Cultural Sharing Opening Activity

**Purpose**

This activity gives participants an opportunity to learn about each other and about themselves by focusing on an item that reflects an aspect of their social identity. The activity introduces the concepts of identity and awareness of one’s cultural or ethnic heritage and builds trust by promoting sharing and by finding similarities in cultural practices and experiences. It also allows people to become multidimensional, reduces stereotyping, and promotes curiosity about others.

**Objectives**

* To introduce participants to one another
* To identify similarities and differences among participants in the group
* To begin building trust between participants
* To set the tone for class
* To foster curiosity about the others in the room

**Time**

40-60 minutes

**Procedures**

1. Tell participants that they are going to introduce themselves by an item that is part of their culture. It can be a fact or a short story about their first, middle, or last name. This object might be a piece of art, book, poem, music, or any artifact that describes an aspect of their personal and family history or identity that is significant to them. If you are working with a large group (more than 25 participants), you may want to have participants work in small groups to share their artifacts.
2. Begin the activity by modeling it and sharing something important to you. Be sure that you set the tone for others by making sure your story is appropriate for the group, that you share something personal about your identity through the story, and that your story is not too long.
3. After all the participants have shared with the group, lead the group in a discussion using some or all of the following questions.

**Discussion Prompts**

1. What was it like to think of and share a cultural artifact?

2. Did anyone find it difficult to come up with something to share? If so, what was challenging?

3. What themes did you notice about the items people shared?

4. What, if anything, did you learn about yourself during this activity?

5. What did you learn about others during this activity?

6. What is the value of sharing an artifact and introducing ourselves in this way rather than by sharing our class year and major?

*Written by Tricia Homer.*

*Adapted from the Cultural Chest activity Zúñiga, X., and Nagda, B. A. “Intergroup Dialogue in Higher Education: Definition, Origins, and Practices” published online in Wiley InterScience.*

*Additional credit to the University of Maryland Words of Engagement Intergroup Dialogue Program and Urban Bush Women Summer Leadership Institute*