

Stinky Tofu

ESL Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

Stinky tofu is one of Taiwan's most iconic and **controversial** street foods enjoyed by millions daily. This unique dish gets its powerful smell from a special **fermentation** process that takes several days to complete. Regular tofu is soaked in a brine made from fermented milk, vegetables, meat, and Chinese herbs carefully. The fermentation breaks down proteins in the tofu, creating the strong **aroma** that can be detected from blocks away. Despite its challenging smell, stinky tofu remains one of the most beloved comfort foods across all of Taiwan.



There are several different **varieties** of stinky tofu, and each one has its own unique flavor and texture. Deep-fried stinky tofu is the most popular version, featuring a golden crispy outside and soft creamy inside perfectly. Steamed stinky tofu is a lighter option often served in bamboo baskets with spicy dipping sauce on the side. Grilled stinky tofu is cooked over charcoal and **brushed** with sweet sauce and chili paste before serving customers. Mapo-style stinky tofu is served in a spicy broth that warms the body during Taiwan's cooler winter months.

Night markets are the best places to **experience** authentic stinky tofu in its most traditional prepared forms. Famous night markets like Shilin, Raohe, and Fengjia all have **renowned** stinky tofu vendors with long lines. Each vendor has a secret family recipe for the fermentation brine that has been passed down for generations. The tofu is typically served with pickled **cabbage** and a tangy chili sauce that perfectly complements the flavor. Watching vendors prepare fresh stinky tofu over massive woks is an unforgettable sensory experience for all visitors.

Stinky tofu has deep **cultural** significance in Taiwanese society that goes far beyond simple street food enjoyment. It represents the idea that appearances can be deceiving, as something that smells terrible can taste absolutely wonderful. Many Taiwanese people associate stinky tofu with childhood memories of visiting night markets with their loving families. The dish has also become a popular **symbol** of Taiwanese identity that tourists specifically seek out during visits. Food bloggers and travel shows regularly feature stinky tofu as a must-try Taiwanese food experience for viewers.

In recent years, stinky tofu has gained international **recognition** as global food culture becomes more adventurous overall. Several Taiwanese stinky tofu restaurants have expanded to other countries including the United States and Japan successfully. Chefs are creating modern versions that reduce the smell while preserving the distinctive flavor that people love greatly. Some restaurants offer stinky tofu pizza, stinky tofu fries, and other creative **fusion** dishes for curious customers. Whether traditional or modern, stinky tofu continues to fascinate food lovers around the entire world completely.

A. Vocabulary

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|-----------------------|---|
| 1. controversial ____ | a. a type of vegetable with thick green leaves |
| 2. fermentation ____ | b. well known and respected for quality |
| 3. aroma ____ | c. the mixing of different cultural styles together |
| 4. varieties ____ | d. being acknowledged and appreciated publicly |
| 5. brushed ____ | e. causing disagreement or different opinions |
| 6. experience ____ | f. a strong and distinctive smell |

7. renowned ____

8. cabbage ____

9. cultural ____

10. recognition ____

g. related to the beliefs and customs of a group

h. different types or kinds of something

i. the chemical process of breaking down food

j. to directly see, feel, or participate in something

B. True or False

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Stinky tofu gets its smell from a fermentation process. — | 2. Deep-fried stinky tofu is the least popular variety. — | 3. Night markets are the best places to find stinky tofu. — |
| 4. Every vendor uses the same recipe for the brine. — | 5. Stinky tofu is typically served with pickled cabbage. — | 6. Stinky tofu has no cultural significance in Taiwan. — |
| 7. Some Taiwanese stinky tofu restaurants have opened in other countries. — | 8. Grilled stinky tofu is cooked over charcoal. — | 9. Stinky tofu was invented in Japan. — |

C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: controversial, fermentation, aroma, varieties, renowned, cultural, recognition

1. Stinky tofu is one of Taiwan's most _____ street foods.
2. The special _____ process takes several days to complete.
3. The strong _____ can be detected from blocks away.
4. There are several different _____ of stinky tofu.
5. Stinky tofu has deep _____ significance in Taiwanese society.

D. Comprehension Questions

1. How is stinky tofu made?
2. What are the different ways stinky tofu can be cooked?
3. Where are the best places to find stinky tofu in Taiwan?
4. Why is stinky tofu culturally important in Taiwan?
5. How has stinky tofu spread to other countries?

E. Discussion Questions

1. Would you be willing to try stinky tofu? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of other foods that smell bad but taste good?
3. Why do you think street food is important to a country's culture?

Answer Key

A. Vocabulary: 1-e, 2-i, 3-f, 4-h, 5-j, 6-d, 7-b, 8-a, 9-g, 10-c

B. True/False: 1-T, 2-F, 3-T, 4-F, 5-T, 6-F, 7-T, 8-T, 9-F

C. Fill Blanks: 1-controversial, 2-fermentation, 3-aroma, 4-varieties, 5-cultural

D. Comprehension: 1. Regular tofu is soaked in fermented brine for several days; 2. Deep-fried, steamed, grilled, and mapo-style; 3. Night markets like Shilin, Raohe, and Fengjia; 4. It represents childhood memories and Taiwanese identity; 5. Restaurants have expanded to the US and Japan