

Conversation Leaders: Joyce & Jon

Students: Yoko, Hyun-ju, Jungmi, Young Hye, Satoko & Yuka

Joyce was the team leader for today. The topics she chose for discussion were “dinner parties” and “small talk.” This is a subject in which all the students have expressed interest.

We began by asking if Satako and Yuka can both attend only on Thursdays and Satako indicated that’s true. Joyce reminded them there is no class next Tuesday, May 30, and that classes will run through June from 10-12 on both days, as usual. She told them there will be no classes in July but that Linda may start an evening group on Wednesdays. They didn’t think they could come to an evening conversation group because of their children.

**Review:** We asked if they had any questions or comments about Tuesday’s topics, measurements and earthquakes. Hyun-ju said if they had known the topic was earthquakes, they would have been better prepared with vocabulary to express themselves. They would prefer to know the topic ahead of time. If we don’t assign it before the end of class, I will send out the topic to both the leaders and students a day or two ahead.

The large room was in use today so we used one of the small Sunday-school rooms downstairs. We weren’t able to divide into two groups as we’d planned, or to serve coffee during an “all-English” coffee break.

### **Something New:**

On Tuesday, I had asked them to write a few sentences, or paragraphs, depending on their ability, about their experiences in coming to America. I gave them ideas such as; things you find very different, things you like, things you don’t like, etc. Each one read their “story” out loud and Joyce used the white board to list the things they mentioned. Following is a partial list: (Joyce and I learned a lot!)

Hyun ju said America has clean air & the children can play outside. In Korea, micro-particle pollution from China forces children to wear masks to go to school and they cannot play outside. Some types of different pollen are a problem for them here. The status of housewives here is less stressful and competitive. Children can do well in school here if they pay attention and do homework. There is no need for a private tutor here. She added that America has reasonable prices for gas, meats and vegetables.

Jung mi said she likes the many choices for shopping.

Yoko spoke about how, in America people you pass on the street make eye contact and smile. Not so in Korea. We discussed making eye contact here is a sign of respect while in Asian culture one averts one’s eyes instead. Children have to be told to look at the teacher because they are not used to that. I showed them the proper way to shake hands and how to instruct their sons to do so. I also told them the origin of the gesture was to show the empty hand, without a weapon. Satoko explained that bowing, when done from the waist, is similar, because by presenting the back of the neck, they are showing their vulnerability and trust.

Yuka said since she came to America, she has become a big hockey fan. She said she has been to four games and loves it. She also loves Sidney Crosby. We introduced the term, “role model” and discussed it a little.

(Yuka and Jung mi are our two participants who speak the least in group. I saw both of their friends

tell them to just go ahead and speak without trying to think of how to say a perfect sentence, so I was happy about that.)

Young Hye told us of two negative things about America, guns and tipping. No one in Korea carries a gun except the police. In Japan, Yoko, said, it's just the police and the gangs. We discussed tipping, the pay level for waitresses here versus in their countries and why Americans tip. Young Hye added that Americans volunteer and donate more than Koreans, too.

Satoko said when she first came here she couldn't speak well at all but she enjoyed seeing so much green(ery) and the fact that people were very nice to her. She was initially afraid when people came near to hug her, getting too far into her personal space. Now she is okay with hugging but some of her French friends kiss on both cheeks and she is still a little uncomfortable with that. She is a violinist, we found out, and her oldest daughter plays violin in the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony.

They then showed us different styles of bowing at weddings, to honor parents and ancestors. We talked a little about religions and they said most people in their countries have no religion, although Buddhist, Catholic and various other Christian religions are present.

We mentioned children's books and asked if they need help with pronunciation when reading them aloud to their children. (No one seemed interested today but we can bring it up again later and may get a different response.) Hyun ju said the expressions of sounds are very different. For example, the sound of a dog barking in Korean is written or spoken as, "mong-mong," not "bow-wow." That might be another topic for us.

During this discussion, we talked about how these types of conversations are very interesting and would be fine at a dinner party. I suggested when they are asked how long they have been here or a similar question, they could augment their reply by adding a comment on something they like about living in America, which could then spark a longer conversation. Joyce mentioned it might be easier to speak with the person seated next to you rather than trying to add to a larger conversation. Yoko agreed, saying by the time she has formed what she wants to say about a topic that is being discussed, the conversation has already moved on to something else.

For next Thursday, I told them they could be the ones to decide the topics. I asked them to write something about other differences in the two cultures besides what we discussed today and be prepared to discuss it. The main topic is "family life." They can write and talk about anything under that heading, including parents, children, pets, etc. To my list, they quickly added: weddings and celebrations; in-laws; and women's rights.

We mentioned Memorial Day and what Americans do to celebrate and said we might also talk next week about what they did for Memorial Day.

We will set a back-up topic in case the first ones run out of steam, which I doubt.