

WHAT IS A LONG TABLE AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

BY EVA YAA ASANTEWAA

A **Long Table**--conceived by **Lois Weaver** of the lesbian theater duo Split Britches--is a physical space and non-hierarchical process for people gathering in conversation on topics of communal concern. It allows for an abundant free flow of ideas, opinions, information and energy.

Weaver's inspiration came from scenes in Marleen Gorris's feminist film *Antonia's Line* (1996) in which a tight-knit family welcomes more and more family and neighborhood characters to their long dining table. In a similar way, Weaver's Long Table format welcomes you to the table to share your experiences, thoughts, ideas, questions and visions. Click [HERE](#) to view Weaver's video about Long Tables (4:45).

A curated core group of table guests (core participants) sets the table with food for thought. These guests are not the typical panel of experts. There make no formal presentations, nor will there be a Q&A. They are guests--and so are you, as you sit (in chairs set up around the perimeter of the space) and listen in.

These core participants open the conversation with initial thoughts or takes on the topic. They model how to approach the table by first introducing themselves (name, pronouns and brief identification or affiliation) as they speak for the first time. (Example: I'm Eva Yaa Asantewaa. Pronouns: she/her. I'm Senior Curatorial Director at Gibney, an arts writer and educator. I write the *InfiniteBody* blog.) They welcome you to jump in at any time and help refresh the energy at the table.

Each Long Table is set up with chairs for this core group plus at least a few empty chairs. At any point, if you have a thought or question to share, feel free to take a seat at the table and wait for an opening to speak. (There might also be paper lining the table and a collection of markers that you can feel free to use to express your thoughts in that way.)

Ideally, as the conversation flows, we will see a flow of people to and from the table. It's embodied democracy in motion. If you want a seat and none are available, you may tap a person to ask if they will yield their seat to you. If you leave the table, you can come back whenever you choose. If you need to leave the room at any point or leave the event entirely, that's also fine.

From time to time, silence might arise at the table. Silence is okay, and breaking the silence is also okay. Awkwardness is okay, too. Although I have rarely experienced a Long Table that ran out of energy and talk before its scheduled endpoint, it's also okay if that happens. The host might then choose to invite people to share very brief announcements of events, projects and resources the community should know about.

See the [Long Table Etiquette](#) handout for more ideas about what a Long Table can offer. I did not write this etiquette sheet but picked it up at my first Long Table where I fell in love with this format!

Thank you for your participation in our community conversation!