



# THE KNISH WAR ON RIVINGTON STREET

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*Benny's family sells the best knishes on Rivington Street. But then the Tisch family opens a knishery right across the street! Benny's papa starts a price war – and as the battle wages, both sides begin to realize that maybe Rivington Street is large enough for two kinds of knishes.*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

In the world of Jewish culture, the knish is not the only food item that sparks loyalty and controversy! Since the 1940s, several colleges in the US have hosted annual debates about the foods we eat at Hanukkah and Purim.

A latke-hamantasch debate may sound ridiculous, but some very serious people have participated in the deliberations over the years. The annual debate began at the University of Chicago and has featured university presidents, Nobel Prize winners, and world-class psychologists, chemists, philosophers, and poets—all making passionate arguments about the significance of potato pancakes and triangle-shaped cookies.

Some debaters claim the roundness of the latke represents the unity of spiritual life, while others say that the three corners of the hamantasch represent the triad of God, the Torah, and the Jewish people. A philosopher claimed that the immortal writings of Plato were called “dialatkes” because they provided a well-rounded intellectual feast, while a lawyer argued that fried potato pancakes are a serious threat and may increase the country’s dependence on foreign oil. A noted linguist pointed out that while the cookies themselves are delicious, the word hamantaschen is an irregular plural; he called for the rejection of “any food item that leaves its eaters unsure about how to refer to eating more than one!”

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

The knish is an iconic Jewish food that was brought to North America by eastern European immigrants around the turn of the twentieth century, and the first knish bakery is said to have opened in New York City in 1910. Dough-covered finger foods also feature in many other cultures, including the Spanish and Latin American empanada, the Italian calzone, and the Asian samosa.

In *The Knish War on Rivington Street*, two families have strong ideas about how to create the most delicious knish. Throughout the world, knishes (and related snacks) are fried, baked, or even grilled. They may be round, square, or triangular. Some are bite-size; some are as large as a sandwich. They include savory fillings such as potatoes, kasha (buckwheat), meat, sauerkraut, or cheese. Knishes can even be sweet, filled with fruit or sweet potatoes.

Why not have a knish party? Engage the entire family and choose several varieties of knish to make and enjoy together. You don’t need to have a “knish war,” but choosing teams that vie for the best knish in your family could be lots of fun!