

# Life Skills Lesson: The "Charlie's Choice" Cafe Challenge

**Subject:** Life Skills (Health, Math, Executive Functioning)

**Student:** Charlie (13-year-old homeschooler)

**Estimated Time:** 2.5 - 3 hours (can be split into a planning session and a cooking session)

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## Materials Needed

- **For Planning:**
    - Paper and pencil or a digital document
    - Access to the internet, cookbooks, or recipe cards
    - Local grocery store flyers or website access for pricing
    - Calculator (optional)
    - A set budget (e.g., \$20 - adjust as needed)
  - **For Cooking:**
    - All ingredients from the final shopping list
    - Standard kitchen equipment (pots, pans, bowls, measuring cups/spoons, cutting board, knives)
    - Oven mitts, apron (optional but fun)
    - Plates and utensils for serving
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## Lesson Plan

### 1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, Charlie will be able to:

- Plan a balanced, two-course meal (main course and dessert) for two people.
- Create a shopping list and calculate the total cost to stay within a predetermined budget.
- Safely follow recipes to prepare and cook the planned meal.
- Evaluate his work and identify one thing he did well and one thing he would do differently next time.

### 2. Introduction: The Chef's Challenge (15 minutes)

**Teacher's Role:** The "Restaurant Investor"

**Charlie's Role:** The "Head Chef and Cafe Owner"

1. **The Pitch:** Announce the challenge! "Charlie, today you are the owner and head chef of a brand new cafe: 'Charlie's Choice Cafe.' Your first task is to design, budget, and cook a signature two-course meal for two very important customers (you and me!)."
  2. **Set the Constraints:** "As the investor, I'm giving you a budget of [e.g., \$20] for all your
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ingredients. Your menu must include a main course and a dessert. It should also be reasonably balanced—think about including a protein, a carbohydrate, and maybe a vegetable or fruit."

3. **Brainstorm:** Ask Charlie what kinds of foods he enjoys making or eating. What comes to mind when he thinks of a main course and dessert? Jot down some initial ideas. This is just to get the creative juices flowing.

### 3. Activity Part 1: The Menu & The Budget (45-60 minutes)

**Teacher's Role:** The "Accountant / Food Consultant"

**Charlie's Role:** The "Menu Designer"

1. **Recipe Research:** Using cookbooks or safe recipe websites (like Allrecipes or Food Network), have Charlie find simple recipes for a main course and a dessert that he thinks he can make. Guide him toward recipes with clear instructions and common ingredients.
  - **Support:** If he's struggling, pre-select 3-4 options for him to choose from.
  - **Challenge:** Encourage him to find recipes that share an ingredient to be more cost-effective (e.g., using lemon in both a chicken dish and a dessert).
2. **Create a Shopping List:** Once recipes are chosen, Charlie must go through them and list every single ingredient and the quantity needed. Remind him to "shop the pantry" first—check what you already have to avoid buying duplicates.
3. **Budgeting:** Using grocery flyers or a local store's website, Charlie must find the price for each item on his list. This is a great real-world math application!
  - He may need to calculate the cost of a portion (e.g., if a bag of flour is \$4 but he only needs 1 cup, the cost for the recipe is much lower). You can simplify this by just using the full item price and explaining that the rest is "pantry stock."
  - He must total up the cost of his shopping list.
4. **Finalize the Menu:** Does the total fit within the budget?
  - **If he's over budget:** This is a key problem-solving moment! Ask him: "What can we substitute? Can we choose a different brand? Is there a less expensive ingredient that would work?" Guide him through making adjustments.
  - **If he's under budget:** Success! Ask him what he could do with the extra money (e.g., add a fancy drink, get a better quality ingredient).

### 4. Activity Part 2: The Cooking & The Service (60-90 minutes)

**Teacher's Role:** The "Sous Chef" (Assistant Chef)

**Charlie's Role:** The "Head Chef"

1. **Mise en Place (Everything in its Place):** Teach this essential kitchen term! Before cooking, Charlie should wash his hands, read through his recipes one more time, and gather all his ingredients and equipment.
2. **Follow the Recipe:** Charlie leads the cooking process. He reads the steps and performs the actions (measuring, mixing, etc.). You act as the assistant—helping with chopping if knife skills are still developing, supervising the stove/oven, and offering tips on technique. Emphasize kitchen safety throughout.
3. **Time Management:** Talk about timing. "The dessert needs to cool for 20 minutes, so let's make that first. While it's cooling, we can start the main course." This builds crucial planning skills.
4. **Plating and Serving:** When the food is ready, encourage Charlie to think about presentation. How can he make the plate look nice? He then serves the meal for the two of you at the "cafe."

## 5. Closure & Assessment: The Food Critic's Review (15 minutes)

**Teacher's Role:** The "Happy Customer"

**Charlie's Role:** The "Reflective Chef"

1. **Enjoy the Meal:** This is the reward! Eat the meal together and discuss the experience.
2. **Guided Reflection (Assessment):** Ask Charlie the following questions to assess his learning:
  - "Did we stay within our budget of [e.g., \$20]? Let's look at our final list." (*Measures budgeting objective*)
  - "On a scale of 1-5, how difficult was it to follow the recipes?" (*Measures recipe-following objective*)
  - "What is one part of this meal you are most proud of?" (*Encourages positive self-assessment*)
  - "If you were to open this cafe for real, what is one thing you would do differently next time?" (*Encourages critical thinking and growth*)
3. **Provide Feedback:** Praise his effort, creativity, and the delicious result. Point out specific successes, such as "I was really impressed with how you solved that budget problem," or "You did a great job measuring the flour accurately."

### Differentiation & Extension

- **For Support:**
  - Choose a single, simple recipe instead of a two-course meal.
  - Provide a pre-made shopping list and focus only on the cooking.
  - Do the budgeting math together step-by-step.
- **For Challenge (The "Michelin Star" Extension):**
  - Challenge Charlie to plan a meal for more people (e.g., the whole family).
  - Task him with creating a theme for his cafe (e.g., "Mexican Fiesta" or "Italian Bistro") and designing a simple menu on paper.
  - Have him calculate the nutritional information for the meal using an online tool.