience, soul food has roots in not only West African but also European and Native American foodways.<sup>2</sup>

In his book *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine One Plate at a Time*, Adrian Miller documents not only these various ethnic and cultural influences but also highlights the varying regional differences within the umbrella of soul food that often gets overlooked in the larger culinary world. Most importantly, Miller also demonstrates soul food’s growth out of historically oppressive and racialized food practices while deconstructing and challenging the racial assumptions of this cuisine and the historical foodways of Black Americans. He also touches upon the growing concerns by many, both within and without the Black community, about the health detriments of soul food, similar to the concerns that Jess raises in her story. As Jess puts it, “There are some things Black folk don’t do...Black women aren’t vegans.” Yet, over the last few years, a Black veganism movement has arisen, defying long-held assumptions of “what Black folks do” while at the same time reinvestigating and re-inventing the traditions of soul food.

Soul food is profoundly tied with the Black experience in the U.S. It grew out of the eating habits and forced migration of Africans and their subsequent enslaved descendants between the 15th and 19th centuries. However, soul food is only partly informed by West African foodways. Many American slaves had to cook the European-influenced foods of their masters, as well as their own families. Thus, their eating habits were also impacted by popular European dishes. For instance, macaroni and cheese was originally a prestige food from France or Italy and was only eaten by early affluent American aristocrats or on special occasions. Some of the first American haute cuisine cooks were black slaves. Thomas Jefferson brought James Hemings with him to Paris while he served as American minister to France. While in Paris, Hemings trained in classical French cooking techniques. Jefferson became enamored with macaroni and cheese while in Paris, and Hemings was the one who continuously cooked it for him after they returned to the United States.

In addition to European influences, slave foodways were also influenced by their relationship with Native Americans. Though soul food today emphasizes the consumption of meat, especially pork, many West African ethnic groups had a diet made primarily of a staple carb—primarily rice, millet, or yam—and vegetables. The vegetables could be flavored with a little meat or fish. These ethnic groups, especially if they initially had lived close to large bodies of water, were also avid fisherman. West African slaves in the U.S. would forage and/or grow vegetables that had come over with them from their home continent in addition to learning about local edible plants from the Native Americans they came in contact with. Natives also showed them local edible fish species and different fishing techniques.

After the Civil War and during Reconstruction, Black Americans relied on the survival techniques and foodways they had developed during enslavement to overcome the depressed economic conditions that generally plagued the South during this period and the inequities initiated by Jim Crow. Foods like chitlins, sweet potatoes, and corn bread were at once relegated to lower class status for their association as both poverty foods and popularity with Black appetites. Additionally, Black foodways began to change in relation to their work as sharecroppers and to the large migration of Black Americans to northern urban centers throughout the 20th century. Throughout the Slave period, forced laborers often cultivated a personal garden to supplement the meager rations afforded to them by their masters. However, as sharecroppers, freedmen were forced to rely on purchasing groceries from landowners’ general stores, rather than growing food themselves, so that the land could be used to grow cash crops. At the same time, Black Americans migrating to city centers did not have access to fertile land to garden or grow their own food, and thus also relied on purchasing food for eating.

Despite being far from the country, many urban transplants still reminisced and yearned for the popular known foods of the South. Black entrepreneurs capitalized on this by opening various restaurants and eateries that specialized in southern or “down home” cooking. The term “soul food” was not coined until the 1940s jazz era; when Black musicians were tired of their music being appropriated and capitalized upon by white recording companies. Assuming that white artists would not be able to mimic it, soul music combined jazz with the gospel influence of southern Black churches. As its popularity grew, “soul” as a subculture bled into other areas of Black identity, including food.

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## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Note that the title of Jess’s story is Soul Food but she never uses that term to describe any of the meals that are eaten.

<sup>2</sup> Foodways are the various intersecting systems that impact how we eat.

<sup>3</sup> There is an ongoing debate in the culinary world about the relationship between “southern” cuisine, “soul food,” and whether or not they are the same cuisine racialized differently.





It was Stokely Carmichael and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that cemented soul food with Blackness, specifically Black Power, in 1966 when in a New York Times article, SNCC explained the Black Power philosophy delineating white people's inability to "relate to chitterlings, hog's head cheese, pig feet, ham hocks...because these things are not part of their experience."<sup>4</sup> Though SNCC's sentiment is understood, their declaration is not entirely correct. Many southern white Americans and white immigrants could relate to eating these foods.

Looking forward, over the past five to ten years, the culinary landscape of soul food has been changing as the Black Vegan movement has taken hold. Similar in intention to the highlighting of soul food as part of the Black identity during the Civil Rights era, veganism as part of Black identity is rooted in both social justice and activism. Like Jessica, many people turned to veganism for health reasons, believing that the meat-heavy soul food cuisine was a key cause to some of the illnesses in the Black community. At the same time, taking care of one's health can also be considered a revolutionary act. It works to push against the assumptions of Blackness in the U.S. and helps strengthen a person against

the daily challenges that "come with being Black in America."<sup>5</sup> Though Black veganism has historical roots in various religious movements, like Rastafarianism, the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, and the Nation of Islam, the advent of social media has allowed its existence to come to the forefront of the culinary and activist world in recent years.

Just like Jessica, each person's journey to veganism is their own, but there are many resources both on the web and in Chicago to learn more about veganism and its connections with Blackness. Activist and writer Aph Ko started the website Black Vegans Rock to highlight prominent vegans historically and currently in the Black community. Thinking outside the refrigerator, veganism has begun to intersect with other aspects of Black culture, like hip-hop. In 2016, Atlanta-based rapper Grey dropped his music video, "Vegan Thanksgiving" lauding plant-based options of this traditional holiday meal. If you want to experience the intersection of veganism and soul food a little closer to home, check out Majani in South Shore, where Chefs Nasya and Tsadakeeyah impact their community through both their food and their activism.

## FOR DISCUSSION:

- Does activism play a role in the food you eat? How or how not?
- What is one new piece of information from this article that sticks out to you?
- How does our environment shape the food we eat?

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>4</sup> Miller, Adrian. *Soul Food: The Surprising Story of an American Cuisine One Plate at a Time*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2013, pg. 44 - 45.

<sup>5</sup> Severson, Kim. "Black Vegans Step Out, for Their Health and Other Causes." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 28 Nov. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/28/dining/black-vegan-cooking.html>.

# PUT THE PEN TO PAPER

At 2nd Story we believe that sharing first-person, true stories has the power to change hearts and minds, and we want to know what stories are living inside of you.

We invite you to share your story. Below are several writing prompts that you can use to share a story from your own life that parallels the themes and ideas in this real-life story. Select a prompt and begin writing on the next page!

## SHARE A TIME WHEN YOU:

- CHALLENGED YOURSELF TO TRY SOMETHING NEW**
- EXPERIENCED A MOMENT OF CONFLICT**
- ESTABLISHED A NEW TRADITION**
- DEFENDED YOUR IDENTITY**
- CHALLENGED THE WAY OTHERS SAW YOU**
- LEARNED SOMETHING NEW ABOUT YOURSELF**
- WERE ON A JOURNEY THAT OTHERS DID NOT UNDERSTAND**



**I'D READ BEFORE THAT YOGA CAN LEAD TO A  
VEGETARIAN DIET. YOGA ASKS YOU TO  
CONSIDER HOW YOU TREAT OTHERS, HOW YOU  
TREAT YOURSELF, EVEN THE ENVIRONMENT  
AROUND YOU. NONVIOLENCE IS A BIG DEAL.  
KILLING AN ANIMAL JUST SO YOU CAN EAT IT  
JUST DOESN'T SIT RIGHT WITH SOME YOGIS.  
AND THAT WAS IT FOR ME.**

**JESSICA YOUNG**