

Dear Book Clubs,

Shortly after I finished writing *The Weight of Ink*, a friend surprised me with a meal made up of foods that related to the different parts of the novel. It was a supremely thoughtful gift, and of course a fun way to savor finishing the book.

In the spirit of my friend's gift—and as my way of thanking readers for their willingness to travel, via fiction, to the different settings of *The Weight of Ink*—here's a light-appetizer menu for book groups to try.

Each food or beverage below pays tribute to a character or location featured in the novel. In honor of Helen's months chopping vegetables in an army base's kitchen in the Israeli desert, I include **Israeli salads and hummus and tahini**. Inquisition refugees like Ester Velasquez's family would have been accustomed to **traditional Portuguese and other Mediterranean fare**—but once they were living in Amsterdam, they would have eaten more typical local foods—so in honor of Ester, Spinoza, and their Amsterdam Jewish cohort, feel free to set out **Mediterranean basics**, as well as **pickled herring** or other **Dutch staples** in honor of life along the canals. In tribute to Ester's years in London, I've included some simple English fare of the time: **bread and fruit preserves** were commonly served (anything from cherry to blueberry to quince), along with **a pungent Stilton or other English cheese**. Finally, for those in the mood for something sweet: for their day-trip up the Thames (and more eventfully, back down it), Mary da Costa Mendes provided Thomas, Ester, and John with **jumbal cakes**. While these aren't easily found in today's local bakeries, Charlotte Betts has a [great recipe](#) . . . or just substitute **sugar cakes**.

As for what to drink? While **coffee** was available in London in the mid-1600s, it was still a luxury. Manuel HaLevy insisted on having it anyway—so feel free to brew some in his honor. Or if you're so inclined, raise a glass of **wine or ale**, both of which were far easier to find in seventeenth-century London than safe and tolerable-tasting drinking water.

These are just suggestions, of course—feel free to come up with ideas of your own! There are wonderful Portuguese, Dutch, and Israeli cookbooks out there . . . and for anyone who wants to know more about food and drink of Ester's day, I recommend Liza Picard's *Restoration London*, which I consulted regularly for details of daily life in seventeenth-century London.

Enjoy!

- *Rachel*

A Weight of Ink Menu

Pickled herring, with or without dill and hard-boiled eggs – for those who want to try making the herring themselves, Jamie Oliver has a [great recipe](#).

An assortment of olives, crackers, almonds, and Mediterranean spreads like sun-dried tomatoes, eggplant salad, or grilled peppers

Hummus, tahini, and other Israeli salads

Stilton or another English cheese, served with bread and fruit preserves

Coffee, or wine or ale

For adventurous bakers, try a recipe for jumbal cakes—or feel free to substitute plain sugar cakes or sugar cookies!