

IMMIGRANT VOICES DISCUSSION GUIDE

IMMIGRANT VOICES PROJECT

In November 2017, English In Action—in collaboration with Writ Large and The Temporary—held a live storytelling event called Immigrant Voices. English In Action—a nonprofit located in the Roaring Fork Valley of western Colorado—helps immigrants learn English and brings community members together across cultural divides. Four of the storytellers were English In Action students and two were from the community at large. The evening included immigrants from diverse backgrounds and countries. Each of the storytellers was coached by Alya Howe of Writ Large in the art of storytelling in front of a live audience. This event was conceived based on the belief that storytelling can help us to develop a deeper connection with members of our community who come from different backgrounds and life experiences.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

- The discussion guide can be used by businesses, schools, churches, and community groups interested in deepening their awareness of cultural differences and the experiences of immigrants in the Roaring Fork Valley and elsewhere.
- Choose one or two stories with interviews to watch (each is 13-18 minutes).
- Select several of the general or specific questions to prompt a discussion.
- In order to have a productive and safe discussion, avoid discussing politics, making judgements or arguing with others. Instead focus on what you learned from hearing the story/stories and your personal perspective. Allow others to respond in their own way.
- The video and discussion together should take approximately an hour. Allocate 15-35 minutes for the video(s) and 20-40 minutes for discussion.
- Please let us know you used the guide and give us feedback at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Immigrant-Voices>.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. What resonated for you in the story/stories you heard?
2. What did you have in common with the storyteller(s)?
3. How were experiences of the storyteller(s) different from experiences you have had?
4. What surprised you about the experiences of the storyteller(s)?
5. What do you think it would be like to tell a personal story for an audience in a second language? What was your experience of hearing a story told by an individual speaking in a second language?
6. What do you think are some of the challenges of living in a new country and communicating in a second language?
7. Is there anything about the video(s) that struck you that has not been discussed?

QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO EACH VIDEO

BERNARDINA BAÑUELOS

1. Bernardina feels it is important to share her experience of growing up in a rural setting in Mexico. What can you learn from hearing about her experience?
2. Reflect on the pain and beauty that you heard in Bernardina's story. What were the values that supported Bernardina and her family while she was growing up?
3. Bernardina makes an appeal to not be afraid of people like her. Have you noticed fear of immigrants in your community? What do you believe is the source of this fear?
4. Bernardina's lack of access to formal education had a big impact on her life. In what ways did she overcome the fact that formal education was not available to her?

SAMUEL BERNAL

1. Samuel says, "I think that's one of the most beautiful human acts is when you build a bridge between your loneliness and the loneliness of someone else and create communication—that's what storytelling is about." What do think are the benefits of storytelling?
2. Samuel describes his excitement about the radio his grandmother gave him, being on the radio, and recording tapes for girls. Did you have any similar experiences as a child?
3. Reflect on the opportunity and loss that Samuel describes in moving to the United States. Have you ever felt conflicted about taking an opportunity?
4. Discuss the importance of family. Reflect on the sacrifices related to being separated from family and the worries that many immigrants have about family in their home countries.
5. Reflect on Samuel's comments on the invisibility of immigrants. How is that true and/or not true in your community?
6. Samuel says that he is part Mexican and part American. In ways are you a mix of cultures and your past experiences?

MIGUEL CARBALLO

1. Miguel says that he decided to come to the United States to create a better life for his family. How has the dream of having a better life motivated your family or people you know?
2. What did you learn from hearing about Miguel's life in El Salvador?
3. Have you seen the racism and prejudice Miguel describes play out in communities you have lived in? If so, how?
4. Did anything surprise you about Miguel's career path? Reflect on the experience of being a professional in your home country and having to switch to a different field in a new country.
5. Miguel makes the point that North America unites many countries. In what ways are the countries of North America united and separate?
6. Miguel mentions the opportunities that would be available to him if he spoke English better and the importance of education. Reflect on the untapped potential of immigrants.

SHINTA DAMAYANTI

1. Shinta describes moving to a new country and missing various aspects of home. Have you had a similar experience? Was the way you overcame homesickness similar to or different from Shinta's experience?
2. Shinta discusses the barriers associated with not speaking English well. Did any of her comments resonate for you? Did you learn about a barrier you had not considered?
3. Shinta mentions that in Indonesia she was often told that she couldn't do certain things because she was female, even though she worked in a traditionally male field as a civil engineer. Her English In Action tutor told her, "You can do anything you want." In what ways do you think her tutor's perspective is or is not uniquely American?
4. How are Shinta's parenting challenges similar to or different from parenting challenges you have had or other people you know have had? How does being an immigrant complicate those challenges?
5. Shinta mentions the value of learning from people from other cultures. What do you think are the advantages of cross-cultural learning?

ESTELA GARCIA

1. Estela describes the diversity of beliefs, superstitions, cultures and languages in Mexico. Did anything surprise you in the beliefs she spoke about? Are you aware of similar beliefs and superstitions here in the United States?
2. Do you believe that understanding the cultures of other people is important? If so, why?
3. In what ways is the United States a mix of cultures?
4. What do think is the connection between being able to speak a language and freedom?
5. Estela discusses the importance of welcoming others from different backgrounds. Discuss the ways our community is and is not welcoming. Are there ways we can be more welcoming?

KRISTINA MACE

1. How is Kristina's immigrant story similar to or different from the stories of other more recent immigrants to our country?
2. Kristina speaks about the fact that we don't know each other's stories. What about her story surprised you? How can we benefit from hearing each other's stories?
3. Were you aware of the historical events that Kristina describes? How can you benefit from learning about history?
4. How did hearing Kristina's story from the child's perspective impact you? How do you think having the experiences she has as a child would impact the rest of your life?
5. Reflect in the tensions that Kristina describes between maintaining her own culture and integrating into a new culture. What would one lose and gain from becoming part of a new culture?