

COOKING SHOULDN'T BE CHILD'S PLAY

Read the text and do the multiple choice.



Take the fun out of cooking with your kids and there's a chance you'll have bred a chef with a great future. Television cook Nigella Lawson has revealed that her own mother put her and her sister "to work" in the kitchen from the age of five. For the young Nigella, preparing food was certainly not recreational. Sounds intriguing. Will her new series feature her putting young ones through a blisteringly tough regime, swearing as they bone out chickens and being blasted when their soufflé collapses? Apparently not, but she makes a good point. "Parents sometimes feel that they have to get into children's TV presenter mode and make cooking all fun and recreational." For the young Lawsons it was about getting a meal on the table. She and her sister took it in turns to cook their father's breakfast.

My mother took a similar view. She tutored us in cooking. We never made grey pastry in amusing shapes or had hilarious squirting sessions with icing bags. If we were going to cook, it was for a purpose. At first, the only aim was that it be edible. But my mother, noticed the interest my sisters and I had in cooking (in her defense, she never forced us to do it) and set us some challenging tasks. My speciality was sweet pastry. She would look over my shoulder and suggest rolling it thinner "so the light shines through it."

Nowadays, this instructive style of upbringing is frowned upon. Learning to make things has to be all about play and each creation is greeted with exaggerated applause. Parents plaster their kitchen walls with their five-year-old's paintings and poems; they tell their kids how clever and talented they will be. But experts say that overpraised children can, in fact, underachieve and that compliments should be limited and sincere. Analysis by researchers at Stanford University in California found that praising too much demotivates children - interestingly more so with girls than boys.

Playschool cookery exists alongside another culinary crime - making funny faces on the plate. The idea goes that it's nothing but fun, fun and more fun to eat the cherry-tomato eyes, mangetout mouth and broccoli hair. Hmmm, is it? At some point, the cartoon stuff has to go. I have had dinner with grown men who, I suspect, have yet to get over the fact that their fish is not cut out in the shape of a whale. I'd love to meet the comic genius who decided it was somehow good to urge our children to eat food shaped like an endangered species. Nigella Lawson remembers making giraffe-shaped pizzas for her children, only to be asked why they couldn't have ordinary ones like their dad. Smart kids, those.

Sooner or later we have to chuck out all those books that tell you and the little ones what a laugh cooking is and tell the truth. Cooking is a chore - and not an easy one for busy people to keep up. Better to be honest than discover this disagreeable fact later. If my mother had not made cooking something to take seriously, I suspect I would have eaten far more convenience food.

But you can go too far with budding chefs. Nigella might say her early training "just felt normal", but I am not sure that my childhood culinary regime was an ordinary part of growing up. Perhaps our families were too obsessed with food. We shouldn't be too didactic with our little ones, for children lose out if they never fool around with their parents.

The chef Mary Concini got it right, producing a great children's cookery book *Easy Peasy*. The recipes were for real meals - Italian-inspired, common-sense food. Dishes have fun names - Knock-out Garlic Bread and Chocolate Mouse, but all the basics are there. The secret of getting children cooking is perhaps a step away from the intense tutorial given to Nigella and myself. My recipe would be two parts seriousness and one part creative fun. The result should be a youngster with a real passion for food.

1 In the first paragraph, the writer suggest that there is a connection between

- A parents' enthusiasm for cooking and children's ability to cook.
- B teaching children to cook and making a popular TV cookery series.
- C childhood experiences of cooking and how much they enjoy doing it.
- D the effort children put into cooking and how much they enjoy doing it.

2 What does the writer say about her mother teaching her how to cook?

- A She sometimes resented her mother's demands on her.
- B Her mother's comments were intended to encourage her.
- C Her mother misunderstood her level of interest in cooking.
- D She wished that her mother would allow her to have more fun doing it.

3 In the third paragraph, the writer points out a contrast between

- A a belief about parental behavior and the response of children to this behavior.
- B public praise for children and private opinions of what they do.
- C the kind of praise given to boys and the kind given to girls.
- D what children are good at and what their parents would like them to be good at.

4 The writer mentions certain "grown men" as an example of people who

- A grew up having a lot of fun while learning to cook.
- B have the wrong idea about how children view food.
- C pass bad ideas about cooking on to their children.
- D think that everything associated with food has to be fun.

5 What does the writer suggest about regarding cooking as "a chore"?

- A It is something that children are not able to understand.
- B It is not necessary.
- C It can affect the kind of food that people cook and eat.
- D It is a lazy view.

6 The writer says that she differs from Nigella Lawson concerning

- A her aspirations as a cook.
- B her attitude to her family life as a child.
- C the way that children should be taught how to cook.
- D the amount of fun she thinks children should have at home.

