

Culture as Self-Expression

Overview

How do people express their cultures? How many variations do we see of the same cultural traditions, beliefs, ways of dressing, etc.? Culture is something we all have. On the surface it may look the same, however, individuals within the same group may experience their culture differently depending on their age, gender, social status, or ethnic background. This activity illustrates that culture can be a form of self-expression and that there is no right or wrong way to express culture.

Concepts

Culture as self-expression, variation, tradition, analyze and draw conclusions.

Objectives

- ▶ Compare and contrast how various cultural events are celebrated.
- ▶ Draw reasonable conclusions about cultural variations, traditions, and cultural events as self-expressions by the persons involved.

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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?

National Science Education Standards

GRADES K-4

National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment, National Research Council

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	✓

National Science Education Standards

GRADES 5-8

National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment, National Research Council

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

GRADES 5–8

continued

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 Strategy

MATERIALS

Each student needs a pen and paper for this activity.

PROCEDURE

1. Begin with a class discussion. Ask students to name some holidays that most Americans celebrate, for example, the Fourth of July or Thanksgiving.
2. Choose one holiday for the whole class to focus on, and ask students to talk about and write descriptions of how they celebrate this holiday. Ask them to consider the following questions: *What is this holiday about? What foods do we eat? Where do we physically celebrate the event? Who is invited? Who prepares the food? What other activities happen during the event? Are there special tasks to perform?*
3. Next, assign students to groups and assign one student the job of recorder. Have students share how they celebrate these holidays, and suggest that the recorder make two lists: one with the similarities and one with the differences.
4. As a class, discuss the students' findings. How many in the class celebrate the holiday in more or less the same way? What aspects of the holiday are celebrated in similar ways? In different ways? How does age, gender, or ethnic background, for example, affect the way the tradition is celebrated?

NEXT STEPS

1. Extend the lesson and ask students to illustrate their holidays and create a display of images and photographs.
2. Have students think about variations in traditions or beliefs within other cultures you may be studying. Look at a holiday like Ramadan, for example. Have students investigate this holiday using resources available to them, considering how the holiday is celebrated, foods, special activities, etc. Use the book *Ramadan* by Suhaib Hamid Ghazi (additional suggested readings are found in Resources for Adults, downloadable at the Museum's Resources for Learning Web site at <http://www.amnh.org/education/resources>) as inspiration and ask groups of students to research the different ways Ramadan is celebrated in various Muslim communities, both here and abroad. Invite a speaker from a nearby mosque, or the parent of a Muslim student, to talk about the way they celebrate the holiday and how the holiday's meaning has changed over their lifetime.