Street Food in Europe: Who Decides What Is Traditional?

Name Date Class

Reading

1 It is midnight in Berlin, and you are standing at a street stand with a paper tray of sliced sausage covered in curry-flavored ketchup, a small wooden fork stuck in the top. This is currywurst. If you asked ten Berliners what counts as the city's real street food, you would probably get ten different answers, but this dish would be on many of their lists. Across Europe, street food stories like this one often turn out to be about people and ingredients arriving from somewhere else.

2 According to the story most often told, currywurst began in 1949, when a snack-stand owner named Herta Heuwer in the Charlottenburg district got hold of ketchup and curry powder from British soldiers. She **improvised** a spiced sauce, poured it over grilled sausage, and found that it sold well to the construction workers who were rebuilding the damaged city. The details are hard to check, but the main idea is believable: a dish made in a time of shortage from **imported** ingredients that foreign soldiers happened to have. The snack spread quickly. Konnopke's Imbiss in East Berlin says that it began selling currywurst in 1960, so the dish soon became known on both sides of a divided city.

3 Berlin's other famous street food has a different background. The Turkish word döner comes from a verb meaning to turn, which describes the meat on its slowly rotating vertical spit. Turkish cooks had long roasted meat this way, but the sandwich version, in which sliced meat is served in flatbread, took shape in West Berlin in the 1970s, where many Turkish workers had come to live and work. Today it usually comes with salad and sauce, but early versions reportedly held only meat, onion, and a little lettuce. An industry association **credits** a worker named Kadir Nurman with selling the first döner sandwich near the Zoo station in 1972. At least one other person has made a **rival** claim for 1971, and there is evidence that döner was served in some Turkish restaurants in Germany even earlier. The same association **estimates** that Germany now has well over ten thousand döner stands.

4 Neither dish is more than about eighty years old, yet both have become **staples** of daily life in Germany. Both have also kept changing, which makes any fixed idea of the original harder to defend. A food that many people have eaten for decades has a history of its own, even if it is not an ancient one. If a dish had to be centuries old to count as traditional, currywurst and döner would both fail the test. That is why the word **authentic** causes so much argument. Does it mean old, local, or made by the people who first cooked it?

5 Prague offers the clearest case. In the old town, stalls selling trdelník, a hollow spiral pastry baked over coals and rolled in sugar and nuts, are **ubiquitous**. The pastry is often **marketed** as an old Czech tradition, but that description is **misleading**. Trdelník **descends** from the chimney cake of Hungarian-speaking Transylvania, and it is a **specialty** of the Slovak town of Skalica, whose version has had protected status under European Union rules since 2007. Prague's own contribution seems to be the cone filled with ice cream that became popular in its cafes.

6 Does it matter? Some Czechs say it does, mainly because visitors leave with a false idea of what Czech food is. Their complaint is about the **label**, not the pastry. If the stalls sold it as a Central European treat, few people would **object**. A fair reply is that every food was new once, and that currywurst and döner would not pass a test of age either.

7 Food will always **evolve**, and the stories attached to it change too. The EU's protected status covers a name tied to one town, not every pastry of this type. So the question is not only where a dish came from, but how long a street food needs to be sold before a city can call it its own.

Vocabulary Matching

Match each word from the reading with its meaning. Write the letter on the line.

1	**improvised**	_____	**A**	brought into a country from another country
2	**imported**	_____	**B**	a word used to describe or name something
3	**credits**	_____	**C**	to say that you do not agree with something
4	**rival**	_____	**D**	advertised and sold in a particular way
5	**estimates**	_____	**E**	found everywhere or in very many places
6	**staples**	_____	**F**	to change and develop slowly over a long time
7	**authentic**	_____	**G**	says roughly how large an amount is
8	**ubiquitous**	_____	**H**	says that someone is responsible for something good
9	**marketed**	_____	**I**	real and true to the original, not an imitation
10	**misleading**	_____	**J**	comes from an older form through a line of change
11	**descends**	_____	**K**	a food that a place is especially known for
12	**specialty**	_____	**L**	made by a competing person or group
13	**label**	_____	**M**	foods that people eat regularly in daily life
14	**object**	_____	**N**	made something quickly with whatever was available
15	**evolve**	_____	**O**	giving a false idea about something

Fill in the Blank

Choose a word from the box to complete each sentence. Use each word once. The words are already in the correct form.

authentic	**credits**	**estimates**	**evolve**	**imported**	**improvised**	**label**	**marketed**	**misleading**	**object**
rival	**specialty**	**staples**	**ubiquitous**						

1 We had no oven, so we _____ a way to bake the bread.

2 Most of the coffee sold in this shop is _____ .

3 The mayor _____ the volunteers with saving the old market.

4 The two _____ bakeries stand on opposite sides of the square.

5 The builder _____ that the repair will take two weeks.

6 Rice and beans are _____ in many households.

7 The restaurant serves _____ food from the north of the country.

8 Smartphones are _____ in cities around the world.

9 The drink was _____ as a healthy choice for children.

10 The advertisement was _____ , so the shop had to change it.

11 Fish soup is the _____ of this small restaurant.

12 The _____ on the box says that the cake contains nuts.

13 Some neighbors _____ to the noise from the night market.

14 Street food tends to _____ as new people arrive in a city.

Comprehension Questions

Answer in your notebook or discuss with a partner. Questions 10 to 12 are IELTS-style.

1 What is currywurst, and how does the reading describe the scene at the start?

2 According to the story most often told, how did currywurst begin, and why does the writer say the details are hard to check?

3 Why was currywurst popular with construction workers in the early years?

4 How did the döner sandwich appear in West Berlin, and who claims to have invented it?

5 How does the reading show that the origin of the döner sandwich is not completely clear?

6 Why does the writer say that currywurst and döner would fail a test of age, and what question does this raise?

7 What does the reading say about where trdelník really comes from?

8 What is the complaint of some Czechs about trdelník?

9 What does the reading say the EU's protected status covers, and why does this matter to the writer's argument?

IELTS-Style Questions

10 **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Herta Heuwer patented her sauce in 1951."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

11 **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that trdelník should be banned from Prague's old town."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

12 **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer include the sentence about asking ten Berliners what counts as the city's real street food? What does it add to the opening paragraph?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false) according to the reading. Write a correction for each false statement on the dotted line.

1 **T / F** The reading begins at a street stand in Berlin at midnight.

2 **T / F** Herta Heuwer got ketchup and curry powder from Italian chefs.

3 **T / F** The reading says the details of the currywurst story are hard to check.

4 **T / F** Turkish cooks had roasted meat on a vertical spit long before the sandwich appeared in Berlin.

5 **T / F** The reading says that Germany has fewer than a thousand döner stands.

6 **T / F** The writer says currywurst and döner are both very old dishes.

7 **T / F** The reading says currywurst and döner would fail a test of being centuries old.

8 **T / F** The writer says that trdelník is an old Czech tradition.

9 **T / F** The Slovak town of Skalica has had protected status for its version of trdelník since 2007.

10 **T / F** Czech critics say their main problem is the taste of the pastry.

Discussion Questions

Talk with a partner or in a small group. The questions move from personal to more abstract.

1 What street food is popular where you live, and when do people usually eat it?

2 Do you prefer to eat street food standing up, or do you like to sit down? Why?

3 Is there a food in your country that was made popular by people who came from another place? Which one?

4 Currywurst may have started with ingredients that foreign soldiers happened to have. Can a good dish come from shortage and improvisation?

5 Many people now see döner as a German food. When does a food stop being foreign?

6 Several people claim to have invented the döner sandwich. Why do origin stories matter to businesses and to cities?

7 What does authentic mean to you when you talk about food: old, local, made by the first cooks, or something else?

8 Have you seen a food in your country sold to tourists with a story that may not be true? What was it?

9 Should visitors be told the real history of the food they buy, or is the taste enough?

10 Some Czechs object to the trdelník label. Who should decide how a country's food is presented to visitors?

11 The EU protects some food names, such as Skalický trdelník. What are the advantages and disadvantages of protecting a food name?

12 Some people worry that tourism changes local food to suit visitors. Have you noticed this in places you have visited?

13 Street food often follows migration. What can a food that travels with people tell us about a society?

14 Should a city try to protect traditional street food from change, or should vendors be free to experiment? Where would you draw the line?

Language Focus: The Second Conditional for Imagined Situations

The second conditional uses if with the past simple and would with a base verb: If + past simple, would + base verb. It talks about situations that are imaginary, unlikely, or opposite to the facts now.

In the reading:

- "If you **asked** ten Berliners what counts as the city's real street food, you **would** probably **get** ten different answers…"
- "If a dish **had** to be centuries old to count as traditional, currywurst and döner **would** both **fail** the test."
- "If the stalls **sold** it as a Central European treat, few people **would** object."

Practice: Rewrite this fact as a second conditional: *"I do not live in Berlin, so I cannot eat currywurst every day."* Begin with *If*.

Activities and speed challenge
englishbridges.com/lessons/street-food-europe

Notes