

Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different⁹



Class time needed: 40 minutes

Materials

An “Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different” worksheet for each student

Objectives

- Students will be able to define culture.
- Students will recognize that some differences among people stem from culture and that some stem from personal traits and preferences.

Introduction

This activity invites students to identify aspects of culture that influence our own behavior and sometimes make it difficult to understand the behavior of other people. Culture is a complex idea, and teachers should be prepared to offer students many examples of cultural features.

Procedure

1. Write the following statements on the board.
 - No one is exactly like me.
 - I have many things in common with the members of my family and community.
 - Every person in the world needs some of the same things I need.
2. Ask students to share ideas that support these statements.
3. Point out that people in various groups often look at people in other groups as “different.”
4. Ask students to describe some of these differences. Why may people in one group behave differently from people in another?
5. Explain that many differences are related to culture—ways of living and beliefs that are handed down from one generation to the next. Working from the list on the board, explain that all people share basic needs (food, shelter, etc.), that each of us learns a set of behaviors and beliefs from the people we grow up with (the kinds of houses we build and foods we eat), and that each individual has unique talents and preferences (I’m good at math; I don’t like chocolate). When we talk about the behaviors and beliefs that a group of people have in common, we are talking about culture.
6. Ask students to complete the worksheet in order to help them identify aspects of their own cultures. Explain that each student should answer each question with one sentence or phrase. Then students should rank each item as to how important they feel it is to their culture.
7. After students have completed the worksheets, ask them to share their answers in small groups. Ask the groups to compare and contrast various aspects of their individual cultures.
8. In some schools, students may share many cultural traits. Some students may not identify with a particular ethnic or foreign culture. Ask students if they think there is one American culture. Discuss characteristics of your region (immigration patterns, geographic location, etc.) that might explain the similarities and differences among student responses to the worksheet.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to focus discussion on the role culture plays in forming our behaviors and beliefs.

1. How does it feel to know you are part of a cultural group that shares many ideas and beliefs?
2. What happened when you compared your worksheets? How many different cultures are represented in the class?
3. What did you learn from this activity?
 - Does culture explain why other people sometimes seem “different”?
 - What are some things that you do that you learned from your culture?
 - Are all of our behaviors related to culture? (Possible answer: Some behaviors are related to individual preferences and personality traits.)
4. What can you do to learn about and understand other cultures?
5. What if you were part of another culture? How might you be different from the way you are now?
6. How can we use what we learned in this lesson to improve our community?

Extending the Ideas

- Have students explore their community’s history to trace the influence of various cultures. Who were the original inhabitants of the area? Over the years, what other cultural groups have come to the area? What are some of the features of your community that represent these groups (e.g., architecture, place names, types of restaurants, religious organizations)?
- Ask students to imagine a community that allowed no resident to display or practice any element of cultural identity. Have students write short stories describing a typical day in such a community. When students have completed their stories, ask volunteers to read their compositions. Are the fictitious communities desirable or interesting places to be? Would it be possible or desirable to create such a community in reality?

Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone Is Different

Directions: Write one sentence or phrase about each topic. Then rate each item from 1-10 (1 is most important) according to what value this topic has in your culture.

Rank

_____ What language(s) do you speak?



_____ What is your religion?

_____ What music do you listen to?

_____ What dances do you know?



_____ What foods do you eat at home?

_____ What do you wear on special occasions?

_____ What holidays and ceremonies are important?



_____ What is most important to you?

_____ What things do you believe are right and wrong?

_____ How important is your extended family?



The name of my culture is _____.



The Iceberg¹⁰

Class time needed: 30 minutes

Materials

“Features of Culture” handout for each student

Objectives

- Students will identify features that all cultures have in common.
- Students will understand that culture includes visible and invisible features.

Introduction

Culture has been compared to an iceberg. Just as an iceberg has a visible section (one-ninth of it) above the waterline and a larger, invisible section below the waterline, culture has some aspects that you can observe and others that you can only imagine or intuit. Like an iceberg, that part of culture that is visible (observable behavior) is only a small part of a much bigger whole.

Procedure

1. Draw a large iceberg floating in the sea on the board. Ask students: What do you know about icebergs? Emphasize the fact that most of the iceberg is hidden from view.
2. Ask students to look over the “Features of Culture” handout. Explain that this list presents some of the features all cultures have in common. Pictures of people involved in everyday activities in various parts of the world will help you illustrate this idea.
3. Ask students to identify those features from the list that they can see in the behavior of people and those that are invisible. As students share their ideas, record them above or below the waterline on your iceberg drawing.
4. Point out that there is a relationship between those items that appear above the waterline and those that appear below it. In most cases, the invisible aspects of culture influence or cause the visible one. Religious beliefs, for example, are “seen” in certain holiday customs, and notions of modesty influence styles of dress. Ask students to find other examples of this from the iceberg representation of culture.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to help students understand how the “Features of Culture” can be used to enhance their understanding of other cultures.

1. Does it make sense to compare culture to an iceberg? Can you think of other things to which the visible and invisible features of culture can be compared?
2. A Peace Corps Volunteer serving as a teacher in Mongolia had this to say about some photographs she sent to a group of students in the United States.

Mongolians are very serious and composed in their expressions. In the city, this is beginning to change slightly. You’ll see a number of my students smiling. But this is not traditional. When I first came here, my friends asked me why Americans smile so much. They felt that Americans smile even at people they don’t like and that this was quite insincere.

- Lisa Buchwalder¹¹

What does this tell you about the visible and invisible features of culture? Does it explain why people from different cultures sometimes misunderstand each other?

3. Can you match this description of American and Mongolian behaviors to any of the items on your list of cultural features?
4. How can a list such as “Features of Culture” help you understand differences among people? (Possible answer: Differences may seem less strange or unusual when we understand them as variations on fundamental characteristics that all cultures have in common.)

Extending the Ideas

- If your class is corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer through World Wise Schools, share the “Features of Culture” list with your volunteer and ask him or her describe some of the visible and invisible features of the host country.
- Revisit the first activity in this section. Ask students to match items from the “Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different” worksheet to items on the “Features of Culture” list.



Features of Culture

1. facial expressions
2. religious beliefs
3. religious rituals
4. importance of time
5. paintings
6. values
7. literature
8. child-raising beliefs
9. ideas about leadership
10. gestures
11. holiday customs
12. ideas about fairness
13. ideas about friendship
14. ideas about modesty
15. foods
16. eating habits
17. understanding of the natural world
18. concept of self
19. the importance of work
20. concept of beauty
21. music
22. styles of dress
23. general world view
24. concept of personal space
25. rules of social etiquette
26. housing

