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WRITING LESSON
Feeding Ourselves, Feeding Our Revolutions

Students will read and respond to the YES! Magazine article, "Cooking Stirs the Pot for Social Change," by Korsha Wilson.

In this article, Wilson explores the power of food to spark change in our communities. The author believes that cooking and consumption are not just necessary for survival; they are also political acts of resistance against oppression, means to preserve heritage, and ways for change-makers to practice self-care.

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Part 1: The Article

Feeding Ourselves, Feeding Our Revolutions

Preparing food—and letting others in our communities cook for us—is how we become good citizens who engage with the communities around us.

Photo by Tom Werner/Getty Images

By Korsha Wilson

My arms hurt as I walked through Brooklyn on a cold December night. I was carrying a 10-pound, party-size tray of macaroni and cheese with three cheeses, cooked to just a touch beyond al dente, with a breadcrumb topping. I was headed to a community potluck and had spent the better part of that morning making (read: babying) a mornay sauce, cooking the pasta, and baking the mixture in the oven. As I walked the six blocks from the subway station to the venue where the meeting was being held, my arms started to shake. I started to wonder why I didn't just pick up a bag of chips and a jar of dip and call it a day, but then I remembered the excited messages I received when I told my fellow event-goers that I would be bringing macaroni and cheese to our potluck. It was my way of making my friends and community members happy on a cold night and my way of providing comfort as we talked about the future of our community.

Why do we cook? First, we cook to sustain

ourselves and our families. But in the current culture of food-as-art-form, we also cook to express ourselves. Cooking may seem like an act of self-preservation, an act that is both self-serving and necessary, but if you look beyond the immediate and beyond the narrow definition of what cooking is, you can see that cooking is and has always been an act of resistance.

Sometimes what we don't cook says more than what we do cook. For chef Sean Sherman, fry bread is a dish that he will not make. In his cookbook, The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen, he talks about fry bread, viewed as a sacrosanct part of indigenous cuisine, and explains why this seemingly simple dish is more than the sum of its parts. "I'm often asked why we don't have fry bread on the menu or offer a recipe for fry bread in this book," he writes. "It originated nearly 150 years ago when the U.S. government forced our ancestors from the homelands they farmed, foraged, and hunted, and the waters they fished." For Sherman and for many indigenous communities, fry bread is an edible reminder of the injustices of colonialism and the loss of the ability to explore and develop indigenous cuisine using ingredients from the region. "They lost control of their food and were made to rely on government-issued commodities—canned meat, white flour, sugar, and lard—all lacking nutritive value," Sherman explains. "Controlling food is a means of controlling power."

Every time we step to our stoves to make a meal we're engaging with the society around us. Each ingredient that we use, every technique, every spice tells a story about our access, our privilege, our heritage, and our culture. The foods and dishes we consume are all part of larger forces that impact our lives. Our appetites and what we crave are the result of our place in the world at that time.

Three cookbooks—Feed the Resistance, The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen, and The Immigrant Cookbook—show how the act of cooking can be a platform for social justice and social action.

For Sherman, creating dishes using ingredients that were available to his ancestors is how he reclaims Native American foodways and supports the indigenous community. In his book, he explains how the work that he does now is about continuing to explore these foodways and create dishes using ingredients that are native to Minnesota. Instead of fry bread, Sherman creates corn cakes with braised bison or smoked duck because these ingredients represent indigenous cuisine and its reliance on the land and ingredients in a more holistic way.

"They taste of a time when we, as a people, were healthy and strong, and of the promise that we can stand up to the foods that have destroyed our health, the forces that have compromised our culture," he writes. "And our corn cakes are easier to make and far tastier than any fry bread."

Reclaiming a culture's cuisine is a clear act of using food in a way to create social change. But home cooking can create change in smaller communities and ways. Feed the Resistance is technically a cookbook, but it's also a collection of essays from chefs, writers, nonprofit founders, and others who are busy using their stoves in their resisting. Author Julia Turshen writes cookbooks and recently created Equity at the Table, a database for women and nonbinary people of color in the food world. She's also an activist and intends for the book to be used as a way to support local activism. The recipes are divided into sections for activists who need to feed a crowd or bring portable snacks to a bake sale, or if someone just needs to make a quick meal for herself. They are accompanied by an introduction or essay by the creator of the recipe about what this specific dish means to them and what they are actively "resisting" when they make it. "Homemade food is an act of self-care that will serve you while you're resisting," Turshen writes above a simple recipe for roasted broccoli and quinoa with cashew dressing. "It's important to take care of yourself so you can better take care of the world."

Feed the Resistance can feel like a diary at times and offers readers a peek into the kitchens of people all over the United States who are actively working in the social justice space. In the essay "How Food Can Be a Platform for Activism," Shakirah Simley, co-founder and organizer of Nourish/Resist in San Francisco, talks about using food to discuss police brutality with her brother and the function that food has when it comes to activism. "In my work, we seek to nourish so that we may resist," she writes. In this

way, it isn't just the food that is important, but the act of eating together that creates a platform where activism can happen.

In activism, and in food, there's also the question of who gets the mic and who gets to tell their story or share their ideas. In The Immigrant Cookbook the recipes are courtesy of chefs and writers from all over the world who have made America home. Well-known chefs like Daniel Boulud, José Andrés, and Nina Compton share recipes alongside chefs who are less known, but each one represents the story of a person or family coming to this country—and bringing their heritage and foodways with them.

Cultures and history come to the stove with us each time we cook, and every recipe in The Immigrant Cookbook is proof of that. Immigrants bring their food and recipes to this country and add to our shared American table. We may think of "American" food as apple pies and hot dogs and hamburgers, but these recipes, with their substitutions and roots in cuisines from other countries, are just as American. American food is a mixture of indigenous cuisine and food from other places adapted to incorporate American ingredients. Cooking these dishes is a way of embracing all of the "recipes that make America great," as the book says.

When I think about cooking at my stove, or going grocery shopping, I often think about the feeling that I want to have when I sit down to eat. Am I trying to make something healthy so I feel good? Am I trying to comfort myself? Am I trying to make my partner feel loved? Food and cooking tap into what we want to feel, and that's why they're the perfect way to create change. Everyone puts down their guard over a good meal, and in that space, change is possible.

In her book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Barbara Kingsolver wrote that "cooking is good citizenship. It's the only way to get serious about putting locally raised foods into your diet, which keeps farmlands healthy and grocery money in the neighborhood." I would expand that to say that cooking—and letting others in our communities cook for us—is how we become good citizens who engage with the communities around us. That connection is how we create change. That's why cooking is and will always be an act of resistance.

Part 2: The Writing Prompt

If you were to host a potluck or dinner to discuss a challenge facing your community or country, what food would you cook? Who would you invite? On what issue would you deliberate?

Part 3: Writing Guidelines

The writing guidelines below are intended to be just that: a guide. Please adapt to fit your curriculum.

- Provide an original essay title.
- Reference the article.
- Limit the essay to no more than 700 words.
- Pay attention to grammar and organization.
- Be original. Provide personal examples and insights.
- Demonstrate clarity of content and ideas.

Common Core State Standards:

This writing exercise meets several Common Core State Standards for grades 6-12, including W. 9-10.3 and W. 9-10.14 for Writing, and RI. 9-10 and RI. 9-10.2 for Reading: Informational Text. This standard applies to other grade levels. "9-10" is used as an example.

How did this lesson work for you and your students?
Share your feedback with us and other teachers
by leaving a comment on our website:
https://bit.ly/2TTeJkj

Part 4: Evaluation Rubric

Our rubric should serve as a guide, not an unreasonable or rigid standard. You've probably encountered similar rubrics before, but here are two quick pointers for using ours:

1. In the left column, find the criteria for evaluating essays.
2. In the top row, find scores from 4 (outstanding) to 1 (poor).

	4	3	2	1
Focus on topic	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main idea is supported by detailed information.	Main idea is clear, but general.	Main idea is somewhat clear, but there is need for more supporting evidence.	Main idea is not clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.
Organization	Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the reader's interest.	Details are placed in a logical order, but the way they are presented sometimes make the writing less interesting.	Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.	There is no clear introduction of the main topic or structure of the paper.
Originality and strength of ideas	Formulates a thought-provoking, well-developed, and fairly original position on an issue.	Writer takes a clear position on an issue, though it is not developed fully.	Writer's position is evident, though it is vague.	Fails to take a clear position, or writer contradicts herself.
Evidence and/or reasoning	Provides specific reasons and/ or evidence that demonstrate understanding and insight.	Offers adequate – though perhaps vague or incomplete – supporting reasons and/or evidence	Provides less than adequate or contradictory reasons or evidence to support position.	Offers only general reasons or evidence or none, or offers evidence contradictory to the writer's thesis or main idea.
Command of grammar and conventions	Command of conventions exhibited. Creative word choice and varied sentence structure.	Correct use of grammar and conventions (for the most part).	Weak control of grammar and conventions. Errors are distracting.	Use of grammar and conventions interferes with understanding.
Voice	Author's voice is strong and engaging. Draws reader in.	Writing attracts reader's interest. Author's voice shows engagement with the topic.	Technically well written; however, author's voice is weak.	Writing fails to engage the reader. Does not demonstrate writer's interest in topic.

* Adapted from "Rubric for Editorial – Commentary Essay" from LAEP.org and "6+1 Traits of Writing Rubric" from ReadWriteThink.org.

A Feast for the Future

India Brown, grade 8

Close your eyes and imagine the not too distant future: The Statue of Liberty is up to her knees in water, the streets of lower Manhattan resemble the canals of Venice, and hurricanes arrive in the fall and stay until summer. Now, open your eyes and see the beautiful planet that we will destroy if we do not do something. Now is the time for change. Our future is in our control if we take actions, ranging from small steps, such as not using plastic straws, to large ones, such as reducing fossil fuel consumption and electing leaders who take the problem seriously.

Hosting a dinner party is an extraordinary way to publicize what is at stake. At my potluck, I would serve linguini with clams. The clams would be sautéed in white wine sauce. The pasta tossed with a light coat of butter and topped with freshly shredded parmesan. I choose this meal because it cannot be made if global warming's patterns persist. Soon enough, the ocean will be too warm to cultivate clams, vineyards will be too sweltering to grow grapes, and wheat fields will dry out, leaving us without pasta.

I think that giving my guests a delicious meal and then breaking the news to them that its ingredients would be unattainable if Earth continues to get hotter is a creative strategy to initiate action. Plus, on the off chance the conversation gets drastically tense, pasta is a relatively difficult food to throw.

In YES! Magazine's article, "Cooking Stirs the Pot for Social Change," Korsha Wilson says "...beyond the narrow definition of what cooking is, you can see that cooking is and has always been an act of resistance." I hope that my dish inspires people to be aware of what's at stake with increasing greenhouse gas emissions and work toward creating a clean energy future.

My guest list for the potluck would include two groups of people: local farmers, who are directly and personally affected by rising temperatures, increased carbon dioxide, drought, and flooding, and people who either do not believe in human-caused climate change or don't think it affects anyone. I would invite the farmers or farm owners because their jobs and crops are dependent on the weather. I hope that after hearing a farmer's perspective, climate-deniers would be awakened by the truth and more receptive to the effort to reverse these catastrophic trends.

Earth is a beautiful planet that provides everything we'll ever need, but because of our pattern of living—wasteful consumption, fossil fuel burning, and greenhouse gas emissions— our habitat is rapidly deteriorating. Whether you are a farmer, a long-shower-taking teenager, a worker in a pollution-producing factory, or a climate-denier, the future of humankind is in our hands. The choices we make and the actions we take will forever affect planet Earth.

Apple Pie Embrace

By Grace Williams, grade 11

It's 1:47 a.m. Thanksgiving smells fill the kitchen. The sweet aroma of sugar-covered apples and buttery dough swirls into my nostrils. Fragrant orange and rosemary permeate the room and every corner smells like a stroll past the open door of a French bakery. My eleven-year-old eyes water, red with drowsiness, and refocus on the oven timer counting down. Behind me, my mom and aunt chat to no end, fueled by the seemingly self-replenishable coffee pot stashed in the corner. Their hands work fast, mashing potatoes, crumbling cornbread, and covering finished dishes in a thin layer of plastic wrap. The most my tired body can do is sit slouched on the backless wooden footstool. I bask in the heat escaping under the oven door.

As a child, I enjoyed Thanksgiving and the preparations that came with it, but it seemed like more of a bridge between my birthday and Christmas than an actual holiday. Now, it's a time of year I look forward to, dedicated to family, memories, and, most importantly, food. What I realized as I grew older was that my homemade Thanksgiving apple pie was more than its flaky crust and soft-fruit center. This American food symbolized a rite of passage, my Iraqi family's ticket to assimilation.

Some argue that by adopting American customs like the apple pie, we lose our culture. I would argue that while American culture influences what my family eats and celebrates, it doesn't define our character. In my family, we eat Iraqi dishes like mesta and tahini, but we also eat Cinnamon Toast Crunch for breakfast. This doesn't mean we favor one culture over the other; instead, we create a beautiful blend of the two, adapting traditions to make them our own.

That said, my family has always been more than the "mashed potatoes and turkey" type.

My mom's family immigrated to the United States in 1976. Upon their arrival, they encountered a deeply divided America. Racism thrived, even after the significant freedoms gained from the Civil Rights Movement a few years before. Here, my family was thrust into a completely unknown world: they didn't speak the language, they didn't dress normally, and dinners like riza maraka seemed strange in comparison to the Pop Tarts and Oreos lining grocery store shelves.

If I were to host a dinner party, it would be like Thanksgiving with my Chaldean family. The guests, my extended family, are a diverse people, distinct ingredients in a sweet potato casserole, coming together to create a delicious dish.

Our Thanksgiving spread accurately represents our blend of cultures. White and olive-toned hands alike hold plates piled high with mashed potatoes, turkey, and dolma. Everyone will come. Whether they be family, or "cousins" I've never met before, the more crowded the table, the better. As they lounge on plastic-covered sofas, I'll make my apple pie for a house full of loud immigrants.

In her article "Cooking Stirs the Pot for

Social Change," Korsha Wilson writes, "each ingredient that we use, every technique, every spice tells a story about our access, our privilege, our heritage, and our culture." Voices around the room will echo off the walls into the late hours of the night while the hot apple pie steams at the table's center.

We will play concan on the blanketed floor and I'll try to understand my Toto, who, after forty years, still speaks broken English. I'll listen to my elders as they tell stories about growing up in Unionville, Michigan, a predominately white town where they always felt like outsiders, stories of racism that I have the privilege not to experience. While snacking on sunflower seeds and salted pistachios, we'll talk about the news- how thousands of people across the country are protesting for justice among immigrants. No one protested to give my family a voice.

Our Thanksgiving food is more than just sustenance, it is a physical representation of my family 's blended and ever-changing culture, even after 40 years in the United States. No matter how the food on our plates changes, it will always symbolize our sense of family—immediate and extended—and our unbreakable bond..

Nourishing Change After Tragedy Strikes

By Lillia Borodkin, university

In the Jewish community, food is paramount. We often spend our holidays gathered around a table, sharing a meal and reveling in our people's story. On other sacred days, we fast, focusing instead on reflection, atonement, and forgiveness.

As a child, I delighted in the comfort of matzo ball soup, the sweetness of hamantaschen, and the beauty of braided challah. But as I grew older and more knowledgeable about my faith, I learned that the origins of these foods are not rooted in joy, but in sacrifice.

The matzo of matzo balls was a necessity as the Jewish people did not have time for their bread to rise as they fled slavery in Egypt. The hamantaschen was an homage to the hat of Haman, the villain of the Purim story who plotted the Jewish people's destruction. The unbaked portion of braided challah was tithed by commandment to the kohen or priests. Our food is an expression of our history, commemorating both our struggles and our triumphs.

As I write this, only days have passed since eleven Jews were killed at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. These people, intending only to pray and celebrate the Sabbath with their community, were murdered simply for being Jewish. This brutal event, in a temple and city much like my own, is a reminder that anti-Semitism still exists in this country. A reminder that hatred of Jews, of me, my family, and my community, is alive and flourishing in America today. The thought that a difference in religion would make some believe that others do not have the right to exist is frightening and sickening.

This is why, if given the chance, I would sit down the entire Jewish American community at one giant Shabbat table. I'd serve matzo ball soup, pass around loaves of challah, and do my best to offer comfort. We would take time to remember the beautiful souls lost to anti-Semitism this October and the countless others who have been victims of such hatred in the past. I would then ask that we channel all we are feeling—all the fear, confusion, and anger—into the fight.

As suggested in Korsha Wilson's "Cooking Stirs the Pot for Social Change," I would urge my guests to direct our passion for justice and the comfort and care provided by the food we are eating into resisting anti-Semitism and hatred of all kinds.

We must use the courage this sustenance provides to create change and honor our people's suffering and strength. We must remind our neighbors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, that anti-Semitism is alive and well today. We must shout and scream and vote until our elected leaders take this threat to our community seriously. And, we must stand with, support, and listen to other communities that are subjected to vengeful hate today in the same way that many of these groups have supported us in the wake of this tragedy.

This terrible shooting is not the first of its kind, and if conflict and loathing are permitted to grow, I fear it will not

be the last. While political change may help, the best way to target this hate is through smaller-scale actions in our own communities.

It is critical that we as a Jewish people take time to congregate and heal together, but it is equally necessary to include those outside the Jewish community to build a powerful crusade against hatred and bigotry. While convening with these individuals, we will work to end the dangerous "otherizing" that plagues our society and seek to understand that we share far more in common than we thought. As disagreements arise during our discussions, we will learn to respect and treat each other with the fairness we each desire. Together, we shall share the comfort, strength, and courage that traditional Jewish foods provide and use them to fuel our revolution.

We are not alone in the fight despite what extremists and anti-semites might like us to believe. So, like any Jew would do, I invite you to join me at the Shabbat table. First, we will eat. Then, we will get to work.

Last Meal

By Paisley Regester, grade 12

As a kid, I remember asking my friends jokingly, "If you were stuck on a deserted island, what single item of food would you bring?" Some of my friends answered practically and said they'd bring water. Others answered comically and said they'd bring snacks like Flamin' Hot Cheetos or a banana. However, most of my friends answered sentimentally and listed the foods that made them happy. This seems like fun and games, but what happens if the hypothetical changes? Imagine being asked, on the eve of your death, to choose the final meal you will ever eat. What food would you pick? Something practical? Comical? Sentimental?

This situation is the reality for the 2,747 American prisoners who are currently awaiting execution on death row. The grim ritual of "last meals," when prisoners choose their final meal before execution, can reveal a lot about these individuals and what they valued throughout their lives.

It is difficult for us to imagine someone eating steak, lobster tail, apple pie, and vanilla ice cream one moment and being killed by state-approved lethal injection the next. The prisoner can only hope that the apple pie he requested tastes as good as his mom's. Surprisingly, many people in prison decline the option to request a special last meal. We often think of food as something that keeps us alive, so is there really any point to eating if someone knows they are going to die?

"Controlling food is a means of controlling power," said chef Sean Sherman in the YES! Magazine article "Cooking Stirs the Pot for Social Change," by Korsha Wilson. There are deeper stories that lie behind the final meals of individuals on death row.

I want to bring awareness to the complex and often controversial conditions of this country's criminal justice system and change the common perception of prisoners as inhuman. To accomplish this, I would host a potluck where I would recreate the last meals of prisoners sentenced to death.

In front of each plate, there would be a place card with the prisoner's full name, the date of execution, and the method of execution. These meals could range from a plate of fried chicken, peas with butter, apple pie, and a Dr. Pepper, reminiscent of a Sunday dinner at Grandma's, to a single olive.

Seeing these meals up close, meals that many may eat at their own table or feed to their own kids, would force attendees to face the reality of the death penalty. It will urge my guests to look at these individuals not just as prisoners, assigned a number and a death date, but as people, capable of love and rehabilitation.

This potluck is not only about realizing a prisoner's humanity, but it is also about recognizing a flawed criminal justice system. Over the years, I have become skeptical of the American judicial system, especially when only seven states have judges who ethnically represent the people they serve. I was shocked when I found out that the

officers who killed Michael Brown and Anthony Lamar Smith were exonerated for their actions. How could that be possible when so many teens and adults of color have spent years in prison, some even executed, for crimes they never committed?

Lawmakers, police officers, city officials, and young constituents, along with former prisoners and their families, would be invited to my potluck to start an honest conversation about the role and application of inequality, dehumanization, and racism in the death penalty. Food served at the potluck would represent the humanity of prisoners and push people to acknowledge that many inmates are victims of a racist and corrupt judicial system.

Recognizing these injustices is only the first step towards a more equitable society. The second step would be acting on these injustices to ensure that every voice is heard, even ones separated from us by prison walls. Let's leave that for the next potluck, where I plan to serve humble pie.

The Empty Seat

By Emma Lingo, grade 11

"If you aren't sober, then I don't want to see you on Christmas."

Harsh words for my father to hear from his daughter but words he needed to hear. Words I needed him to understand and words he seemed to consider as he fiddled with his wine glass at the head of the table. Our guests, my grandma, and her neighbors remained resolutely silent. They were not about to defend my drunken father–or Charles as I call him–from my anger or my ultimatum.

This was the first dinner we had had together in a year. The last meal we shared ended with Charles slopping his drink all over my birthday presents and my mother explaining heroin addiction to me. So, I wasn't surprised when Charles threw down some liquid valor before dinner in anticipation of my anger. If he wanted to be welcomed on Christmas, he needed to be sober—or he needed to be gone.

Countless dinners, holidays, and birthdays taught me that my demands for sobriety would fall on deaf ears. But not this time. Charles gave me a gift—a one of a kind, limited edition, absolutely awkward treat. One that I didn't know how to deal with at all. Charles went home that night, smacked a bright red bow on my father, and hand-delivered him to me on Christmas morning.

He arrived for breakfast freshly showered and looking flustered. He would remember this day for once only because his daughter had scolded him into sobriety. Dad teetered between happiness and shame. Grandma distracted us from Dad's presence by bringing the piping hot bacon and biscuits from the kitchen to the table, theatrically announcing their arrival. Although these foods were the alleged focus of the meal, the real spotlight shined on the unopened liquor cabinet in my grandma's kitchen—the cabinet I know Charles was begging Dad to open.

I've isolated myself from Charles. My family has too. It means we don't see Dad, but it's the best way to avoid confrontation and heartache. Sometimes I find myself wondering what it would be like if we talked with him more or if he still lived nearby. Would he be less inclined to use? If all families with an addict tried to hang on to a relationship with the user, would there be fewer addicts in the world? Christmas breakfast with Dad was followed by Charles whisking him away to Colorado where pot had just been legalized. I haven't talked to Dad since that Christmas.

As Korsha Wilson stated in her YES! Magazine article, "Cooking Stirs the Pot for Social Change," "Sometimes what we don't cook says more than what we do cook." When it comes to addiction, what isn't served is more important than what is. In quiet moments, I like to imagine a meal with my family–including Dad. He'd have a spot at the table in my little fantasy. No alcohol would push him out of his chair, the cigarettes would remain seated in his back pocket, and the stench of weed wouldn't invade the dining room. Fruit salad and gumbo would

fill the table—foods that Dad likes. We'd talk about trivial matters in life, like how school is going and what we watched last night on TV.

Dad would feel loved. We would connect. He would feel less alone. At the end of the night, he'd walk me to the door and promise to see me again soon. And I would believe him.

The Empty Seat

By Emma Lingo, grade 11

I close my eyes and envision a dinner of my wildest dreams. I would invite all of my relatives. Not just my sister who doesn't ask how I am anymore. Not just my nephews who I'm told are too young to understand me. No, I would gather all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins to introduce them to the me they haven't met.

For almost two years, I've gone by a different name that most of my family refuses to acknowledge. My aunt, a nun of 40 years, told me at a recent birthday dinner that she'd heard of my "nickname." I didn't want to start a fight, so I decided not to correct her. Even the ones who've adjusted to my name have yet to recognize the bigger issue.

Last year on Facebook, I announced to my friends and family that I am transgender. No one in my family has talked to me about it, but they have plenty to say to my parents. I feel as if this is about my parents more than me—that they've made some big parenting mistake. Maybe if I invited everyone to dinner and opened up a discussion, they would voice their concerns to me instead of my parents.

I would serve two different meals of comfort food to remind my family of our good times. For my dad's family, I would cook heavily salted breakfast food, the kind my grandpa used to enjoy. He took all of his kids to IHOP every Sunday and ordered the least healthy option he could find, usually some combination of an overcooked omelet and a loaded Classic Burger. For my mom's family, I would buy shakes and burgers from Hardee's. In my grandma's final weeks, she let aluminum tins of sympathy meals pile up on her dining table while she made my uncle take her to Hardee's every day.

In her article on cooking and activism, food writer Korsha Wilson writes, "Everyone puts down their guard over a good meal, and in that space, change is possible." Hopefully the same will apply to my guests.

When I first thought of this idea, my mind rushed to the endless negative possibilities. My nun-aunt and my two non-nun aunts who live like nuns would whip out their Bibles before I even finished my first sentence. My very liberal, state representative cousin would say how proud she is of the guy I'm becoming, but this would trigger my aunts to accuse her of corrupting my mind. My sister, who has never spoken to me about my gender identity, would cover her children's ears and rush them out of the house. My Great-Depression-raised grandparents would roll over in their graves, mumbling about how kids have it easy nowadays.

After mentally mapping out every imaginable terrible outcome this dinner could have, I realized a conversation is unavoidable if I want my family to accept who I am. I long to restore the deep connection I used to have with them. Though I often think these former relationships are out of reach, I won't know until I try to repair them. For a year and a half, I've relied on Facebook and my parents to relay messages about my identity, but I need to tell my own story.

At first, I thought Korsha Wilson's idea of a cooked meal leading the way to social change was too optimistic, but now I understand that I need to think more like her. Maybe, just maybe, my family could all gather around a table, enjoy some overpriced shakes, and be as close as we were when I was a little girl.