

ONE WORLD YOUTH PROJECT

What is culture?

Adapted from Building Bridges: A Peace Corps Classroom Guide to Cross-Cultural Understanding

Objective: To help youth better understand their own culture

Materials: Features of a Culture worksheet (one or more copies) and writing utensil(s)

Curriculum Connections: language arts, social studies

Write the following statements for the group to see:

- No one is exactly like me.
- I have many things in common with the members of my community.
- Every person in the world needs some of the same things I need.

Point out to youth that people in various groups often look at people in other groups as “different.” Ask students whether they have seen this occur in their school or community. If so, why has it happened?

Ask the youth to describe some of these differences. Then ask why people in one group might behave differently from people in another group.

Explain that many differences are related to culture—beliefs and ways of living that are handed down from one generation to the next.

Explain that all people share basic needs, and ask youth for several examples (e.g., food, shelter, love, respect). In addition, each of us learns a set of behaviors and beliefs from the people we grow up with. Ask youth for examples (e.g., the manners we’re taught, the way we celebrate holidays, how we are expected to behave toward neighbors). Finally, each individual has unique talents and preferences. Again, ask youth for examples (e.g., I’m good at math, I’m good at soccer, I don’t like chocolate).

Explain that when we talk about behaviors and beliefs a group of people have in common (not individual talents and preferences), we are talking about culture.

Now have the group look at some of the features of culture. Provide each student with a copy of the [Features of Culture Worksheet](#). Ask the youth to complete the worksheet by filling in an example for each feature of culture.

After youth have completed the worksheet, either as a group or individually, you may wish to lead a group discussion:

- What conclusions can you begin to draw about the culture of your country?
- What are your impressions about how your country’s culture has shaped you?

Why is cultural exchange important?

Objective: To demonstrate the importance of cultural exchange in building solutions

Materials: no materials needed

Curriculum Connections: social studies, drama, civics

Ask for two volunteers. We will call them Sally and Bob in this example. Ask Sally and Bob to leave the room. Explain to Sally (making sure Bob cannot hear you) that she and Bob are going to enter the room and shake each other's hands to show the importance of working together. Explain to Sally that she is from the mythical Planet Z and on Planet Z people never shake each other's hands unless they dance first. Ask Sally to make up a bit of dance step (something silly). Tell Sally that she must never shake someone's hand unless both parties participate in the silly dance step beforehand. Explain that if someone offers their hand, before dancing, she must refuse the handshake. Inform Sally that when she enters the room, she is not allowed to talk.

Explain to Bob (making sure Sally cannot hear you) that he and Sally are going to enter the room and shake each other's hands to show the importance of working together. Explain to Bob that he is from the mythical Planet X where people always shake each other's hand upon arriving. Inform Bob that when he enters the room to shake Sally's hand, he is not allowed to talk.

Reenter the room and explain to the group (making sure Bob and Sally cannot hear you) that Bob and Sally are from the mythical Planets X and Z, respectively. Inform the group that on each Planet people have different cultures, and therefore different ways of greeting one another. Explain to the group how Sally's way of greeting people differs from Bob's way. Tell the group that neither Bob nor Sally can speak the same language and are unaware of each other's customs. Inform the group that when you call Bob and Sally in they have been instructed to try to shake each other's hands –Sally according to her customs and Bob according to his.

Call Sally and Bob into the room. Within a few seconds they should encounter a problem. Sally will begin doing her silly dance step, expecting Bob to join in so that they will be able to shake hands. Whereas Bob will continually try to put out his hand for a handshake, confused as to why Sally keeps turning down his offer and dancing instead. Let Bob and Sally struggle for a few moments. The group will most likely find this entertaining!

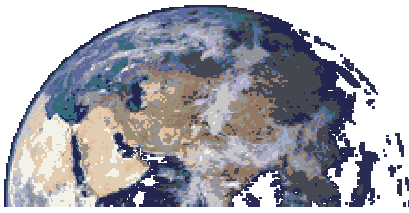
Ask Bob and Sally to stop for a moment. Ask the audience to explain how the customs of X and Z differ. The audience may not do the best job of articulating the differences (that's okay) –so it may take several tries before Bob and Sally both understand the difference between their cultures. Knowing this information, ask Bob and Sally (without talking) to develop an approach to shake each other's hands, without one party compromising too much of their own culture. Neither culture should be compromised –or both parties should decide to compromise a little to reach an ultimate solution.

There may be many ways to solve this. But, the most common approach is for both Bob and Sally to grab each other's hand, while simultaneously beginning to do Sally's dance step. If they have trouble reaching a solution, you can ask the audience to help. After they have reached a solution, lead a group discussion:

- If Sally and Bob had not discovered the differences in each other's cultures, would they have been able to reach a solution? Is it possible, that eventually both Bob and Sally would have become frustrated by the unwillingness of the other to cooperate?
- After they discovered their cultural differences, how were they able to reach a solution?
- Would they have been able to reach a solution faster if both Bob and Sally had understood each other's customs from the beginning?

Explain that this is why cultural exchange and global communication is so important. Explain that in real life people are in situations similar to Bob and Sally's due to a lack of communication. Talk about how sometimes these situations can be far more serious than just a handshake. Ask youth to think about some of the problems they see in the world –ask them to think about how miscommunication or a lack of awareness fits into the problem either as a cause or magnifying effect.

Explain that one of the best ways to build peace and to develop solutions is through cultural exchange and communication. Explain that in order to take positive action you have to understand who it is you are working with.



Culture

Take a look at your own culture as well as discuss the importance of cultural exchange!

What is culture? How would you describe your culture? What are the parts of your community that join together to create what you consider your culture? Youth from around the world have very different ideas as to how culture is defined...

“Culture is the customs of a place such as the way we dress, the way we behave, way we talk the music food and so the whole way that a community lives. Culture is very important to us because it is the whole set of beliefs and ideas that we were brought up to be what we are today. Culture is defined as the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.” - **Brigada da Natureza Youth Group, Brazil**

“Culture. I think there is two kinds of culture. First one is traditional culture. For example: traditional dance, wrestling, horse race and so on. The second one is Social culture. It means civilization and I think this culture is everything that creates intelligent or developed people.” -**New Generation School of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia**

“Culture to us can be described as an acceptable life style of a particular group of people within their locality. This involves art, thought and customs which consider clothing, food and behavior and or beliefs. What culture means to us is oneness of group living wherein each member of the community grows up with the sense of belongingness and self confidence. This is particularly beneficial to a society because its elements live together under norms which are free from deviant activities.” - **RESPECT Intellectual Club, Ghana**



“What does culture mean to us? Well, we believe that there are a lot of different answers to this question. Culture can be how you were raised, how you live your daily life, what type of food you eat, how you celebrate holidays, what type(s) of religion you believe in, the area in which you live, etc. Can culture be defined? That is a difficult question. We believe that it can be defined, but that it would take an extremely long time to do it because the definition has such a wide range of variables. As mentioned before, religion, style, beliefs, food, and time are a part of our definition of culture. However, there are many aspects that we didn't mention, such as: history of our country/people, child raising, community, geography, language, entertainment, sports, games, etc.” -**Cumberland County High School, United States of America**



“What is culture? Culture means our tradition, what we are used to doing. These things include those aspects of life which are related to language, beliefs, arts, morals, food, laws, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society. The aspects that join together to form our community is the language, the food, the types of dress, the customs and the beliefs. I think culture can be defined though it is too vast but since we can define those aspects that make up culture like language, way of greeting, ways of dress, laws, beliefs, customs etc relating a particular people means we can almost define it. Culture are those aspects of life which are related to language, beliefs, laws, customs and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of the society” -**Cameroon Children Environmental Forum, Cameroon**

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see separate document for:

Features of a culture worksheet