

The Dinner Party Curriculum Project

Encounter 2: Extending the Invitation

Grade Levels: Upper-Elementary, Middle, High School



In this Encounter, students apply the criteria used by Judy Chicago and “invite” women to join the others at *The Dinner Party* table. Each student presents a symbolic representation of the nominee, along with a statement outlining reasons for the selection, to a group of five or six students. The group must select only one of the nominated women to present to the whole class. The ensuing discussion and debate mimic how Judy Chicago and her team of researchers struggled with the task of deciding who was to be invited to the table out of the more than 3,000 women researched. In the installation, there are 39 historical and mythical

women of achievement at the table and 999 corresponding women’s names honored on the *Heritage Floor* where the table rests.

Extending the Invitation builds upon Encounter 1: *Table Talk* and strives to deepen the students’ contextual knowledge about *The Dinner Party*. It introduces yet another dimension of the artwork and requires students to think metaphorically. Through this Encounter, students are involved in choice-making and negotiation with others; students may have to give and take and let go of preconceived notions about their selections. Reflective strategies serve students well in processing the relevance and importance of *The Dinner Party* as representative of inequity in society. As they engage in this Encounter, students should understand the importance of advocating for those who are underrepresented. In addition, *Extending the Invitation* validates students’ excitement about the contributors in their lives.

Investigation

The teacher will:

1. Continue to introduce *The Dinner Party* to students by providing additional contextual information and sharing the following quote from Judy Chicago:

► *I have brought these women together—invited them to dinner, so to speak—in order that we might hear what they have to say and see the range and beauty of our heritage, a heritage we have not had the opportunity to know. These guests, whether they are real women or goddess figures, have all been transformed in *The Dinner Party* into symbolic images—images that stand for the whole range of women’s achievements and yet embody women’s containment. Each woman is herself, but through her can be seen the lives of thousands of other women—some famous, some anonymous, but all struggling, as the women on the table struggled, to have some sense of their own worth through five thousand years of civilization dominated by men (Chicago, 1979, p. 52).*



2. Extend an invitation for other women to join the table, inviting students to respond by bringing the name of their proposed guest for consideration, along with an object that represents the woman and her accomplishments.

3. Provide *Extending the Invitation* worksheet. Review Part One, which explains the process for selecting women to be honored in *The Dinner Party*. Help students reflect on our collective social history and their personal history in relationship to the selection criteria for *The Dinner Party*. Ask, “Why is it important to include only women who have made contributions to society, worked to improve conditions for women, and those who represent a significant time period in women’s history or who might be considered a model for greater equality in society?”

4. Facilitate Parts Two, Three and Four in which students identify a woman to nominate for the table, create an image or find an object that represents the woman’s accomplishments and characteristics, and complete a statement outlining how the nominee meets the criteria used in selecting women for the *Heritage Floor*.

5. Have students work in small groups to discuss each member’s nominee and then to select one woman to “invite” to the table.

6. Facilitate a large class discussion in which each small group presents its chosen woman, along with her symbolic image or object and reasons for her selection. Have students display these objects and placards.

7. Suggest that students display all women nominated for an invitation to the table.

8. While recognizing that students may have strong feelings about their respective nominees, facilitate a discussion about the process of nominating and selecting women to be honored and its impact upon students’ understanding and appreciation of *The Dinner Party*. Possible prompts:

- ▶ Of the women introduced to you, who has made the biggest impression? Why?
- ▶ After hearing and seeing the exhibition of nominees to the table, how do you feel about the woman you introduced to the selection process?
- ▶ Do any of the invitees represent a part of history previously unknown to you?
- ▶ How did your group narrow the invitee selection to one woman? Why did your group choose this particular invitee?
- ▶ What do you think about inclusion and exclusion? Who is typically included and excluded?
- ▶ How does your new understanding of the selection process for *The Dinner Party* affect your ideas about the artwork?

The students will:

1. Review Judy Chicago’s criteria used in the selection of *The Dinner Party* women. The student refers to the *Extending the Invitation* worksheet, Part One.

2. Engage in research and identify a woman to invite to the table based on the criteria Judy Chicago and her researchers used for *The Dinner Party* guests. The student considers:

- ▶ Did the woman make a worthwhile contribution to society?
- ▶ Did she attempt to improve conditions for women?
- ▶ Does her life or work highlight a significant aspect of women’s history or provide a model for greater equality in society?

3. Make a personal connection by considering the question, “What has this woman contributed to my own life?”

4. Create or select an object that symbolizes the woman’s contributions and characteristics.

5. Compose a statement outlining reasons why the selected woman should have a place at the table—how the woman’s

life and contributions meet the criteria for selection. Complete the *Extending the Invitation Guest Placard* found on page 5.

6. In groups of five to six members, take turns presenting their symbolic images/objects and placards to the other students, explaining their reasons for nominating the woman they wish to be honored, and how their object represents her.

7. Work within their groups to select only one woman from those nominated. Each group will put forward the name of one woman to include at the table.

8. With the whole class, consider the nominations from each small working group. A representative from each group presents the nominee, along with the group's reasons for selecting this woman.

9. Display group nominees, with guest placards, for all to view.

10. Create another display of those nominees whose names were not put forward by the individual groups.

Continuing Exploration:

1. Invite students to use reflective journals or comment logs during the conclusion of this learning Encounter, especially in relation to the exhibition of placards and symbolic images/objects for the invitees. How do they feel about the experience of nominating and selecting women for the table? What do they know now about *The Dinner Party* that they did not know before?

2. The closure activity for this learning Encounter could include students' brainstorming about enduring ideas generated from *The Dinner Party*. Some examples of enduring ideas are as follows: People are included and excluded; Value systems determine our histories; Our predecessors influence our paths.

3. Headlines in our visual culture are sometimes viewed as representative of who is being included and excluded. A *Headlines Activity* (Wormeli, 2004) is another way students could represent the qualities and contributions of their chosen invitee.

► *A Headline Activity:* Role-playing as a newspaper reporter, each student composes three to five headlines describing a nominee's significant contributions and submits these headlines to an Editorial Board consisting of five or six other students. The Editorial Board listens to the reporters' justifications of the headlines, provides feedback, and discusses possibilities and adjustments to the headlines. The Editorial Board and all other students select the headlines that they believe should be "published."



Classroom Connections:

1. Upper-Elementary, Middle, High School: Art teacher Andrea Horn created an alternative approach to this Encounter with a lesson entitled: *Who Has Made Great Contributions to our World?* Her students consider why more men, as opposed to women, are generally recognized as contributors to our world. After creating a list of people who have made great contributions, they surmise why there are mostly men on their list. Students determine what counts as a contribution and consider those people who have made great contributions to our world.

Materials:

1. *Extending the Invitation* worksheet.
2. *Extending the Invitation Guest Placard*.

References:

1. Chicago, J. (1979). *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of our Heritage*. NY: Anchor Books.
2. Wormeli, R. (2004). *Summarization in Any Subject: 50 techniques to improve student learning*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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Extending the Invitation

PART ONE: Learn more about selecting women for *The Dinner Party*.

The Dinner Party is an installation of 39 place settings of ceramic and needlework presented on a triangular table that rests on a porcelain floor. Each place setting represents a woman of achievement in history.

Artist Judy Chicago and her helpers researched over 3,000 women, but could only select 39 to have a place setting at *The Dinner Party* table. They used the following criteria:

- ▶ Did the woman's contribution or circumstances render her as being representative of a particular historical time period?
- ▶ Did her life embody some type of significant achievement?
- ▶ Did she in some way work toward the betterment of conditions for women?
- ▶ Is there enough information about her to provide the basis for a visually cogent image?

An important part of *The Dinner Party*, the *Heritage Floor*, is made of porcelain tiles inscribed with the names of 999 women who were also important in history. Selection was based on the following three criteria:

- ▶ Did the woman make a worthwhile contribution to society?
- ▶ Had the woman attempted to improve conditions for women?
- ▶ Did the woman's life or work highlight a significant aspect of women's history or provide a model for more equality in society?

Note that it took a team of 20 researchers two years to put together the information about the women for the *Heritage Floor*!

PART TWO: Whom will you invite?

Using the criteria for selecting women to be included in the *Heritage Floor*, identify a woman who you believe should be invited to *The Dinner Party* table. You may need to research information about several women before you make your decision. Ask yourself these questions:

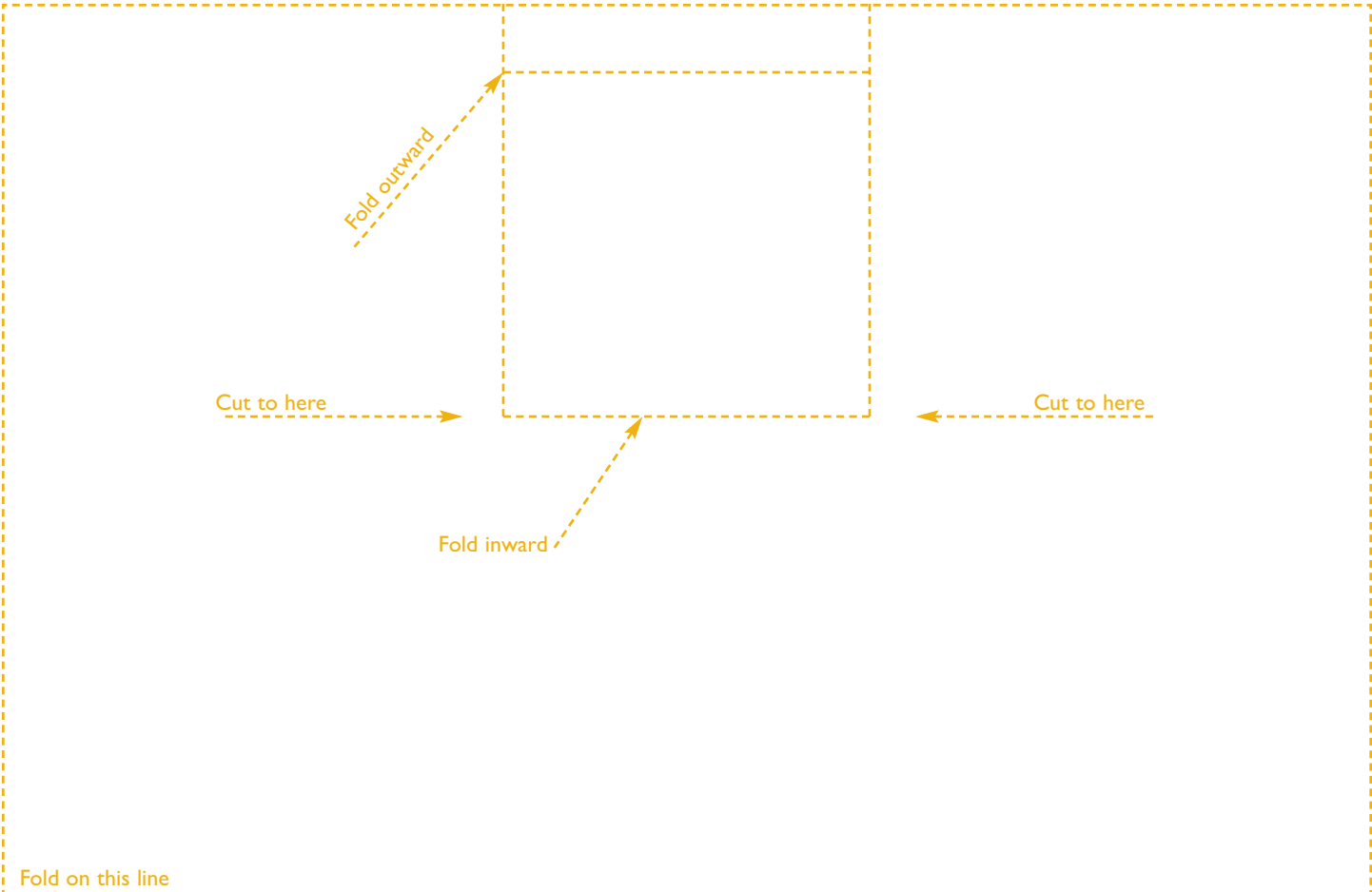
- ▶ 1. How did the woman make a worthwhile contribution to society?
- ▶ 2. In what ways did the woman attempt to improve conditions for women?
- ▶ 3. How did the woman's life or work highlight a significant aspect of women's history or provide a model for more equality in society?

PART THREE: How will you represent her accomplishments?

What visual metaphors represent your selected woman? Create or find an image or object that will communicate to others the woman's accomplishments and special qualities.

PART FOUR: Guest Placard

Create a placard (refer to page 5) to tell how your selected woman meets the criteria for selection and why you believe she should be invited. Share your object/image and placard with your group.



Extending An Invitation

To: _____

Because: _____

Nominator: _____