

Becoming a Cultural Researcher

Overview

Anthropology, the science of studying humans, encompasses everything about humans—from human development to cultural celebrations. As anthropologists gather data on different groups of people, they explain similarities and differences among cultures and develop theories about what it means to be human. Comparing cultures in this way is called the comparative method.

This activity engages students as cultural researchers. Students begin to practice the skills of anthropology.

By the end of this activity, students should understand that culture:

- ~ is a way of life shared by members of a group.
- ~ includes common beliefs, rules of behavior, traditions, and customs.
- ~ is learned and passed down to children.

Concepts

Anthropology, culture, being human, artifacts, traditions, customs, beliefs, comparing different cultures and drawing reasonable conclusions.

Objectives

- ▶ Examine cultural artifacts, activities, and ceremonies and infer their function and significance within a given culture.
- ▶ Compare and contrast different cultures and their artifacts and ceremonies.
- ▶ Develop and demonstrate understandings of the nature of culture as shared ways of life, including beliefs, behavior, traditions, and customs.
- ▶ Draw reasonable conclusions about the importance of various cultural artifacts to their own culture and other cultures.

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Standards and Assessment

Standards

The materials in this unit are closely correlated to the National Science Education Standards, Standards for the English Language Arts, and Curriculum Standards for Social Studies. A listing of the standards follows. A check mark indicates the standards that are addressed.

Assessment

This unit provides tasks that can be used to assess students' understanding of the information presented. Use the following questions to assess each student's reasoning, responses, understanding, and interaction.

- How well did the student use his or her observation skills?
- How well did the student demonstrate an understanding of the information provided?
- How well did the student communicate the observations he or she made?
- How well did the student explain concepts and ideas to other students?
- Was the student able to use evidence to support his or her conclusions?
- How well did the student complete the tasks outlined?
- How well did the student participate in all aspects of cooperative work?

<h2 style="text-align: center;">National Science Education Standards</h2> <p style="text-align: right;">GRADES K-4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment, National Research Council</p>	
Science as Inquiry	
Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry	✓
Understanding about scientific inquiry	✓
Science in Personal and Social Perspective	
Characteristics and changes in populations	✓
Types of resources	
Changes in environments	
Science and technology in local challenges	
History and Nature of Science	
Science as a human endeavor	✓
<h2 style="text-align: center;">National Science Education Standards</h2> <p style="text-align: right;">GRADES 5-8</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment, National Research Council</p>	
Science as Inquiry	
Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry	✓
Understanding about scientific inquiry	✓
Science in Personal and Social Perspectives	
Populations, resources, and environments	
Science and technology in society	
History and Nature of Science	
Science as a human endeavor	✓
Nature of science	✓

Standards for the English Language Arts

GRADES K-8

National Council of Teachers of English

Students read to build an understanding of texts, themselves, and the cultures of the United States and the world.	✓
Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.	
Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.	✓
Students employ a wide range of writing strategies to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.	
Students apply knowledge of language structure, conventions, and figurative language to create, critique, and discuss texts.	
Students conduct research; generate ideas and questions and pose problems; gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources; communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.	✓
Students use a variety of technological and information resources to gather and synthesize information.	
Students develop a respect for diversity in language use.	

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

GRADES K–4

National Council for the Social Studies

Culture and Cultural Diversity	
Explore and describe similarities and differences in the ways groups, societies, and cultures address similar human needs and concerns.	✓
Give examples of how experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.	✓
Describe ways in which language, stories, folktales, music, and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture and influence behavior of people living in a particular culture.	✓
Compare ways in which people from different cultures think about and deal with their physical environment and social conditions.	
Give examples and describe the importance of cultural unity and diversity within and across groups.	✓
Time, Continuity, and Change	
Demonstrate an understanding that different people may describe the same event or situation in diverse ways, citing reasons for the differences in views.	✓
Demonstrate an ability to use correctly vocabulary associated with time such as past, present, future, and long ago; read and construct simple timelines, identify examples of change; and recognize examples of cause and effect relationships.	
Demonstrate an understanding that people in different times and places view the world differently.	
People, Places, and Environments	
Construct and use mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, direction, size and shape.	
Interpret, use, and distinguish various representations of the Earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs.	
Use appropriate resources, data sources, and geographic tools such as atlases, databases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and maps to generate, manipulate, and interpret information.	
Locate and distinguish among varying landforms and geographic features, such as mountains, plateaus, islands, and oceans.	
Describe and speculate about physical system changes, such as seasons, climate and weather, and the water cycle.	

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies continued	GRADES K-4
Describe how people create places that reflect ideas, personality, culture, and wants and needs as they design homes, playgrounds, classrooms, and the like.	✓
Examine the interaction of human beings and their physical environment, the use of land, building of cities, and ecosystem changes in selected locales and regions.	
Explore ways that the Earth’s physical features have changed over time in the local region and beyond and how these changes may be connected to one another.	
Individual Development and Identity	
Describe personal connections to place—especially place as associated with immediate surroundings.	
Identify and describe ways family groups and community influence the individual’s daily life and personal choices.	✓
Individuals, Groups, and Institutions	
Identify roles as learned behavior patterns in group situations such as student, family member, peer play group member, or club member.	✓
Give examples of and explain group and institutions influences such as religious beliefs, laws, and peer pressure, on people, events, and elements of culture.	✓
Production, Distribution, and Consumption	
Give examples that show how scarcity and choice govern our economic decisions.	
Distinguish between needs and wants.	
Describe how we depend upon workers with specialized jobs and the ways in which they contribute to the production and exchange of goods and services.	
Science, Technology, and Society	
Identify and describe examples in which science and technology have changed the lives of people, such as in homemaking, childcare, work, transportation, and communication.	
Global Connections	
Explain ways that language art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements may facilitate global understanding or lead to misunderstanding.	✓
Explore causes, consequences, and possible solutions to persistent, contemporary, and emerging global issues, such as pollution and endangered species.	

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies continued	GRADES 5–8
Culture and Cultural Diversity	
Compare similarities and differences in the ways cultures meet human needs and concerns.	✓
Explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people of diverse cultural perspectives.	✓
Explain and give examples of how language, literature, the arts, architecture, other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, values and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture.	✓
Explain why individuals and groups respond differently to their physical and social environments and or changes to them on the basis of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs.	✓
Time, Continuity, and Change	
Demonstrate an understanding that different scholars may describe the same event or situation in different ways but must provide reasons or evidence for their views.	✓
Identify and use key concepts such as chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity.	✓
People, Places, and Environments	
Elaborate mental maps of locales, regions, and the world that demonstrate understanding of relative location, direction, size and shape.	
Create, interpret, use, and distinguish various representations of the Earth, such as maps, globes, and photographs.	
Use appropriate resources, data sources, and geographic tools such as aerial photographs, satellite images, geographic information systems (GIS), map projects, and cartography to generate, manipulate, and interpret information such as atlases, data bases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and more.	
Locate and describe varying landforms and geographic features, such as mountains, plateaus, islands, rain forests, deserts, and oceans, and explain their relationship within the ecosystem.	
Describe physical system changes such as seasons, climate and weather, and the water cycle and identify geographic patterns associated with them.	
Describe how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals as they build neighborhoods, parks, shopping centers, and the like.	✓
Examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes.	✓

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

GRADES 5–8

continued

Describe ways that historical events have been influenced by, and have influenced, physical and human geographic factors in local, regional, national, and global settings.	✓
Observe and speculate about social and economic effects of environmental changes and crises resulting from phenomena such as floods, storms, and drought.	
Individual Development and Identity	
Describe personal connections to place – as associated with community, nation, and the world	✓
Describe the ways family, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and institutional affiliations contribute to personal identity.	✓
Identify and describe ways regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals' daily lives.	✓
Individuals, Groups, and Institutions	
Demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.	✓
Analyze group and institutional influences on people, events, and elements of culture.	✓
Production, Distribution, and Consumption	
Give and explain examples of ways that economic systems structure choices about how goods and services are to be produced and distributed.	
Describe the role of specialization and exchange in the economic process.	
Explain and illustrate how values and beliefs influence different economic decisions.	
Science, Technology, and Society	
Examine and describe the influence of culture on scientific and technological choices and advancement, such as in transportation, medicine, and warfare.	
Show through specific examples how science and technology have changed people's perceptions of the social and natural world, such as in their relationship to the land, animal life, family life, and economic needs, wants, and security.	
Seek reasonable and ethical solutions to problems that arise when scientific advancements and social norms or values come into conflict.	
Global Connections	
Describe instances in which language, art, music, belief systems, and other cultural elements can facilitate global understanding or cause misunderstanding.	✓
Explore causes, consequences, and possible solutions to persistent, contemporary, and emerging global issues, such as health, security, resource allocation, economic development, and environmental quality.	

Teacher Strategies

MATERIALS

Becoming a Cultural Researcher activity sheet and Vocabulary list.

PROCEDURE

1. Ask students to brainstorm what can be learned about a culture from studying the things that are created by the people of that culture. It may help to use examples of artifacts from the students' own cultures. Write this list on the board. Ask the class to explore how studying material culture might be different from studying written culture.
2. Distribute the worksheet *Becoming a Cultural Researcher*. This activity gives students a first-hand look at how culture influences the kinds of things we do. Students will identify a daily activity, custom, or ceremony that they take part in and investigate how objects associated with their choice might inform an outsider about their own culture. Have them brainstorm some examples (you can get them started with activities such as brushing their teeth, celebrating a holiday, or even attending school) and choose objects that are associated with this activity.
3. Have students share their cultural reflections. They can do this orally, or they can create a poster or diorama describing why the object they have chosen is important to them and their culture. Have them explore the benefits and limitations of learning about another culture by studying hand-made objects.



A Mongolian Artifact

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Becoming a Cultural Researcher

Culture is made up of the shared beliefs, rules of behavior, traditions, and general way of life common to members of a group.



A good way to practice studying culture is to investigate your own culture. Take a moment to think about some of the daily activities, customs, or ceremonies you take part in. Then, choose one to explore.

Write the daily activity, custom, or ceremony here: _____

Who introduced you to this daily activity, custom, or ceremony? _____

Why is it important in your life? _____



Choose one object that is associated with this daily activity, custom, or ceremony. Draw and describe the object below.

Name of Object: _____

Materials used to make it: _____



- Imagine you are an anthropologist studying this object. You have never seen anything like this. Based on your observations what might you guess the object is? What might this object lead you to believe about the culture that made it? *Write your answer on the back or on a separate sheet of paper.*

Vocabulary

Anthropology The study of human beings, from the beginning of time to the present. Anthropologists are interested in every aspect of humans—from human anatomy and biology to social interactions and cultural influences.

Continuity When things continue on the same course, remaining the same as they have always been.

Culture A group's values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and behaviors that are “learned” and passed down from one generation to another. Culture is “taught” through words, activities, concepts, and symbols.

Culture Shock The feeling of being out-of-place, disoriented, and confused as a result of finding yourself in a cultural setting that is very different from your own.

Ethnography Research that records and describes the specifics of a culture, including such things as food production, gender roles (and other divisions of social organization), belief systems, clothing, material culture, and language.

Fieldwork The actual work of an anthropologist that consists of traveling to (and remaining for a time within) the location of the group being studied. Fieldwork consists mainly of observing and recording the actions and behaviors of people, as well as the interaction between people and the environment. It also

includes gathering data on the physical environment, interviewing members of the group, and utilizing a wide range of data-recording devices to document culture (such as cameras, tape recorders, sketches, etc.).

Social or Cultural Anthropology The study of the way people live in a society—paying particular attention to a group's culture and customs. Social anthropologists conduct fieldwork, where they research different cultures.