



# *Classroom Activities*

## **NIKI NAKAYAMA**

*A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*

# Niki Nakayama: Classroom Activities

## ABOUT THE BOOK

**NIKI NAKAYAMA:** *A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*

By Jamie Michalak

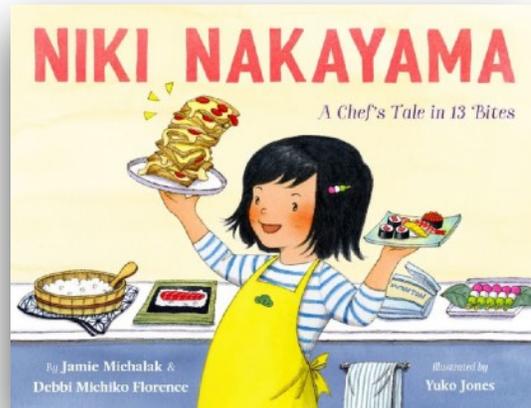
By Debbi Michiko Florence

Illustrated by Yuko Jones

Published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux

ISBN-13: 9780374313876

Age Range: 4 - 12 Years



**Niki Nakayama: A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites** is a picture book biography that tells the story of the powerhouse female Japanese-American chef and her rise to fame.

As both a child and adult, Niki Nakayama faced many naysayers in her pursuit of haute cuisine. Using the structure of a traditional kaiseki meal, the authors Debbi Michiko Florence and Jamie Michalak playfully detail Niki's hunger for success in thirteen "bites" – from wonton wrappers she used to make pizza as a kid to yuzu-tomatillo sauce in her own upscale Los Angeles Michelin-starred restaurant, n/naka.

To anyone who tells her a woman can't be a master chef, Niki lets her food do the talking. And oh, does it talk! Niki was featured on the first season of Netflix's culinary documentary series *Chef's Table*. Niki is currently a featured teacher on *MasterClass*.

A smart, strong woman with star power, Niki is only just getting started – like the young readers who will devour this book, featuring illustrations by Yuko Jones!

A Junior Library Guild Gold Selection



"Art, storytelling, and food work together on so many levels in this beautiful tale about master chef Niki Nakayama's life." – *Booklist*, **starred review**



"Mixed media and digital art by Jones make each vignette atmospheric, with varying angles and insets, toothsome details, and watercolor washes." – *Publishers Weekly*, **starred review**

"Determined heroine, delightful story, delectable illustrations: Both young readers and their adults will be inspired and charmed by every spread of this book." – Linda Sue Park, Newbery Medalist

"Well-chosen details in this picture book biography chart a young chef's development as she forges her own path using food to tell her story...This empowering picture book biography is both lively and thoughtful, and a strong choice for primary grade readers who enjoy exploring culture through food." – *School Library Journal*

# Niki Nakayama: Classroom Activities

## ACTIVITIES

Most of the activities below have individual self-directed activity sheets on the proceeding pages. You know your readers best, however, so feel free to use these ideas to simply inspire your own recipe for reader engagement.

### *13 Bites: Telling Your Story*

ELA Activity  
(Pages 7-9)

Like the staged, connected, (and absolutely delicious) courses of the Japanese storytelling meal kaiseki, the authors tell Niki Nakayama's story in 13 parts or "bites."

This writing activity invites readers of the biography to become writers of their own story. Invite your readers to choose 13 objects, meals, books, or people as the anchors for writing their own biography.



**Art & ELL Extension:** Illustrator Yuko Jones revisits meals and memories with her artwork framed within circles. Invite students to create representations of their objects, meals, books, or people within circles to accompany their writing.

### *Kaiseki: Food & Memory*

STEAM Activity  
(Page 10)

Food is often connected to memory. When Niki Nakayama first enjoyed kaiseki, or a storytelling feast, it evoked memories. Tastes and smells can remind the eater of something from their past.

Can you use this picture book biography to build a STEM lesson on the five senses? Award-winning STEM educator Suzanne Costner offers these resources:



## Books

**My Five Senses (Let's-Read-and-Find-Out Science 1)** by Aliki (HarperCollins)  
**You Can't Taste a Pickle With Your Ear** by Harriet Ziefert (Blue Apple Books)  
**The Magic School Bus Explores the Senses** by Joanna Cole (Scholastic)

# Niki Nakayama: Classroom Activities

## Lessons

[Teacher's Guide: The Five Senses](#) (Source: KidsHealth in the Classroom)

[Experience Water in Five Ways: Using Your 5 Senses](#) (Source: Wet Science Center)

[Exploring Taste: Sweet, Sour, Salty, and Bitter](#) (Source: Education.com)

[Five Basic Tastes and Tongue Mapping](#) (Source: STEM Learning)

If you want to take the lessons into space:

[Five Senses in Space](#) (Source: Canadian Space Agency)

[Space Food and Japanese Space Food](#) (Source: The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency)

To expand this exploration into a STEAM lesson, have readers choose someone in their classroom, home, or larger community to interview. Interview subjects can be asked to recall a food or meal memory using all of their five senses.

## Asakusa to Takasaki: Mapping Food

### Geography Activity

(Page 11)

On the "Bite 5" spread in **Niki Nakayama: A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites**, illustrator Yuko Jones uses a pictorial map to depict Niki's eating tour of Japan.

Can you use this image as the stepping off point for a local geography lesson? That lesson could include a walking tour of independently owned restaurants like Niki's n/naka. Perhaps you could even arrange to have your readers meet a female and/or Japanese chef. What kinds of maps could be created of neighborhood food locations? Alternatively, have readers grocery shop with their families and map what areas of the store the family visits for everyday food.



## Inventing Dishes & Making Menus

### ELA & Math Activity

(Templates on Pages 12-14)

Young Niki invented her own dishes like Wonton Pizza. She now invents new kaiseki dishes every night to serve her guests at her award-winning restaurant.

Can your readers invent 13 dishes they would like to serve at an imagined restaurant?



# *Niki Nakayama: Classroom Activities*

Using the provided template, can your readers create names, descriptions, and prices for each of their envisioned dishes?

Pairs of readers can swap menus and “place an order” with the “restaurant owner.” The provided template includes a traditional restaurant order pad to write the order, fill in the prices, add up the bill, and apply the tax.

## *Each Dish a Work of Art*

### Art Activity

Yuko Jones’s illustrations open many doors to exploring Niki’s story through art. The artistry of Japanese food presentation alone could launch several projects. To see photos of food served at *n/naka*, search the hashtag #nikinakayama on Instagram or visit the [n/naka](#) website.



Art educator Kelly McConnell offers up these ideas for creating a food sculpture from paper. Look for her art extensions on the lessons “13 Bites: Telling Your Story” and “Kuyashii! vs. Your Hopes & Dreams.”

### *3-D Art*

Could young artists create 3-D representations of one of Niki Nakayama’s dishes or one of their own imagined culinary treats? Use the book as an opportunity to teach the 3-D paper shapes of cylinder, sphere, cone, cube, and spiral. How can those shapes be colored, collaged, and combined to create a paper food sculpture?

### *Plates & Plating*

Resist the temptation to use a plain paper plate as the base of these paper sculptures. Plating, or how food is arranged on a plate, is important to any chef. The plate itself is very important to Niki Nakayama and Japanese food culture in general. Visit an Asian market and take photos of the shapes, textures, and patterns of Japanese dishware. After showing these images and paying close attention to Yuko Jones’s illustrated plates, give your students blue or black paper and a medium in lighter colors to design and then shape their plate.

### *Strike a Pose*

Once your readers have plated 3-D food, can they strike a “proud chef” pose like Niki Nakayama does on the cover of the book? Add a yellow apron! If any of your pictures can be shared, tag them with #NikiNakayamaBook.

# Niki Nakayama: Classroom Activities

## *Nihongo & Other Languages*

Non-English Language Activity  
(Pages 15-16)

To explore how Americans of all backgrounds retain and integrate the non-English words for food and family, consider having your readers partner with a person in their classroom, home, or community to learn six words about food and sharing meals together. A provided template allows the pair to collaboratively create language flash cards. Cards could be combined for a whole global eating deck!



**ELL Extension:** This activity exhibits the strengths of your ELL students who have more than one language in their astounding brains.

## *Kuyashii! vs. Your Hopes & Dreams*

Social Emotional Learning Activity  
(Pages 17-18)

In Japanese, there's a word for the defeated feeling that happens when people put you down or say you can't do something: kuyashii. Every reader will recognize Niki's frustration with kuyashii or being told her culinary dreams were not attainable or sustainable.

Child therapist LCSW Bonnie Thomas explores these frustrations and offers readers strategies for self-supporting their dreams with affirmations and an ongoing dream board.



**Art Extension:** Observe the way illustrator Yuko Jones uses water to represent not only the flow of kaiseki but also the transitions of Niki's life. Consider exploring kuyashii with a wax resist watercolor painting. The negative words and barriers to Niki attaining her dream could be written on watercolor paper with white crayon. Washing over those words with watercolor, your artists can see that color and dreams have the power to overcome words of resistance. Switch the activity for personal exploration. Let your readers write positive words in white and have them shine through the final watercolor.

# *Niki Nakayama: Classroom Activities*

## *Wonton Pizza Recipe*

Cooking Activity  
(Page 19)

Young Niki liked to "imagine...explore ...and invent!" Download and share one of her very first recipes. What recipe will your reader chefs invent?



## *Your Own Recipe for Delicious Lessons:*

# 13 Bites: Telling Your Story

Like the staged, connected and absolutely delicious courses of kaiseki, the authors choose to tell Niki Nakayama's story in 13 parts or "bites."

*Could you tell your own life story in 13 parts?*

Think back to the stories told about you as a younger kid. Consider the events that make up your life now. What are your key memories?

*Like the authors use 13 foods as the basis of telling Niki's story, what 13 "things" could you use to tell your story?*

**For example**, could you choose 13 toys (from a rattle to a bike) or 13 pieces of clothing (from a bib to jeans) as the basis to tell us about your life? As in the book, you could choose 13 foods or meals (from baby food to pizza). You could even use books you have read (or that were read to you) to tell your story. Or, how about people? Your relationships with 13 people could also tell us how you have moved through your amazing life story.

Use these sheets to brainstorm 13 different things (or people) and what they tell us about your life. Turn your brainstorm into a written biography!

*Thing 1:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Role in Life Story:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Thing 2:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Role in Life Story:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



*As Niki grew older, she hungered to create her own life story.*

– **NIKI NAKAYAMA:**

*A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*

# 13 Bites: Telling Your Story

Thing 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thing 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thing 5: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thing 6: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thing 7: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Thing 8: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# 13 Bites: Telling Your Story

Thing 9: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thing 10: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thing 11: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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Thing 12: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Thing 13: \_\_\_\_\_

Role in Life Story: \_\_\_\_\_

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*Now, bite into your writing project. Your story will be delicious, we just know it!*

# Kaiseki: Food & Memory

*Food is often connected to memories.*

**For example**, there may be food that is served in your family on a particular holiday. Or there may be a food that is always served when you visit someone's home. Sometimes a taste can instantly remind you of something that happened when you tasted that food before.

When Niki Nakayama first enjoyed kaiseki, or a storytelling feast, it evoked memories. Tastes and smells can remind the eater of something from their past.

*Let's discover how food and memory are linked through the five senses with STEM exploration and community interviews.*

- Explore the five senses with books from the library or with STEM lessons.
- Choose someone in your classroom, home, or larger community to interview.
- Ask your interview subject to think about a food that holds memories of somewhere they have been or someone they shared the meal with.
- Tell your subject what you have learned about the five senses.
- Ask them to tell you more details of their memory using all five of their senses.
- Record all their answers in writing, pictures, and/or on a device. Your teacher can tell you how long your interview should be and in what final format. *If you are working on this project on your own, set your own delicious goal.*



*The tomato's scent brought back memories of a long-ago picnic.*

**—NIKI NAKAYAMA:**  
*A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*

**Interview Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# Asakusa to Takasaki: Mapping Food

Turn to "Bite 5" in the picture book **Niki Nakayama: A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites**. Look at how illustrator Yuko Jones has created a map of Tokyo and Niki's trip north. This is not like a Google Map that shows the streets and where to turn; this is a pictorial map that tells where Niki was and what she ate.

*Can you make a map of the places you or others in your community eat?*

That could be a map of the independently owned restaurants\* in your community. It could be a map of the supermarket where your family shops and the shelves or areas where you pick up your everyday food.

Work with your teacher to decide whether you will create a map on a grid or make a pictorial map like Yuko Jones did. Consider using a map key and compass rose. Explore these mapping tools at your library.

Use the space below to brainstorm a list of things you want on your map and where they are located.

\* *An independently owned restaurant is one like Niki's n/naka. Her restaurant is owned by one person or a group of people. McDonalds, for example, is not independently owned, but owned and managed by a big corporation.*



*She traveled to Tokyo, Japan, where she spent her days discovering the city, one bite at a time.*

– **NIKI NAKAYAMA:**  
*A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Inventing Dishes & Making Menus

Young Niki invented her own dishes like Wonton Pizza. She now invents new kaiseki dishes every night to serve her guests at her award-winning restaurant.

*Can you invent 13 dishes to serve at an imaginary restaurant? What will that restaurant be called? What will its theme or cooking style be?*

Drop into local restaurants for a takeout menu. Or search online to get ideas for creating dishes or designing and writing menus. Take some notes below.

Using the provided menu template, create names, descriptions, and prices for each of your envisioned dishes.

When you are happy with your menu, find a partner to swap menus with. Have your partner "place an order" from your menu. Write out their order on the provided order pad template.

Add the prices, total the bill, and calculate the tax. What is the final price for the meal? You are in business!



*Every night, Chef Niki invents delicious dishes. She never serves the same meal to a customer twice.*

**– NIKI NAKAYAMA:**

*A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*

*Notes:* \_\_\_\_\_

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# Welcome

# MENU



This imagined menu was inspired by the book  
**NIKI NAKAYAMA: A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites**  
by Jamie Michalak, Debbi Michiko Florence  
and illustrated by Yuko Jones (FSG).  
Image © Yuko Jones. #NikiNakayamaBook



# Nihongo & Other Languages

Americans speak all the languages of the world including the indigenous languages of North America. Holding onto the language of your ancestors means holding onto something essential about yourself.

But, it is not unusual for an American to lose the ability to fully speak their community's first language(s). Many of the words that do remain are the words for beloved foods. Many of those words even become accepted by all English speakers. For example, is there an English word for sushi? No, English speakers use the Japanese word!

**Seek out a person in your classroom, family, or community who speaks a language or languages other than English.** If you yourself are just learning English, find an English-speaker to do this activity with. Ask your partner to teach you words that have to do with family and friends gathering to share a meal together.

The templates below allow you to write a word in your language on one side of the dotted line and your partner to write the word in their language on the other side of the dotted line. Note what language the word is in at the bottom.

Cut the template on the solid line and fold on the dotted line (with your written text on the outside). Glue the interior blank sides together. You have created language flash cards! Swap flash cards with others and discover the global language of eating together!



*Outside of Niki's house was Los Angeles. Inside of her house was Japan.*

– **NIKI NAKAYAMA:**

*A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*



Language:

Language:

# *Nihongo & Other Languages*

*Language:*

*Language:*

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# Kuyashii! vs. Your Hopes & Dreams

Throughout Niki Nakayama's childhood and early career she had a strong and determined dream to be a chef, but she faced resistance and gender barriers from those who assumed only men could be chefs.

**Kuyashii:** the defeated feeling that happens when people put you down or say you can't do something.

*Have you ever felt kuyashii or underestimated by those around you?*

Niki was determined to show her family and peers that her dream was important and that nothing was going to stand in her way of achieving it.

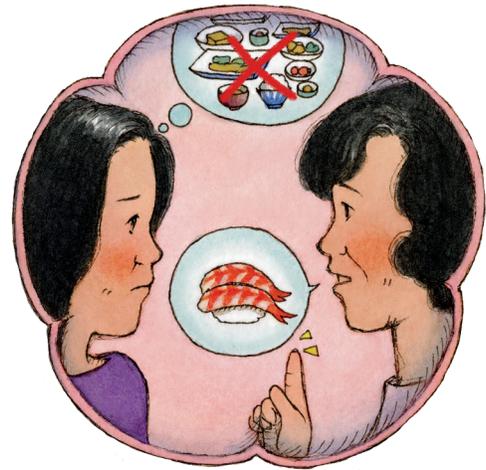
*How can you feed your hopes and dreams?*

## Discussion and Exploration

- What are *your* hopes and dreams?
- What would your life be like and how would you feel if you achieved your dreams?
- Have you ever told someone your hopes or dreams and they responded with **encouraging** words like, *You can do whatever you put your heart and mind to* **or** *I support you* **or** *You got this* **or** *I believe in you*? If so, how did that feel?
- Have you ever told someone your hopes or dreams and they responded with **discouraging** or doubting words like *You can't do that because...* **or** *That's impossible* **or** *That's not how the world works* **or** *You don't really want to do that*? If so, how did that feel?
- How do you want others to respond to you and your dreams?
- What are encouraging words we can say to ourselves and other people when they have a dream they want to achieve?

## Let's Be Dream Makers

- Pay attention to what delights and inspires you.
- Keep track of your hopes and dreams. They might change throughout your life, and that's okay. You can keep track of your dreams by making a list, journaling about them, or making a dream board.



*Kuyashii! Niki thought.  
"I'll show them!"*

**– NIKI NAKAYAMA:**

*A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*

# *Kuyashii! vs. Your Hopes & Dreams*

## *Let's Be Dream Makers (cont.)*

- If someone tells you that you can't achieve your dream, say, *Yes, I can!* You do not even have to say it out loud. You can say it to yourself!
- Stay close to those who encourage you to be yourself and follow your dreams.
- When people are not supportive, ignore their words. If the words hurt or make you question yourself, go back and look at your list, journal, or dream board to remind you of what's important to you.
- Say positive, uplifting, and encouraging words to yourself. There may be days when you're the only one cheering yourself on. Tell yourself: *I can do this.* Tell yourself: *I have done hard things before and I can do this too.* Tell yourself that: *I'm unstoppable.*
- Ask for help and look for resources. Librarians, teachers, coaches, and guidance counselors are just some of many people who might connect you to information and resources related to your interests and dreams.

## *Make a Dream Board*

A dream board begins with a large piece of paper. Poster board, a recycled grocery paper bag cut to shape, or cardboard from a box all work well for this project. That piece of paper becomes a Dream Board when you decorate it with words and pictures related to your dreams. These pictures and words can be created by you or they can be cut from recycled magazines or other printed materials. Add other decorations like stickers if you have them. Here are some ideas of things to include in your dream board:

My dream is...

- What's important to me is...
- Draw or list any people who encourage you to be you. You can include people you haven't met in person who inspire you to be true to yourself and your dreams – like Niki Nakayama. Don't forget to draw yourself!
- Draw a picture of you living your dream.

Write or cut out encouraging statements like...

- *My dream is important*
- *I can do this*
- *I can do hard things*
- *I'm unstoppable*



# Wonton Pizza Recipe

MAKES 12 MINI PIZZAS

## INGREDIENTS

- 36 wonton wrappers
- 8 oz tomato sauce
- 6 oz shredded mozzarella
- Cooking oil, for greasing the baking sheet
- Italian seasonings (optional)
- Extra toppings, like veggies or pepperoni (optional)

## INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven to 450° Fahrenheit. Always be sure to have an adult help you when you use the stove or oven!

1. Lightly grease two baking sheets. (One will also do! You can work in two batches of six.)
2. Stack three wrappers (assuming they're very thin) on top of one another. Fold each of the four sides up and over ¼" to make a square crust. Press down on each fold so it stays put. Do this again for the remaining eleven pizzas, and place them on your baking sheets.
3. Spoon 1–2 teaspoons of sauce onto each pizza square. Sprinkle cheese on top, and then add spices to taste. Use any extra toppings you want, but be sure they are in small pieces so they cook evenly with the rest of the pizza.
4. Bake pizzas for 7–10 minutes, or until the crust is brown and the cheese is bubbling.
5. Let cool slightly, then dig in!

## HELPFUL TIPS

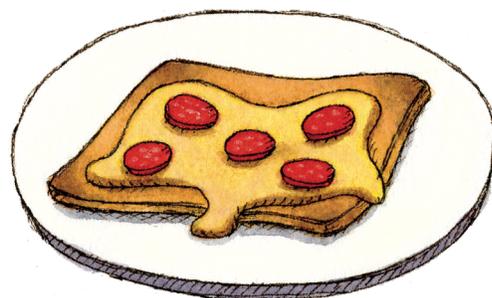
It's normal to have leftover sauce and cheese. If the pizzas are soggy, try pre-baking the crust for three minutes before adding sauce and toppings.



*She liked to imagine . . .  
explore . . . and invent!*

*Most of all, Niki loved  
making up her own  
recipes.*

**– NIKI NAKAYAMA:**  
*A Chef's Tale in 13 Bites*



*What recipe will you invent?*