

A Japanese meal as a prelude to deeper intercultural engagement.

One of our co-hosts also had several Japanese friends who she invited to meet with us. Among them was a Japanese language and culture instructor who was also quite practiced at teaching others to make Japanese cuisine. One late afternoon after a workshop featuring the Japanese Tea-Ceremony, she guided us in composing sushi rolls and gyoza, sunomono, and umami. We stood around the work station in Carole's kitchen with our bamboo, seaweed, sushi rice and ingredients and made Nora roles. Then we held paper thin dough in our hand, placed finely chopped filling into the small circles and delicately folded the dough to make dumplings. As we worked we talked with our instructor and observed her working alongside of us in making sunomono, and umami.



Then we awaited with anticipation the three other Japanese friends that Carole had invited to join us for this evening meal. When they arrived, we set ourselves down to eat the Japanese food we had carefully prepared with our teacher and three new Japanese friends. Following the meal, we shifted into a full circle so we all could see each other and hear about the varied intercultural journeys of these four Japanese women who had immigrated to the United States. We learned about how they were navigating what it meant to be Japanese and American in Des Moines, Iowa as well as what it meant to be American and Japanese as they ventured back to engage with family and friends in Japan.