

The All-American Slurp

Lensey Namioka

The first time our family was invited out to dinner in America, we disgraced ourselves while eating celery. We had emigrated to this country from China, and during our early days here we had a hard time with American table manners.

In China we never ate celery raw, or any other kind of vegetable raw. We always had to disinfect the vegetables in boiling water first. When we were presented with our first relish tray, the raw celery caught us unprepared.

We had been invited to dinner by our neighbors, the Gleasons. After arriving at the house, we shook hands with our hosts and packed ourselves into a sofa. As our family of four sat stiffly in a row, my younger brother and I stole glances at our parents for a clue as to what to do next. **A**

Mrs. Gleason offered the relish tray to Mother. The tray looked pretty, with its tiny red radishes, curly sticks of carrots, and long, slender stalks of pale green celery. “Do try some of the celery, Mrs. Lin,” she said. “It’s from a local farmer, and it’s sweet.”

Mother picked up one of the green stalks, and Father followed suit. Then I picked up a stalk, and my brother did too. So there we sat, each with a stalk of celery in our right hand.

20 Mrs. Gleason kept smiling. “Would you like to try some of the dip, Mrs. Lin? It’s my own recipe: sour cream and onion flakes, with a dash of Tabasco sauce.”

Analyze Visuals ▶

What emotion or attitude does the girl’s facial expression convey?

A TONE AND IMAGERY

Reread lines 1–12. What words and images help create a humorous tone toward the subject of the story?



Most Chinese don't care for dairy products, and in those days I wasn't even ready to drink fresh milk. Sour cream sounded perfectly **revolting**. Our family shook our heads in unison.

Mrs. Gleason went off with the relish tray to the other guests, and we carefully watched to see what they did. Everyone seemed to eat the raw vegetables quite happily.

Mother took a bite of her celery. *Crunch*. "It's not bad!" she whispered.

30 Father took a bite of his celery. *Crunch*. "Yes, it *is* good," he said, looking surprised.

I took a bite, and then my brother. *Crunch, crunch*. It was more than good; it was delicious. Raw celery has a slight sparkle, a zingy taste that you don't get in cooked celery. When Mrs. Gleason came around with the relish tray, we each took another stalk of celery, except my brother. He took two.

There was only one problem: long strings ran through the length of the stalk, and they got caught in my teeth. When I help my mother in the kitchen, I always pull the strings out before slicing celery.

40 I pulled the strings out of my stalk. *Z-z-zip, z-z-zip*. My brother followed suit. *Z-z-zip, z-z-zip, z-z-zip*. To my left, my parents were taking care of their own stalks. *Z-z-zip, z-z-zip, z-z-zip*. **B**

Suddenly I realized that there was dead silence except for our zipping. Looking up, I saw that the eyes of everyone in the room were on our family. Mr. and Mrs. Gleason, their daughter Meg, who was my friend, and their neighbors the Badels—they were all staring at us as we busily pulled the strings of our celery.

That wasn't the end of it. Mrs. Gleason announced that dinner was served and invited us to the dining table. It was **lavishly** covered with
50 platters of food, but we couldn't see any chairs around the table. So we helpfully carried over some dining chairs and sat down. All the other guests just stood there.

Mrs. Gleason bent down and whispered to us, "This is a buffet dinner. You help yourselves to some food and eat it in the living room."

Our family beat a retreat back to the sofa as if chased by enemy soldiers. For the rest of the evening, too **mortified** to go back to the dining table, I nursed¹ a bit of potato salad on my plate. **C**

Next day Meg and I got on the school bus together. I wasn't sure how she would feel about me after the spectacle² our family made at the party.

60 But she was just the same as usual, and the only reference she made to the party was, "Hope you and your folks got enough to eat last night. You certainly didn't take very much. Mom never tries to figure out how

revolting (rĭ-vōl'tĭng)
adj. causing disgust
revolt *v.*

B TONE AND IMAGERY

Using a word that sounds like what it means is called **onomatopoeia** (ŏn'ə-măt'ə-pē'ə). Notice the word *crunch* in lines 29–30 and the word *z-z-zip* in lines 40–42. How do these words add humor to the story? Which senses do these images of eating celery appeal to?

lavishly (lāv'ĭsh-lē) *adv.*
in a rich or plentiful way;
abundantly

mortified (môr'tē-fīd')
adj. ashamed, humiliated
mortify *v.*

C VISUALIZE

In line 55, what picture does the description of the family beating "a retreat back to the sofa as if chased by enemy soldiers" create in your mind?

1. **nursed**: very slowly ate.

2. **spectacle**: public display of bad behavior.



◀ Analyze Visuals

Based on the food shown, what can you **infer** about the event pictured here?

much food to prepare. She just puts everything on the table and hopes for the best.”

I began to relax. The Gleasons’ dinner party wasn’t so different from a Chinese meal after all. My mother also puts everything on the table and hopes for the best. **D**

Meg was the first friend I had made after we came to America. I eventually got acquainted with a few other kids in school, but Meg
70 was still the only real friend I had.

My brother didn’t have any problems making friends. He spent all his time with some boys who were teaching him baseball, and in no time he could speak English much faster than I could—not better, but faster.

I worried more about making mistakes, and I spoke carefully, making sure I could say everything right before opening my mouth. At least I had a better accent than my parents, who never really got rid of their Chinese accent, even years later. My parents had both studied English in school before coming to America, but what they had studied was mostly written English, not spoken.

D TONE

The tone of lines 65–67 is different from the tone the author used to describe the dinner party. Choose one word to describe the tone of this paragraph.

80 Father's approach to English was a scientific one. Since Chinese verbs have no tense, he was fascinated by the way English verbs changed form according to whether they were in the present, past imperfect, perfect, pluperfect, future, or future perfect tense. He was always making diagrams of verbs and their inflections,³ and he looked for opportunities to show off his mastery of the pluperfect and future perfect tenses, his two favorites. "I shall have finished my project by Monday," he would say smugly.⁴

Mother's approach was to memorize lists of polite phrases that would cover all possible social situations. She was constantly muttering things
90 like "I'm fine, thank you. And you?" Once she accidentally stepped on someone's foot, and hurriedly blurted, "Oh, that's quite all right!" Embarrassed by her slip, she resolved to do better next time. So when someone stepped on *her* foot, she cried, "You're welcome!"

In our own different ways, we made progress in learning English. But I had another worry, and that was my appearance. My brother didn't have to worry, since Mother bought him blue jeans for school, and he dressed like all the other boys. But she insisted that girls had to wear skirts. By the time she saw that Meg and the other girls were wearing jeans, it was too late. My school clothes were bought already, and we didn't have money
100 left to buy new outfits for me. We had too many other things to buy first, like furniture, pots, and pans.

The first time I visited Meg's house, she took me upstairs to her room, and I wound up trying on her clothes. We were pretty much the same size, since Meg was shorter and thinner than average. Maybe that's how we became friends in the first place. Wearing Meg's jeans and T-shirt, I looked at myself in the mirror. I could almost pass for an American—from the back, anyway. At least the kids in school wouldn't stop and stare at me in the hallways, which was what they did when they saw me in my white blouse and navy blue skirt that went a couple of inches below the knees.

110 When Meg came to my house, I invited her to try on my Chinese dresses, the ones with a high collar and slits up the sides. Meg's eyes were bright as she looked at herself in the mirror. She struck several sultry poses, and we nearly fell over laughing.

The dinner party at the Gleasons' didn't stop my growing friendship with Meg. Things were getting better for me in other ways too. Mother finally bought me some jeans at the end of the month, when Father got his paycheck. She wasn't in any hurry about buying them at first, until

3. **inflections** (ɪn-flɛk'shənz): different tenses.

4. **smugly**: with self-satisfaction; self-righteously.

Language Coach

Verb Forms Mr. Lin is studying verb tenses, the time of action or state of being expressed by a verb. If you struggle with verb tenses, follow the rules below.

Tense	Use	Example
Present	To express an action or state of being that is occurring now	Father makes diagrams of verbs.
Past	To express an action or state of being that occurred in the past	Father made diagrams of verbs.
Future	To express an action or state of being that will occur in the future	Father will make diagrams of verbs tomorrow.

Scan pages 448–449 for examples of present, past, and future verb tenses.

SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION



The Chinese dress Meg tries on is a *cheongsam* (chōng'sām') or *qipao* (kī'pā-ō'). *Cheongsam* is from the Cantonese dialect and translates as "long dress." *Qipao* is Mandarin for "banner gown."

I worked on her. This is what I did. Since we didn't have a car in those days, I often ran down to the neighborhood store to pick up things for her.
120 The groceries cost less at a big supermarket, but the closest one was many blocks away. One day, when she ran out of flour, I offered to borrow a bike from our neighbor's son and buy a ten-pound bag of flour at the big supermarket. I mounted the boy's bike and waved to Mother. "I'll be back in five minutes!"

Before I started pedaling, I heard her voice behind me. "You can't go out in public like that! People can see all the way up to your thighs!"

"I'm sorry," I said innocently. "I thought you were in a hurry to get the flour." For dinner we were going to have pot-stickers (fried Chinese dumplings), and we needed a lot of flour.

130 "Couldn't you borrow a girl's bicycle?" complained Mother. "That way your skirt won't be pushed up."

"There aren't too many of those around," I said. "Almost all the girls wear jeans while riding a bike, so they don't see any point buying a girl's bike."

We didn't eat pot-stickers that evening, and Mother was thoughtful. Next day we took the bus downtown and she bought me a pair of jeans. In the same week, my brother made the baseball team of his junior high school, Father started taking driving lessons, and Mother discovered rummage sales. We soon got all the furniture we needed, plus a dart board
140 and a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle (fourteen hours later, we discovered that it was a 999-piece jigsaw puzzle). There was hope that the Lins might become a normal American family after all. **E**

Then came our dinner at the Lakeview Restaurant.

The Lakeview was an expensive restaurant, one of those places where a headwaiter dressed in tails conducted you to your seat, and the only light came from candles and flaming desserts. In one corner of the room a lady harpist played tinkling melodies.

Father wanted to celebrate, because he had just been promoted. He worked for an electronics company, and after his English started improving,
150 his superiors decided to appoint him to a position more suited to his training. The promotion not only brought a higher salary but was also a tremendous boost to his pride.

Up to then we had eaten only in Chinese restaurants. Although my brother and I were becoming fond of hamburgers, my parents didn't care much for Western food, other than chow mein.⁵

E VISUALIZE

Try to visualize the narrator's image of a "normal American family" (line 142). Which of the narrator's descriptions stand out to you the most? Record them in your chart.

5. **chow mein** (chou' mǎn'): Chinese-American dish of vegetables and meat served over fried noodles.

But this was a special occasion, and Father asked his coworkers to recommend a really elegant restaurant. So there we were at the Lakeview, stumbling after the headwaiter in the murky dining room.

At our table we were handed our menus, and they were so big that to
160 read mine I almost had to stand up again. But why bother? It was mostly in French, anyway. **F**

Father, being an engineer, was always systematic. He took out a pocket French dictionary. “They told me that most of the items would be in French, so I came prepared.” He even had a pocket flashlight, the size of a marking pen. While Mother held the flashlight over the menu, he looked up the items that were in French.

“*Pâté en croûte*,” he muttered. “Let’s see . . . *pâté* is paste . . . *croûte* is crust . . . hmm . . . a paste in crust.”

The waiter stood looking patient. I squirmed and died at least fifty times.
170 At long last Father gave up. “Why don’t we just order four complete dinners at random?” he suggested.

“Isn’t that risky?” asked Mother. “The French eat some rather peculiar things, I’ve heard.”

“A Chinese can eat anything a Frenchman can eat,” Father declared.

The soup arrived in a plate. How do you get soup up from a plate? I glanced at the other diners, but the ones at the nearby tables were not on their soup course, while the more distant ones were invisible in the darkness.

Fortunately my parents had studied books on Western **etiquette** before
180 they came to America. “Tilt your plate,” whispered my mother. “It’s easier to spoon the soup up that way.”

She was right. Tilting the plate did the trick. But the etiquette book didn’t say anything about what you did after the soup reached your lips. As any respectable Chinese knows, the correct way to eat your soup is to slurp. This helps to cool the liquid and prevent you from burning your lips. It also shows your appreciation.

We showed our appreciation. *Shloop*, went my father. *Shloop*, went my mother. *Shloop, shloop*, went my brother, who was the hungriest.

The lady harpist stopped playing to take a rest. And in the silence, our
190 family’s **consumption** of soup suddenly seemed unnaturally loud. You know how it sounds on a rocky beach when the tide goes out and the water drains from all those little pools? They go *shloop, shloop, shloop*. That was the Lin family, eating soup.

At the next table a waiter was pouring wine. When a large *shloop* reached him, he froze. The bottle continued to pour, and red wine flooded the tabletop and into the lap of a customer. Even the customer didn’t notice anything at first, being also hypnotized by the *shloop, shloop, shloop*.



TEKS 8

F HYPERBOLE

One way a writer can add humor to a story is to use **hyperbole**, an exaggeration of the truth for emphasis or humorous effect. The use of hyperbole adds to the humorous tone of this story. Lines 159–160 contain an example of hyperbole. The narrator says the menu was was so big “I almost had to stand up” to read it. Read ahead to lines 170–197 and find at least two more examples of hyperbole.

etiquette (ět’ÿ-kět’) *n.* the practice of social manners

consumption (kən-sŭmp’shən) *n.* the act of taking in, eating, or drinking **consume** *v.*

It was too much. “I need to go to the toilet,” I mumbled, jumping to my feet. A waiter, sensing my urgency, quickly directed me to the ladies’ room.

I splashed cold water on my burning face, and as I dried myself with a paper towel, I stared into the mirror. In this perfumed ladies’ room, with its pink-and-silver wallpaper and marbled sinks, I looked completely out of place. What was I doing here? What was our family doing in the Lakeview Restaurant? In America? **G**

The door to the ladies’ room opened. A woman came in and glanced curiously at me. I retreated into one of the toilet cubicles and latched the door.

Time passed—maybe half an hour, maybe an hour. Then I heard the door open again, and my mother’s voice. “Are you in there? You’re not sick, are you?”

There was real concern in her voice. A girl can’t leave her family just because they slurp their soup. Besides, the toilet cubicle had a few drawbacks as a permanent residence. “I’m all right,” I said, undoing the latch.

Mother didn’t tell me how the rest of the dinner went, and I didn’t want to know. In the weeks following, I managed to push the whole thing into the back of my mind, where it jumped out at me only a few times a day. Even now, I turn hot all over when I think of the Lakeview Restaurant. **H**



G SENSORY LANGUAGE

Writers use **sensory language** to help you imagine what their characters see, feel, hear, smell, and taste. Reread lines 201–205. Write down the phrases in this paragraph that include sensory language and identify which of the five senses each phrase appeals to.

H VISUALIZE

Many events embarrass the narrator during the dinner at the Lakeview Restaurant. Record the details and what you visualized in your chart.



◀ Analyze Visuals

Does this meal look inviting or intimidating? Explain.

But by the time we had been in this country for three months, our family was definitely making progress toward becoming Americanized. I remember my parents' first PTA⁶ meeting. Father wore a neat suit and tie, and Mother put on her first pair of high heels. She stumbled only once. They met my homeroom
230 teacher and beamed as she told them that I would make honor roll soon at the rate I was going. Of course Chinese etiquette forced Father to say that I was a very stupid girl and Mother to protest that the teacher was showing favoritism toward me. But I could tell they were both very proud.



The day came when my parents announced that they wanted to give a
240 dinner party. We had invited Chinese friends to eat with us before, but this dinner was going to be different. In addition to a Chinese-American family, we were going to invite the Gleasons.

“Gee, I can hardly wait to have dinner at your house,” Meg said to me. “I just *love* Chinese food.”

That was a relief. Mother was a good cook, but I wasn't sure if people who ate sour cream would also eat chicken gizzards⁷ stewed in soy sauce.

Mother decided not to take a chance with chicken gizzards. Since we had Western guests, she set the table with large dinner plates, which we never used in Chinese meals. In fact we didn't use individual plates at all, but
250 picked up food from the platters in the middle of the table and brought it directly to our rice bowls. Following the practice of Chinese-American restaurants, Mother also placed large serving spoons on the platters. ◆

The dinner started well. Mrs. Gleason exclaimed at the beautifully arranged dishes of food: the colorful candied fruit in the sweet-and-sour pork dish, the noodle-thin shreds of chicken meat stir-fried with tiny peas, and the glistening pink prawns⁸ in a ginger sauce.

◆ **GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT**

A **clause** is a group of words that has a subject and a verb. An **independent clause** can stand alone as a sentence, but a **dependent clause**, such as “*Following the practice of Chinese-American restaurants*” in lines 251–252, cannot. Notice that the writer avoids using sentence fragments by joining all dependent clauses with independent clauses.

6. **PTA:** Parent Teacher Association.

7. **gizzards:** A gizzard is the muscular pouch behind a bird's stomach that helps with its digestion.

8. **prawns** (prɒnz): large seafood, similar to shrimp.

At first I was too busy enjoying my food to notice how the guests were doing. But soon I remembered my duties. Sometimes guests were too polite to help themselves and you had to serve them with more food.

260 I glanced at Meg, to see if she needed more food, and my eyes nearly popped out at the sight of her plate. It was piled with food: the sweet-and-sour meat pushed right against the chicken shreds, and the chicken sauce ran into the prawns. She had been taking food from a second dish before she finished eating her helping from the first!

Horrified, I turned to look at Mrs. Gleason. She was dumping rice out of her bowl and putting it on her dinner plate. Then she ladled prawns and gravy on top of the rice and mixed everything together, the way you mix sand, gravel, and cement to make concrete.

I couldn't bear to look any longer, and I turned to Mr. Gleason. He was 270 chasing a pea around his plate. Several times he got it to the edge, but when he tried to pick it up with his chopsticks, it rolled back toward the center of the plate again. Finally he put down his chopsticks and picked up the pea with his fingers. He really did! A grown man! ❶

All of us, our family and the Chinese guests, stopped eating to watch the activities of the Gleasons. I wanted to giggle. Then I caught my mother's eyes on me. She frowned and shook her head slightly, and I understood the message: the Gleasons were not used to Chinese ways, and they were just **coping** the best they could. For some reason I thought of celery strings.

When the main courses were finished, Mother brought out a platter of 280 fruit. "I hope you weren't expecting a sweet dessert," she said. "Since the Chinese don't eat dessert, I didn't think to prepare any."

"Oh, I couldn't possibly eat dessert!" cried Mrs. Gleason. "I'm simply stuffed!"

Meg had different ideas. When the table was cleared, she announced that she and I were going for a walk. "I don't know about you, but I feel like dessert," she told me, when we were outside. "Come on, there's a Dairy Queen down the street. I could use a big chocolate milkshake!"

Although I didn't really want anything more to eat, I insisted on paying for the milkshakes. After all, I was still hostess.

290 Meg got her large chocolate milkshake and I had a small one. Even so, she was finishing hers while I was only half done. Toward the end she pulled hard on her straws and went *shloop, shloop*.

"Do you always slurp when you eat a milkshake?" I asked, before I could stop myself.

Meg grinned. "Sure. All Americans slurp." ☞ ❶

❶ TONE

Reread lines 257–273. Is it the Gleasons' actions, the narrator's responses, or both that add humor to the story? Explain.

cope (kōp) v. to struggle to overcome difficulties

❶ TONE AND IMAGERY

What does the tone and imagery in lines 290–295 tell you about how the narrator feels after her parents' dinner party?

Comprehension

- Recall** What two types of food served at the Gleasons' dinner party are unusual for the Lin family?
- Recall** How does each member of the Lin family learn English?
- Clarify** Why do the Lins slurp their soup in the French restaurant?



READING 8 Understand, make inferences, and draw conclusions about how an author's sensory language creates imagery in literary text. **RC-6(C)** Monitor and adjust comprehension (creating sensory images).

Literary Analysis

- Visualize** Review the chart you created while reading. Which sensory details helped you picture the story events most vividly in your mind? How do these details help you understand the Lin's experiences?
- Analyze Imagery** Look back through the story and list some of the images the author uses to describe the events that take place, noting which sense—sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste—each image appeals to. Then explain how the use of imagery adds humor to the story.
- Compare and Contrast Characters** Find examples of similarities and differences between the Lins and the Gleasons. Do you think the narrator feels more like or different from her neighbors by the end of the story? Support your answer with evidence from the story.
- Evaluate Tone** Find examples of characters' thoughts, words, and actions that contribute to the humorous tone of "The All-American Slurp." Record the examples in a chart like the one shown. Which details do you think have the strongest effect on the tone of the story?

<i>Thoughts</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Actions</i>

Extension and Challenge

- SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION** Imagine that you are preparing the Lin family for their dinner at the Gleasons' house. Write a **summary**, or a brief retelling, of the article on page 457 for the Lins. Remember that your summary should only include information from the article, and not your personal opinions.

Are people more **ALIKE** or different?

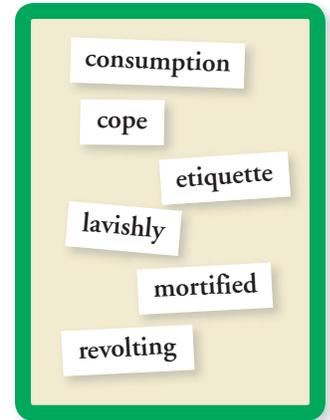
Namioka seems to think people are more alike than different. Do you agree?

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the letter of the item you would associate with each vocabulary word as it is used in “The All-American Slurp.”

1. **revolting**: (a) a borrowed sweater, (b) a spoiled sandwich, (c) an old car
2. **lavishly**: (a) a generous amount, (b) a large classroom, (c) a crowded train station
3. **mortified**: (a) playing a trick, (b) going to a meeting, (c) falling down in public
4. **etiquette**: (a) fixing a bicycle, (b) writing a thank-you note, (c) baking a dessert
5. **consumption**: (a) taking an elevator, (b) finding a lost hat, (c) eating lunch
6. **cope**: (a) get angry, (b) finish a project, (c) manage stress



ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• aspect • distinctive • interpret • perceive • sensory

Write a paragraph in which you discuss how the writer’s **distinctive** use of **sensory** language and hyperbole in “The All-American Slurp” added to your enjoyment of the story. Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: SIMILES AS CONTEXT CLUES

When writers want to compare two things, they sometimes use figurative language called similes. **Similes** are comparisons that use the words *like* or *as*. In “The All-American Slurp,” the narrator’s family leaves the buffet table at a party “as if chased by enemy soldiers.” The simile here is humorous and helps you understand how quickly the family left.

Similes can also give you context clues to help you figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words. If you can form a mental picture of the comparison, you understand the meaning of the unfamiliar word.

PRACTICE Use the simile in each sentence as a context clue to help you define the boldfaced word.

1. She was stepping as **gingerly** as the parent of a sleeping baby.
2. Storm clouds **loomed** like Friday’s spelling test.
3. He felt like a caged bird in the house’s **confining** guest room.
4. Her sloppy handwriting was as **cryptic** as any secret code.
5. The awkward fit of his clothes made him feel **gawky**, like a newborn giraffe.



READING 2B Use context to determine or clarify the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central
Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML6-455