

Sharing a Meal and Our Intercultural Journey

1. Introduction to _(Name of the Meal)_____ and its meaning to me. (Meal Host)

Prior to this opening session the co-facilitators / hosts will determine if they would like to include sharing of a full lunch, an afternoon tea or desert (depending upon the time of day) as part of their session gatherings. It is helpful to have the co-hosts plan on preparing and setting out food prior to the formal start of the session, so that there is an easy transition from the opening to this sharing section. It's also helpful to have at least one item on the menu that is vegetarian in order to honor the health and cultural preferences of your participants.

There are many intercultural dimensions to the art of cooking and the practice of sharing food with each other. When introducing the meal, the meal host(s) might want to talk about why they chose the particular dishes they chose, what kinds of ingredients are especially common in this cuisine, and what are the customs around serving and eating the food. It is helpful to illustrate how the food is dished up and eaten in order to help with the awkwardness of knowing how to proceed when first introduced to a new dish from a new cuisine.

Model: Chinese Hot-Pot and its meaning.

This particular dish was chosen because the practice of eating the food is a collective process; it includes several people putting items that have been cut up in advance into the pot – in essence you are co-creating the hot pot. It is a common dish in the Chongqing region of China and was introduced to my family by the Chinese high school student who lived with us last year. So, for our family, it brings back memories of the wonderful experiences we had with Taili while she was living with us. We would typically eat this on a weekend day when we had time to purchase and chop up the ingredients and linger at the table together over conversation. Most of the ingredients were purchased at a specialty Asian foods store because the hot-pot base, the thinly sliced beef or lamb meats, and several of the Chinese vegetables can only be found at these stores. As the food is cooked, each person around the table can scoop out into their individual bowls the items they are most interested in eating. Chopsticks are typically used for eating the food from the bowls. A specialty tea is frequently served along with the dish to help counter what can be very hot and spicy soup bases.

Segue to next portion. It's helpful for the facilitator to let the participants know that once everyone has had a chance to serve themselves, that they will continue their sharing with a question prompt.

2. Sharing of ourselves and our intercultural stories.

The purpose of this section is to help participants become more acquainted with each other through the lens of how they express themselves and how they experience engaging with others who are culturally different. Some members may be more adept at talking about their passions and interests because they actively externalize these interests (for example artists and musicians), but others may be more timid in responding as it may be a latent or long held dream yet to be realized. It should be made clear that participants are welcome to pass with any questions.

Potential Prompt Question for Sharing: ***What skill, talent, passion, interest, hobby are you inspired to share with others?***

