

## The Multicultural Person<sup>12</sup>

**Class time needed:** 20 minutes

### Materials

No materials needed

### Objectives

- Students will identify themselves as members of many different groups.
- Students will observe differences without making value judgments.

### Introduction

Each of us belongs to many groups that function in ways similar to larger cultures. This exercise can be used to teach elementary school children about the many groups to which they belong. It attempts to teach the notion of differences in a neutral framework without evaluating those differences as being either good or bad.

### Procedure

1. The teacher should prepare for this activity by developing three lists of neutral characteristics that would be likely to divide the group. The first list should include characteristics related to objects worn or carried by the students, e.g., those wearing black shoes/brown shoes/other-colored shoes; those wearing red/those not wearing red; those with backpacks/those without backpacks. The second list may include more personal characteristics, such as hair color, eye color, birth month, or food and activity preferences. The third set will contain more obvious cultural differences, such as gender, national background, and race. The lists should be appropriate for the students in the class and designed in such a way that students are not singled out in embarrassing ways.
2. Move desks and chairs off to one side of the room to clear a large area in the center of the floor.
3. Assemble the students into a large group in the center of the room. Ask students to name a few characteristics that they all have in common (e.g., all of the students live in the same community and are members of a particular class in school). Help students identify ways that these characteristics set them apart from other groups. For example, all of the students in the school may be expected to follow a particular set of rules. All of the fifth grade students may take part in an annual field trip.
4. Then give a series of instructions that will divide the group according to items on the first list, such as: "All those wearing red move to the right side of the room, and all those not wearing red move to the left side of the room."
5. Reassemble the large group and continue to issue instructions that will divide the group in a series of ways.
6. After the group has become familiar with the exercise, move toward the more personal differences related to the second list.
7. End the exercise by using characteristics from the third list.



## Debriefing

Use the following questions to focus discussion around racial/cultural difference being just one of the significant components that define us.

1. How did it feel to learn that each of you is a member of many different groups? Were you surprised by the number of groups to which you belong?
2. How did you feel about being put into a group based on characteristics you couldn't change (e.g., eye color and hair color)?
3. What happened when we started dividing the class into subgroups according to the color of their clothing or shoes? What comments did you or your classmates make?
4. What did you learn by doing this exercise?
5. What do you think about judging individuals according to the color of their shoes or by what kind of food they like?
6. How does this exercise relate to how you get along with people? What kind of judgments do you make about people? How are your judgments similar to or different from food or clothing preferences?
7. What if we had done this exercise by giving different treatment to certain groups? How would you feel? How might other people in the group feel?
8. How can we use what we learned during this exercise in real life?

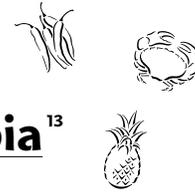
## Extending the Ideas

- Point out to students that each of us typically can identify with a number of groups. Provide several examples, such as “people who speak Spanish,” or “people who like to eat fish.” Have students brainstorm additional examples of groups. Then, ask students to list on a sheet of paper 10 groups to which they belong. Have students arrange the items on their lists in a hierarchy from the group with largest number of people to the smallest (e.g., from people who live on the planet Earth to people who hate French fries). Then have each student collect the signatures of other students in the class who belong to the same groups. Afterward, discuss the similarities and differences among the student lists. Did students in the class belong to many of the same groups? Do some of these groups identify members as part of a particular culture or cultures?



- This lesson could lead to a service-learning project. Discuss the multicultural nature of your class, school, and/or community. Have your students learn more about the cultures present in your area and then teach other students about them. They may make posters, bulletin boards, videos, or multimedia presentations to accomplish this. Use the Service-Learning Rubric found in the introduction to this guide to help you plan and execute a project that will have strong impact.

## Cuisine and Etiquette in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia<sup>13</sup>



**Class time needed:** 40 minutes

### Materials

- Three readings on cuisine and etiquette in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia
- Large sheets of paper or overhead transparencies

### Objective

- Students will make inferences about cultural norms from customs related to eating in three African countries.

### Introduction

Food is one of the most enjoyable ways to experience another culture. The focus of this activity about mealtime etiquette is on how manners reflect cultural norms. The descriptions were written by teachers from Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. **Note: This lesson could be used to supplement content on African agriculture or climate.**

### Procedure

1. Explain the concept of “staple food,” usually a carbohydrate that is eaten daily and is a major source of calories. Ask the students to identify the staple foods of other cultures they have studied (potatoes for Ireland, rice for Japan, maize for Mexico, etc.). What is our staple food? Some students may say hamburgers, but wheat, corn, or potatoes are more accurate answers. Explain that in their readings in this lesson they will learn that rice is the staple food for most of West Africa, maize (corn) for much of Eastern and Southern Africa, and *matoke* (ma-tok-a), or cooking bananas, for Uganda.
2. Ask students to describe the table manners they are expected to observe in their homes or in the school cafeteria. Who eats together? What do you do before eating? Are there rules about your hands or the way you sit? What do you do at the end of a meal? Why do we have rules about how to eat? Have you ever been in situations where the rules you are used to don't seem to fit?
3. Introduce the countries of Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. If the students are unfamiliar with their locations, point them out on a map of Africa.
4. Divide the class into three groups for Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia.
5. Have each group read its handout (i.e., the Zambia groups reads “Cuisine and Etiquette in Zambia”) to identify the mealtime behaviors that are considered acceptable or unacceptable in Sierra Leone, Uganda, or Zambia.
6. On large sheets of paper or overhead transparencies, each group should draw up a list of rules for mealtime that they think are observed in their assigned country. The list should include: a) roles for men, women, and children; b) proper behavior before, during, and after the meal; and c) taboos, or what not to do when eating in this country.
7. Have each group display its lists and report on its findings. As a whole class, compare etiquette among the three countries.

8. Remind students that the cultural behaviors that we can observe often provide ideas about what the group values or thinks is most important. For example, by observing that it is common for Ugandan families to say a prayer before eating, we may assume that religion is an important part of daily life. Work with the whole class to develop some ideas about the values represented by the behaviors they listed. Some examples follow.

- In Sierra Leone, if you visit a friend, he or she will almost always invite you to stay and eat. (*Possible values: sharing, hospitality*)
- In Sierra Leone, when everyone finishes eating, they wash their hands and thank the cook. (*Possible values: cleanliness, respect for adults and for work*)
- In Uganda, the responsibility of preparing the family's meals belongs solely to women and girls in the home. (*Possible value: clearly defined roles for men and women*)
- In Zambia, if visitors happen to have a meal with the family, they are given the honor of washing first. (*Possible value: guests are treated with honor*)

### Debriefing

Use the following questions to focus discussion on the meaning of culture.

1. What are some mealtime rules observed in your household that are similar to those observed in the African households described in your reading?
2. What are some mealtime habits or rules in your home that a visitor from one of these three African countries may find unusual? What could you do to make your visitor feel comfortable?
3. Zambian children learn lessons about manners from their mothers during mealtime. How did you learn what behavior is appropriate at mealtime?
4. What if you brought a guest from Sierra Leone to a fast food restaurant in the United States? What might your friend think about the type of food, the manner of serving it, and the way people eat?
5. Why are rules of etiquette so important? Whose rules do you follow when you're sharing a meal at someone's house? Whose rules do you follow in a restaurant?

### Extending the Ideas

- Simulate an African meal using the recipes provided below. Responsibilities for preparation should be divided among class members as you see fit. Some classes may prefer to prepare one dish; others may want to sample several. The easiest dish to prepare is fried plantains. Groundnut stew is simple to prepare, and Americans usually enjoy it. During the meal, follow the rules outlined in the readings as closely as possible. Following the meal, debrief the class by asking them to react to eating African style.
- Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Chris Davis who served in Guatemala from 1987 to 1989 remembers his first meal in his host country as an awkward one:

*I am trying to force down what they give me, none of it recognizable to me. Some kind of fried vegetable and small pieces of meat. The mother smiles broadly at me, turns to [scold] one of her older kids, then smiles at me again. Since I am unaware that I have to be the one to stand first, we sit at the table for over three hours.*

Encourage class members to tell their own stories about feeling awkward in a strange situation or having a hard time understanding someone else's ways of doing things. What did they learn from these experiences?

- Invite a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, an international exchange student, a recent immigrant, or students' family members to talk about food and manners in other countries.



## Cuisine and Etiquette in Sierra Leone



In Sierra Leone, the staple food is rice. “If I haven’t had my rice, I haven’t eaten today,” is a popular saying. Sierra Leoneans eat rice at least twice a day. Only women and girls prepare the food. They usually cook in big pots on a three-stone stove (three big rocks that support the pots). Firewood or charcoal is the main fuel except for some city dwellers who use gas or electricity.

If you visit a Sierra Leonean friend, he or she will almost always invite you to stay and eat. Usually the men and boys eat separately from the women and girls. Everyone washes their hands before they eat, and then they gather around in a circle with a huge dish of food placed in the middle. Sharing is an important part of life in Sierra Leone, and each person eats from the part of the big dish that is right in front of him or her. It is very bad manners to reach across the dish! Only the right hand is used for eating; the left hand is considered unclean.

When you are eating, you usually don’t talk. Talking shows a lack of respect for the food. It is rude to lean on your left hand while you are eating. People usually drink water only after a meal is over.

The oldest males get the choicest food, the best pieces of meat or fish. Then the young males take the next best pieces, and then finally the women and girls get any meat or fish that is

left. Sometimes the women and girls wait until the men and boys have had all they want before they eat.

Rice is eaten with the hands by squeezing or rolling it into a ball, dipping it into the sauce, and then popping it into the mouth. If rice falls from your fingers or mouth, you don’t put it back in the dish. When everyone finishes eating, they wash their hands and thank the cook.

Many ingredients go into sauces or stews to go with rice. The most popular sauces are made of greens, especially cassava or potato leaves. Other common ingredients include palm oil, onions, tomatoes, yams, and red peppers. Sometimes groundnut (peanut) oil or coconut oil are used. Other sources of protein that go into the sauces include groundnuts and beans, as well as fish, chicken, goat meat, or pork. Seafood, such as oysters, lobster, and crab, may also be used. Most of the calories, however, come from rice, which is eaten in large quantities.

Fruits in Sierra Leone include oranges, bananas, papaws (papayas), lemons, avocados, guava, watermelon, mangoes, and pineapples. Fruit is usually eaten as a snack. Plantains are often sliced and fried as chips for a snack. Tea and coffee are drunk in some parts of the country for breakfast. Cokes and beer are popular with many people who can afford them.





## Cuisine and Etiquette in Uganda



In Uganda, the staple food is *matooke* (cooking bananas). Other food crops include cassava (manioc), sweet potatoes, white potatoes, yams, beans, peas, groundnuts (peanuts), cabbage, onions, pumpkins, and tomatoes. Some fruits, such as oranges, papaws (papayas), lemons, and pineapples, are also grown.

Most people, except for a few who live in the city centers, produce their own food. The responsibility of preparing the family's meals belongs solely to women and girls in the home. Men and boys of age 12 and above are not even expected to sit in the kitchen, which is separate from the main house. Cooking is done on an open fire using wood for fuel.

Most families eat two meals a day. The two meals are lunch and supper. Breakfast is just a cup of tea or a bowl of porridge.

When a meal is ready, all members of the household wash their hands and sit down on [floor] mats. Hands have to be washed before and after the meal because most Ugandans eat with their hands. At mealtime everybody is welcome; visitors and neighbors who drop in are expected to join the family at a meal.

Food is served by women. They cut it up into small pieces for each member of the family. Sauce, which is usually a stew with vegetables, beans, butter, salt, and curry powder, is served to each person on a plate. Sometimes fish or beef stew is served.

Normally a short prayer is said before the family starts eating. During the meal, children talk only when asked a question. It is bad manners to reach for salt or a spoon. It is better to ask someone sitting close to it to pass it. It

is also bad manners to leave the room while others are still eating.

Everyone respects the meal by staying seated until the meal is over. Leaning on the left hand or stretching ones legs while at a meal is a sign of disrespect and is not tolerated.

People usually drink water at the end of the meal. It is considered odd to drink water while eating.

When the meal is finished, everyone in turn gives a compliment to the mother by saying, "Thank you for preparing the meal, madam." No dessert is served after the meal. Fruits like papaw, pineapple, or sweet bananas are normally eaten as a snack between meals.





## Cuisine and Etiquette in Zambia



Zambia's staple food is maize (corn), and Zambians eat maize in several ways. When the corn is ripe but still green, it can be roasted and boiled. When it is dry and hard, it can be fried or boiled. It can also be pounded slightly to remove the top layer and boiled either by itself or mixed with beans or groundnuts (peanuts). At times the maize is ground to a size a little bigger than rice and is cooked as rice. Finally, we have the fine cornmeal which is called mealie-meal in Zambia. This is used for making *nsima*, the most popular meal. *Nsima* is steamed cornmeal.

Meat from cows, goats, sheep, and fish are used in sauces over *nsima*. There are also a lot of vegetables put in sauces, such as leaves from beans, okra, cow peas, pumpkins, and cassava. Other vegetables eaten almost daily include onions and tomatoes.

All the cooking is done by the wife. *Nsima* is usually prepared for lunch and dinner and not for breakfast. In a traditional setting, boys from the age of seven eat with the man.

The mother eats with the girls and the younger boys. This is because all of the children below the age of seven are under the guidance of their mother. Almost all learning takes place through daily activities in the home. The mother, who is in charge of the kids' learning, has to take care of their learning at meal time. This is changing, especially in towns and cities. The trend now is that members of the family all eat together.

Before eating, everybody washes hands in order of the status of the members of the family: father first, then mother and others follow according to their ages. One of the younger children, boy or girl, passes a water dish around for others to wash their hands. If a visitor happens to have a meal with the family, he is given the honor of washing first.



It is rude to talk very much or loudly while eating. After eating, the family members wash their hands again in the same order. The wife and the young ones clear the table. Belching after a meal used to be a compliment, but not nowadays.



## Recipes



Each recipe serves four.

### Groundnut Stew

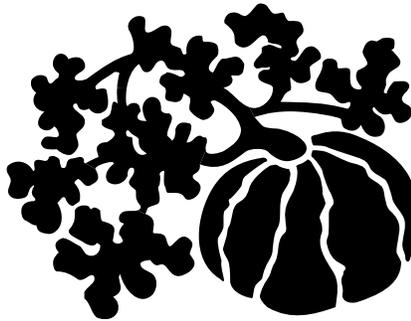
- 1 pound peanut butter
- 1 pound chicken or meat
- 1/4 pound onions
- 1/4 pound tomatoes diced
- 1 can tomato paste
- salt and pepper
- 1 cup milk
- cayenne pepper (optional)

Cut the chicken or meat into 1-inch pieces and season with salt. Brown the meat, then add the onion, tomatoes, tomato paste, milk, and red pepper. Simmer for half an hour. Then add the peanut butter. Simmer until the sauce is very thick. Serve with rice.

### Matoke

- 10 to 20 *matoke*  
(green cooking bananas—plantains may be used)
- 5 to 7 cups water, depending on the quantity of bananas

Peel the bananas and wash them in cold water. Put into a pot, add the water, and cover. Boil for 10 minutes, then reduce the heat and continue to cook. The mixture will turn yellow when well-cooked. Drain the water. Mash the bananas with a wooden spoon. Wrap the mashed food in foil and place on a steaming basket. Place the steamer inside a large pot and add water. Steam on low heat for 20 minutes. Serve while hot.



### Nsima

- 1 cup cold water
- 3 cups hot water
- 2 to 3 cups corn meal

Boil water in a saucepan. Make a paste using some of the meal with the cup of cold water. Add the paste to hot water. Stir with a wooden spoon until thickened like porridge. Cover the saucepan and simmer for some time (about 15 minutes). Lower the heat a little. Remove the lid and gradually add corn meal, stirring constantly and flattening any lumps that may form. Continue to add meal and stir until *nsima* thickens to the desired consistency (some people like it thin, and others prefer it thick). Cover and reduce heat to very low.

Leave for a few minutes to allow further cooking. Stir the *nsima* once again and serve in a slightly wet serving dish. Cover to keep it warm. Serve with meat, poultry, fish, or vegetables.

### Fried Plantains

- 4 plantains (or green bananas)
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- peanut oil
- black pepper

Cut the bananas into slices and cover with lemon juice. Cook the slices quickly in very hot peanut oil until crisp. The bananas may be sprinkled with pepper.

