

ETHNIC CELEBRATIONS
EXAMPLES OF PANEL QUESTIONS

If your library is going to have some sort of ethnic celebration, here is a sample of the types of questions you might ask for a panel discussion. Your aim is to avoid creating new stereotypes (quick and easy labeling) by asking open-ended questions and assuming and asking about the diversity within each group.

Your Arrival/Contact

Did you live in another country before living in America? What was your experience of immigration to a new land? What was your reception?

Do you have or have you had relatives who were born in another country? What was their experience of immigration to the U.S.? What was their reception? Have you ever visited your family's cultural homeland? What was that experience like for you?

Are you part of First Nations groups who were originally here? What regions did your family/nations live in? Were you forced to leave ancestral ground? What was your family's/nation's treatment by the U.S. government?

Did/does you or your family experience prejudice and discrimination because of being members of a certain group? Do you have relatives who were persecuted or are persecuted others? How does your family deal with painful memories and events? How do you support each other and thrive in the face of adversity?

Your Decisions Around Identity

What is your ethnic/racial/tribal background? How homogenous or mixed is your background? What effect has that had on you? Have you emphasized different aspects of your culture at different times of the year or at different times of your life?

What languages do you speak and what languages are spoken in your family? Do you have relatives who are bilingual or don't speak a language in common with you? How does that affect you?

What does being part of your ethnic/racial/tribal group mean to you? Has being part of your group ever made you feel as though you were less "American" or that you had to choose? Who has had the power to define "American" and how has this power affected you?

How are our perspectives different if we're part of or more easily assimilated into the dominant group than if we've been part of more separate, traditional outsider groups?

Have you ever been to another country and experienced your Americanness? What was that like for you?

How does your family express their pride as well as their anxiety about their ethnic or racial roots? When have you felt the best and the worst about your cultural heritage? What to you is the proudest accomplishment of your group? Who in your life has modeled the best and the worst aspects of being part of your cultural group?

On what issues do people in your group most disagree? Are there different values within and between subgroups? For example, do younger and older members disagree?

How do you put your background into practice? Is it something you can pursue on your own or does being part of your heritage need to happen in community? What has your heritage given you and how does it affect the way you live your life?

What has being "American" meant to you? What have you had to give up to be American? What have you gained? Where do you feel the pulls? What are those torn feelings about? Have you changed your name or looks to lessen your ethnic origins?

What do you consider yourself to be now? And what are the struggles and triumphs, opportunities and dangers around each choice? For example, are you:

- a. Monoculture (live in a racially or ethnically homogenous or segregated community. Use language and customs of the "old" country. Avoid contact with members of other groups)?
- b. Transitional (speak group's language or dialect as well as mainstream language, but more comfortable with own group's language. Live among high concentrations of people of own cultural group.)
- c. Bicultural (dominant in mainstream language and some fluency in group's language or dialect. Defend your group but don't practice cultural traditions. "Hyphenated" identity. New culture is more important than old, but hang on to old in some ways.)?
- d. Assimilated (often three or more generations from ancestors who were immigrants or much intermarriage. No clear identification or meaning from old culture's language or rituals. New culture most important. Perhaps some vague connections to cultural traditions.)?

For those who think of themselves as "just American" or "nothing" or "Heinz 57" - should they try to reclaim some ethnic background? How do you answer some people's beliefs that everyone *should* melt in to the mainstream culture?

How do you hold being similar and being different? How has your choice of neighborhood, religion, school and friends strengthened or weakened your cultural connections and your sense of being "American"?

Beyond Insiders and Outsiders

Who was/is the outsider in your family? What was/is your family's attitudes toward the "outsiders"? Whom could/can you bring home to dinner? Whom couldn't/can't you?

What personal fears do you have around difference or "the stranger"? What does being inclusive mean to you and how do you model it? How are you challenged to be more inclusive? What does true power sharing (especially around the power to define oneself) look like or not look like? Who are your role models among whites and people of color for inclusivity? Who gives you pride and positive ethnic/racial identity?

How has your life been enriched by diversity? What motivates you to be more inclusive?

What individual responsibility do we all share to welcome others? What actions can we take to welcome "the stranger" in our schools? Our neighborhoods? Our places of worship? Our libraries? How do *you* welcome others?