

At Home in the Heartland: How Midwesterners Got to be ‘Us’

Sample Talking Points for ADULTS Topics for reflection and discussion:

- **Iowa’s settlement:** What are some indelible influences from the state’s first settlers and early settlement? How did moving from one culture to another, or between different regions within this country, change us? What’s been gained through such processes; what’s been lost? How “should” new migrants be integrated?
- **ethnicity and minorities:** What do our ethnic roots mean to us today: How do they affect or inform us? To what degree and how well are the rights or integrity of minorities acknowledged, secure and respected?
- **social engagement:** In what forms of social engagement do you/r family participate? With what results?
- **work and leisure:** What goods or services have our families provided others in order to make a living? How could “work” gain renewed value? Outside of work, what roles have entertainment, music and art, sports, travel, hobbies, civic engagement or other voluntary pastimes played in our families or individual lives?
- **economic cycles:** How have our families responded to and been shaped by booms or busts; how might they be avoided? How have wealth, poverty, unemployment, education or career shifts altered our lives?
- **technology:** What technologies enhance our lives—and which ones diminish it? Do we control its effects on our lives, or does technology more often dictate how we experience the world and live our lives? How have recent technological developments changed the ways we live, relate and govern as groups of people?
- **war:** How has the experience of war changed family members’ personalities, our communities and shared fates? How have we, through war, affected the lives of others? What is a “just” war—or an “unjust” one?
- **ideology:** To what degree do ideologies help mold community consensus—or get in the way of finding it?
- **communication and transportation:** How do changes in communication or transportation alter our lives?
- **community celebrations:** How have fairs, parades, outdoor band concerts, picnics, sport competitions, and school or church events provided occasions for people to gather, interact and to celebrate local ties?
- **climate and weather:** How have seasonal climatic conditions dictated our ways of living? What freak weather “events” or natural disasters have visited our lives for a moment, but left long-term effects?
- **religion and culture:** How has religious belief or spirituality shaped our families or wider community? To what degree are differences in religious belief or religiosity respected—or not—in our community? Are there local religious bodies that desire to dominate or dictate local culture or politics? If so, how and why?
- **governance and local political culture:** To what degree can non-office-holding citizens influence our most immediate levels of government? What works well in local government and what works less well? What might be done to sustain what works well? How easily can things that don’t work well be changed?
- **community:** What distinguishes our community from those nearby of similar size and character? What works well in our community, what’s worth preserving and what measures might be taken to protect what works well? What works less than optimally, what “should” be changed or removed, and what collective measures might be taken to change or remove that which does not function optimally in our community?
- **agriculture:** What lasting influences—what behaviors, values, goals—has agriculture imparted onto our families and communities? How does the state of agriculture locally, across Iowa and the Midwest affect our abilities to thrive or even survive as families and as communities? What “should” be changed: How?
- **education:** Why has education played such a primary role in Iowa since the pioneers days? How has the quality of public education changed over time? What might be done to reform or strengthen it?
- **family and intimate matters:** How have the roles played by family changed over time? What have been some lasting legacies of unplanned pregnancies, marriage, divorce, patchwork parenting, non-traditional lifestyles, crime, aging and death in our families? What roles “should” family play in the future: Why?

For further information and ideas, see www.roots.TRACES.org. Thank you!