Lit Cookbook Club: Exploring Literature Through Food and Culture

Otselic Valley Public Library

Young Adult

|

Adults

Lit Cookbook Club: Exploring Literature Through Food and Culture

May 14, 2026

$101-250

$$

Byline

Katy Charles, Library Director, Otselic (N.Y.) Valley Public Library

The Otselic Valley Public Library’s Lit Cookbook Club pairs literature with themed cookbooks to create an immersive cultural and literary experience. Participants read a selected book, prepare recipes from a companion cookbook at home, and gather to share a meal, discuss the text, and participate in themed trivia. Featured programs included Edgar Allan Poe paired with *A Ravenous Feast* and *Crying in H Mart* paired with Korean cookbooks. The program encourages literacy, cultural exploration, community engagement, and hands-on learning through food, conversation, and shared experiences.

Advanced Planning

The primary goals of the Lit Cookbook Club were to deepen literary engagement, encourage cultural exploration, and strengthen community connections through shared experiences. Planning began approximately 1–2 months before each session and included selecting books and companion cookbooks, developing trivia activities, promoting the event, and organizing discussion materials. Library staff coordinated the logistics and created an inviting atmosphere for discussion and shared meals. One unexpected challenge involved access to specialty ingredients in our rural community, particularly during the Korean-themed program, but participants embraced the challenge, and many reported visiting an Asian market for the first time.

Marketing

The program was promoted through the library’s social media pages, flyers within the library and school community, word-of-mouth promotion, and community newsletters. Marketing focused on the unique combination of literature, cooking, and cultural exploration, which generated strong interest from patrons looking for a nontraditional book club experience. Participant enthusiasm helped grow interest organically, as attendees shared photos and discussed their experiences with others in the community.

Budgeting

Program costs were relatively low and primarily included printed materials, decorations, trivia supplies, and light refreshments. Participants prepared and brought their own dishes, which helped keep expenses manageable while also increasing personal investment in the program. Cost-cutting suggestions for other libraries would include using donated materials, free online trivia platforms, and selecting cookbooks that rely on accessible ingredients.

Day-of-event Activity

Preparation for the event included arranging tables for a shared meal, setting up serving areas, organizing discussion prompts and trivia materials, and preparing a welcoming environment for participants. One to two staff members managed the setup and facilitated the discussion and activities. The largest logistical considerations involved coordinating food sharing and ensuring enough space for participants and dishes. Overall, the events ran smoothly and created a warm, collaborative atmosphere.

Program Execution

The Lit Cookbook Club successfully created an engaging and immersive literary experience for participants. During the first session, patrons explored Edgar Allan Poe alongside recipes from *A Ravenous Feast*, while the second session paired *Crying in H Mart* with Korean cookbooks, including *Umma* and *The Korean Vegan,* and cultural trivia. Participants enthusiastically prepared dishes, shared personal experiences, and engaged in thoughtful discussions about literature and culture.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many attendees expressing appreciation for the program’s creativity and community-building atmosphere. Several participants noted that they tried new foods, ingredients, and cultural experiences for the first time because of the program.

Advice

Libraries interested in creating a similar program should start with accessible book and cookbook pairings that encourage exploration without overwhelming participants.

Including interactive elements such as trivia, themed décor, and guided discussions helps transform the event into a memorable experience rather than a traditional book club meeting.

Most importantly, creating a welcoming and conversational atmosphere around a shared meal encourages meaningful connections and strong community engagement.

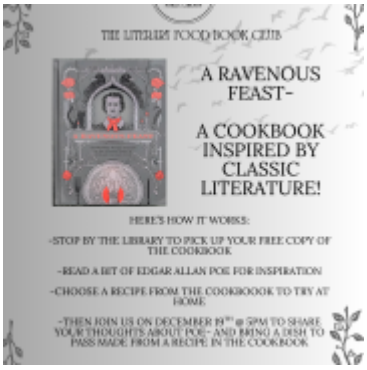
Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images



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