Eating Alone Around the World

Teacher's Key | Level B2 | EnglishBridges.com

Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. self-conscious / self conscious
2. stigma
3. reservations / reservation
4. partitions
5. cater to
6. outrage
7. indicator
8. bias
9. overestimate / over-estimate
10. pace
11. ritual
12. unwind
13. savor / savour
14. linger

Word Partners

Part A. 1 c 2 d 3 g 4 e 5 b 6 a 7 h 8 f

Phrases: feel self-conscious about your accent; remove the stigma of asking for help; make a dinner reservation; cater to the needs of older customers; cause public outrage; a key economic indicator; work at your own pace; linger over a cup of coffee.

Part B. 1 stigmatized / stigmatised 2 self-consciously / self consciously 3 partitioning / partition 4 outraged 5 indicate 6 biased

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *How does the person in the opening scene feel, and what do they do with their phone?*
   They feel self-conscious and worry that everyone is looking at them. They pick up their phone just to give their hands something to do.
2. *What change in solo restaurant bookings does the reading describe, and where?*
   On OpenTable, reservations for one person in the United States rose by about 23 percent in the year to June 2026.
3. *What share of households were single-person households in Japan and in South Korea?*
   About 38 percent in Japan (2020 census) and about 36 percent in South Korea (2024).
4. *How do some restaurants in Japan and South Korea make solo dining easier?*
   In Japan, many restaurants have counters, and Ichiran has booths with partitions. In South Korea, many restaurants offer single seats and smaller servings.
5. *What did the noodle restaurant in South Korea ask, and how did people react?*
   It asked people not to come alone. Many people reacted with outrage and asked why eating alone should be treated as loneliness.
6. *What did the World Happiness Report 2025 find about sharing meals?*
   People who share more meals tend to report higher life satisfaction; sharing meals was a better indicator of well-being than having a job.
7. *Why should we be careful about saying that eating alone causes unhappiness?*
   The findings show a link, not a cause. People who are already lonely or unhappy may simply have fewer people to eat with.
8. *What is the spotlight effect, and how does it relate to eating alone?*
   It is a bias that makes us overestimate how much other people notice us. It may explain why people

avoid eating alone, even though others rarely pay attention.

9. *Which of the reasons people give for enjoying solo meals do you find most convincing? Why?*
   Open answer. A strong answer names a reason from the reading (ordering what you want, eating at your own pace, tasting the food, unwinding) and supports it with an example or experience.
10. *True, False, or Not Given: "The ramen chain Ichiran was founded in Tokyo." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    Not Given. The reading names Ichiran and describes its booths but does not say where or when it was founded.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes the evidence proves that eating alone makes people unhappy." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer says the findings are links, not proof of cause, and that lonely people may simply have fewer people to eat with.
12. *Author's purpose: Why does the reading begin with a host asking "Just one?" Is it (a) to describe a moment many readers know and may find uncomfortable, (b) to criticize restaurant hosts for being rude, or (c) to explain how online booking works?*
    (a) To describe a moment many readers know and may find uncomfortable. The scene makes the topic personal before the facts begin.

True or False

1. **T.** The phone gives their hands something to do.
2. **F.** They rose by about 23 percent.
3. **T.** The reading gives about 38 percent for Japan in 2020.
4. **T.** Diners eat in narrow booths with partitions on both sides.
5. **F.** It offered only tables for one.
6. **F.** Many people reacted with outrage.
7. **T.** Meal sharing was a better indicator than whether people had a job.
8. **F.** The findings are links, not proof; lonely people may simply have fewer people to eat with.
9. **F.** We overestimate how much others notice us.
10. **T.** They enjoy ordering what they want and eating at their own pace.

Language Focus: Verbs Followed by Gerunds or Infinitives

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. When I have a free evening, I enjoy cooking a simple meal and watching a film.
2. I try to avoid eating in front of my computer.
3. I don't mind waiting in line for good food.
4. This year, I have decided to learn how to cook three new dishes.
5. One day, I would like to visit a night market in Taipei.
6. I enjoy listening to music and going for a walk.
7. I avoid eating very spicy food because it upsets my stomach.
8. I would like to eat at the new noodle place near my home.
9. I have decided to go to bed earlier on weeknights.
10. I hope to work abroad for a few years.

Part A, item 5 (I don't mind): accept any gerund. Part B: accept like or love with either form (I like eating / I like to eat).

Notes on the Evidence

Bookings: OpenTable data on U.S. reservations for one, June 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026, compared with the previous year, up

23 percent (Axios, July 17, 2026, citing The Washington Post). These are bookings on one platform only, not all restaurant visits; walk-in solo diners are not counted. Earlier OpenTable figures (up 29 percent over two years in the U.S., 18 percent in Germany, 14 percent in the UK, reported in 2024 by Fast Company and CNN) were left out of the reading to avoid mixing periods.

Households: Japan, 38 percent of households were single-person in the 2020 census (Nippon.com, Statistics Bureau data; Fast Company says "about one-third", which is out of date). South Korea, 36.1 percent in 2024 (Statistics Korea, reported by Korea JoongAng Daily). A 42 percent figure that circulates for Korea comes from the resident-registration count, a different measure, and was not used. Honbap and restaurant changes: Korea Economic Institute of America (2017). Ichiran booths: Scout Magazine and other reports. Eenmaal: a pop-up first run in Amsterdam in June 2013 by designer Marina van Goor (Amusing Planet and other reports).

Yeosu sign: reported in late November and early December 2025 (Daily News South Africa and others, citing Korean social media). The owner’s own reasons were not reported; the cost explanation (table turnover at busy times) comes from the Korea Foodservice Industry Association as quoted in the coverage, so the reading presents it as a general point, not as this owner’s reason. "A few refuse online bookings for one": Fast Company (2024) reported a London restaurant whose website takes no reservations for fewer than two.

World Happiness Report 2025, chapter on sharing meals (UCL and Harvard Gazette summaries): Gallup World Poll data from 2022 to 2023 in 142 countries; meal sharing about as strong a predictor of life evaluation as income and more informative than unemployment status. The U.S. figure (26 percent of adults ate all meals alone the previous day, up more than 50 percent since 2003) comes from the American Time Use Survey as used in the report. The data are correlational, which the reading states.

Solo activities research: Ratner and Hamilton, Journal of Consumer Research (2015), surveys in the U.S., India, and China plus a campus field study with an art exhibition (University of Maryland summary). The spotlight effect is from Gilovich and colleagues (2000); applying it to solo dining is an interpretation, not a direct test, and the reading hedges it ("a related bias"). The tips in paragraph 7 are common practical advice, not research findings.