



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

NIFA

National Institute  
of Food  
and Agriculture



[https://nifa.usda.gov/  
program/4-h-positive-youth-  
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National Aeronautics  
and Space  
Administration

EXPEDITIONARY  
**SKILLS** FOR LIFE

A FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP FOR **STEM** EDUCATION

## LESSON PLAN: ACTIVITY 3.7

# USING THE DINNER TABLE TO CONVEY CULTURE

## LESSON DETAILS

### AGE/GRADE LEVEL

High School

### LEARNER OUTCOMES

Youth will work collaboratively with others who represent diverse cultures, relations and lifestyles.

Youth will be respectful and participate in cross-cultural conversations and learning.

### SUCCESS INDICATORS

Youth will compare and contrast images and experiences of people eating together. Youth will reflect and share their own experiences and cultural traditions with their peers.

### LIFE SKILLS

Social skills, communication, cultural awareness, recognizing diversity

### NATIONAL STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**21st Century Life & Career Skills:**  
/ SOCIAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL SKILLS / Interact effectively with others; work effectively in diverse teams

**21st Century: Content Knowledge**  
/ GLOBAL AWARENESS / Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts

### PREP TIME

15 minutes

### ACTIVITY TIME

1 hour 15 minutes (all activities combined)

### MATERIALS LIST

- images of people eating around a dinner table from different cultures
- paper
- crayons, markers, writing utensils
- sticky notes

### SUGGESTED SPACE

Tables and chairs

### SUGGESTED GROUP SIZE

Small groups or one large group

### INTRODUCTION INFORMATION

This information should be shared after the Introduction Activity.

### REFERENCES

Teaching Learning to Give Lessons  
<https://www.learningtogive.org/>

Culture, Food, and Identity: Culture and Development  
[http://www.normangirvan.info/  
wp-content/uploads/2008/06/  
culturefood-and-identity-6.pdf](http://www.normangirvan.info/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/culturefood-and-identity-6.pdf)

Why Food is an Important Part of the Culture  
[https://crossculturalrhetoric.  
wordpress.com/2012/03/22/  
why-food-is-an-important-part-of-  
the-culture/](https://crossculturalrhetoric.wordpress.com/2012/03/22/why-food-is-an-important-part-of-the-culture/)

## INTRODUCTION

**C**ulture is the behaviors and beliefs of a particular country, social, or age group. Food has a strong connection with culture. Nearly every culture has its own foods and its own customs associated with eating food.

Food has many symbolic meanings. It expresses and establishes the relationship between people and their environment as well as between people and what they believe. Therefore, food is an important component of a culture.

Foods can be used by people to express their social status. Rare and expensive food is frequently used to represent wealth and high social economic status.

Special foods can be used to celebrate important events or festivals. Special occasions, from funerals to weddings, from festivals and fairs to political holidays and religious celebrations – all of these would be less memorable if food were not involved. Understanding the role food plays helps us understand the activities and the culture of the people involved.

People who eat very different foods, or similar foods in different ways, are often thought to be different, and eating habits are often closely linked to the types of food consumed. This activity around meals and individual meal-time routines will provide an opportunity to compare and contrast similarities and differences within your group. Youth will learn about peers' lifestyles and traditions.

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## USING THE DINNER TABLE TO CONVEY CULTURE

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### ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

#### ACTIVITY: FOOD STORIES (20 MINUTES)

In your meeting space hang up images of people eating together around a table. You will need 3-5 images. You can set this up like a gallery walk, where the group looks at each image together and describes what they observe.

Guide the youth to observe the following:

- Facial expressions
- Posture
- The way that the food is served
- Types of food pictured

Have youth choose a partner. Ask the youth to compare and contrast these photos to their own dining experiences. Give each pair a few sticky notes to record each other's experiences. Have them discuss one type of experience (listed below) before introducing the next type.

- With their families
- With their friends
- At home
- In a restaurant
- In a cafeteria

Bring the youth back together as a large group. Have youth share what they discussed in their pairs. Through discussion, help youth build in their mind an image of what a dinner table looks like and what happens at the dinner table.

Conclude by reading the introduction information.

#### ACTIVITY: FOOD REFLECTIONS (25 MINUTES)

Pass out paper and writing utensils. Ask youth to respond to the following prompt (this can be done in writing or youth can draw a picture and describe):

In detail, describe what a meal looks like at your home. You can choose a special meal like one for a holiday, or a typical meal such as lunch, breakfast or dinner. You should describe what you eat, where you eat, who is present at meals, what you do during your meal, what rules or jobs you have and how you feel while you are eating.

Have youth share their experiences. As youth share, identify the similarities and differences within the group.

#### DEBRIEF ACTIVITY (10 MINUTES)

Youth stand in a circle with their right arm on the shoulder of the person to their right. Facilitator will start the group moving in one direction.

The group keeps moving in that direction until one person says "stop" and they give one example of "Something I learned today that was positive" and then ends with the word "go" and the group moves in the opposite direction until another participant says "stop."

Repeat this until at least half of the youth have shared a positive learning experience.

#### APPLIED CHALLENGE (20 MINUTES)

Brainstorm with youth the various places in their community where food can be accessed and served (e.g. grocery stores, farmers markets, restaurants, food trucks). Raise the sensitivity of youth about food banks and soup kitchens. Talk about the service these places provide and how these meals may look and be served differently from their own family.

If time allows, have youth explore how food and meals are provided to those in need in other countries and cultures.

If possible, arrange for a field trip to a food bank or soup kitchen in your community. Before going have the youth brainstorm behavior expectation. Examples:

- Youth should show respect for the people they meet and the facility itself. Describe polite behavior and discourage calling attention to the things that are different.
- After the field trip, allow time for discussion. Examples:
  - Was the experience different from their expectations? If so, how?
  - What was one thing that surprised them about this experience?
  - How did this experience compare to their own experiences in accessing food?
  - What role can youth have in supporting food banks, soup kitchens, or related services in their community?
  - Develop a service learning project around their ideas.

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**ACTIVITY 3.7: LEARNER ASSESSMENT**

These questions are about things you learned during this activity. Please check the circle that best describes you.

**Q1** I can identify three different places where food is served.

- Not at all like me
- A little like me
- Somewhat like me
- A lot like me

**Q2** I can identify three different ways food is served.

- Not at all like me
- A little like me
- Somewhat like me
- A lot like me

**Q3** I understand how culture connects to how food is prepared, served and eaten.

- Not at all like me
- A little like me
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