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Visions of Unity Contest

North Torrance High

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Sobremesa, a Culture's Guide to Unity

Essay Prompt: **MULTICULTURAL** – *Describe unique multi-cultural experiences you have had and what others can learn from your experiences. Has living in a foreign country and experiencing other cultures changed you for the better? What about deepening your understanding of friends or relatives from different races, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, parts of the world, or knowing those from other distinguishing backgrounds?*

Word Count:

Shiny and narrow, I carefully placed my fork on the neatly folded napkin. Taking a bite of the *asada*, I glanced around the wooden table full of *pan amasado*, *empanadas* and *pisco* (a Chilean brandy).

This was my first time visiting Chile. I was 14 years old. Finding myself in a delicate and transitional point of my life, although surrounded by various cultures and perspectives in my hometown of Torrance, I was yet to get to know my own.

After taking the final bites of my meal, my *Tia* busied our plates. In an American manner, I expected my family to transition from the dinner table and host the “after-party” in the living room. However, my brothers and I were asked to set the table in preparation for *sobremesa*: the time spent socializing at the table after the meal. There was excitement in the air as we eloquently transformed the table with an array of breads, jellies and coffee. The night was just getting started!

Around me, grandparents, cousins, and aunts and uncles smiled and exchanged heartfelt stories that would last until 2 am. Despite living in different continents for many decades, my father and all the cousins engaged in emotional conversations. Children as young as five closely bonded with grandparents nearing their 90s.

At five years old, I enrolled in my school's Dual Immersion Program which created a safe and intimate community that enriched our bilingual learning. Surrounded by classmates of all colors, we supported one another to learn our second language. Every year, before winter break, the PTA would plan a potluck that encouraged us to bring a dish from our culture.

As I reflect upon those experiences as a child and the dinners with my family in Chile, I am reminded that *sobremesa* forms the foundation of community, companionship and service. I empathize with those who have not experienced such unity and communion through food before. From my experiences, others can learn that unity is built through vulnerability and without shame or judgment in a safe environment. Much like the experience I had with my family in Chile, a safe space filled with music, laughter and food make for the perfect environment for conversations of vulnerability and deeper connections in which we find gratitude for the little things in life.

Just like a warm hug from an old friend, *sobremesa* allows for vulnerability and a primitive connection through food. Despite our origins, *sobremesa* is a universal, cultural experience that brings togetherness, because at the end of the day, we all need to fuel our bodies and form connections. *Sobremesa's* inclusivity sparks the potential to create a more modern community that can positively advance our society by communion of different cultures through love, tolerance and respect for all.

Being young, my school's *silly little* potlucks and forced family dinners flew over my head. However, today I am grateful to be a part of family dinner's and potlucks as it has taught me how to be a part of something greater than myself, and taught me to be of service to others. A simple act, such as coming together to set the table for dinner is the foundation of teamwork and community that shapes the greatness that we need in our modern, ever-changing society. I am thankful to have learned that through my experiences. As I get older, I feel more connected to my friends who are from other cultures because of the bond we can create while experiencing *sobremesa* ourselves. Today, I have a deeper understanding of the world I live in. Despite social class, race and status, all people bond through enriching community and food.