

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

Sample Talking Points for YOUTH Topics for reflection and discussion:

- **Iowa’s settlement:** What influences from the state’s first settlers or early settlement are visible still today? How did moving from one culture to another, or between regions within the U.S., change or challenge us? What’s been gained through such moves; 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 guide us? How well are the rights or dignity of minorities acknowledged, secure and respected in your community?
- **social engagement:** In what ways are you or your family active in the community? What are some results?
- **work and leisure:** What goods or services has your family provided others in order to make a living? How could “work” gain in value? Outside of work, what roles have entertainment, music and art, sports, travel, hobbies, civic activities or other pastimes played in your family’s life?
- **economic cycles:** How has your family been affected by booms or busts; how might such cycles be avoided? How have wealth, poverty, unemployment, education or career shifts affected your family?
- **technology:** What technologies make our lives better—and which ones don’t? 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 and interact as groups of people?
- **war:** How has participating in war changed family members’ personalities, our communities and shared fates? How have we, through war, touched the lives of others? What is a “just” war—or an “unjust” one?
- **ideology:** To what degree do beliefs help form community consensus—or get in the way of finding it?
- **communication and transportation:** How do changes in communication or transportation affect our lives?
- **community celebrations:** How do fairs, parades, outdoor band concerts, picnics, sport competitions, and school or church events provide occasions for people to gather, to interact and to celebrate local ties?
- **climate and weather:** How do seasonal climatic conditions effect our lives? What freak weather “events” or natural disasters have interrupted our lives for a moment, but left long-term effects: How?
- **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 want to dominate or dictate local culture or politics? If so, how and why?
- **governance and local political culture:** To what degree can ordinary citizens influence the local levels of government that touch your life? What works well in your local government and what works less well? What might be done to preserve what works well? How easily can things that don’t work well be changed?
- **community:** What makes your community different from those nearby of similar size and character? What works well in your community, what’s worth preserving and what might be done to protect what works well? What works less well; what “should” be changed or removed, and what might be done to change or remove what does not function well in your community? What are you willing to do to change things?
- **agriculture:** What lasting influences has agriculture had on your family and community? How does the state of agriculture locally, across Iowa and the Midwest affect the lives of our families and communities?
- **education:** Why has public education played a primary role in Iowa since pioneers days? How has it changed over time? What might be done to change or improve it? Why should we care—or not?
- **family and intimate matters:** How have the roles played by your family affected your life? What have been some lasting effects of unplanned pregnancies, marriage, divorce, patchwork parenting, alternative 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!**