



DO I HAVE CULTURE ?

Level: high school, 11th grade
Course: Spanish and other languages,
social studies

Rationale

Before introducing the students to the study of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, it is important for them to know what is meant by culture. When asked, many students will say that they do not have a culture, that it is something that Native Americans or recent immigrants have but not them. To begin to understand people of different cultures, students must first know how all cultures are alike and different. There are certain things that all cultures have, whether or not they are exactly the same. These things are called cultural universals and include such things as foods, holiday celebrations, religion, values, games, music, the role of the family and the various members of the family. These lessons seek to provide students with knowledge, skills and attitude they need to appreciate their own cultures so that they may become sensitive to the culture of others. These lessons are not culture specific and may be used by world languages or social studies teachers at any middle or high school level.

by
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Lesson Overview

Through a series of activities, readings, discussions and videos students will investigate what culture is and the importance of its preservation. Each student will first look at his own culture and determine what culture means. Next they will discuss the importance of preservation of culture and, through hands on activities,

discover the difficulties of studying cultures when there are many pieces missing. Finally they will study via video, readings and discussions the importance of protecting culture from black marketers who sell stolen artifacts. Repatriation of artifacts will also be covered.

Objectives

1. Students will discover that they have a culture.
2. Students will understand the meaning of culture and cultural heritage.
3. Students will develop a sense of shared humanity.
4. Students will learn the importance of cultural preservation.
5. Students will discern the difference between stereotypical viewpoint versus inside viewpoint.

Time Needed

Three lessons. These can be used consecutively for three to five class periods or each can be developed for an additional three to five class periods.

Materials

Overhead transparencies from Motel of the Mysteries, handouts to show problems of studying culture with pieces missing (included in this document) readings from Rudolfo Anaya, videos *Plunder*, *Silent Witness*, and reference materials. Equipment needed: television, VCR, overhead projector, Internet connection (optional)

Procedures

Lesson 1: We All Have Culture

Activity 1

Discuss meaning of culture. All discussions take place in the target language. (See Teacher Handout for ideas.)

Activity 2

Divide the class into small groups of 3-5 students. Each member of the team discusses the following in relationship to their own family's practices:

- a. Celebration of holidays
- b. Traditional foods and eating habits
- c. Observance of religious customs
- d. Music
- e. Family trips and vacations
- f. Cures for the common cold, flu, stomachache etc.

Optional Activity 1

In small groups, students discuss all the culture groups to which they think they belong. Remind them that they belong to groups in which the members share one or more interests, concerns or attributes. They will find that they belong to several groups—a gender group, a group of athletes, industrious students' group, class clowns group, only child group, having many siblings group, oldest child, youngest child, physically challenged, educationally challenged, a religious group, a political group and many more.

Optional Activity 2

Family heritage activity. In pairs or small groups students answer the following questions in the target language. They may not be able to complete this assignment in class because of the information requested. For homework they can find the answers to the remainder of the questions. If this is done, the next class begins with a paired/small group activity during which students share their answers and discuss similarities and differences in their heritage. Again, have them figure out a cultural group to which they belong.

- a. When did your relatives immigrate to the United States?
- b. Do you know why they left their country?
- c. What stories do they like to tell you or have been passed down through the family?
- d. Do you still preserve your family's heritage? How?
- e. Do you still have relatives in your family's homeland?
- f. Do you communicate with them?
- g. Have you ever visited your family's homeland? When? If yes, what were your impressions? If not, would you like to?

Optional Activity 3

Invite a folklorist to come to your class to tell a tale and discuss what this tells us about the culture where it came from.

Homework

Find an example of culture to share with the class the next meeting. These examples may be physical or verbal but must be rationalized in terms of culture.

Lesson 2: *Objects as culture*

Activity 1

Show students overhead transparencies from Motel of the Mysteries by David McCaulay. Have discussion in target language about what they see and how easy it is to misinterpret things that are not part of their own experience. (If time permits read class the text of this book and follow the mystery.)

Activity 2

From homework— In target language students share an object with personal cultural meaning such as a piece of clothing, box, candlestick, piece of jewelry, letter, etc. and tell what it means to them.

Optional Activity 1

Lesson on objects that the students brought in for homework. In small groups or pairs, give each student one or two objects. Be sure to tell them to respect their fellow classmates' objects! Hand each student a list of the following questions to answer while looking at the object (list from Cultural Reporter by Lisa Falk). My questions will be translated into Spanish. It is a good idea to model this activity for the students with an object that you brought to class.

- a. What is this object?
- b. Does this object have a monetary or symbolic value?
- c. What is the object made of?
- d. How was it made?
- e. Can you tell where the object was made? How?
- f. Can you tell when the object was made? How?
- g. Is there writing on the object? What does it say?
- h. Do you know what the object was used for? How was it used? Do you know who made or who owned the object? How?
- i. Are there any decorations on the object? Do you know what they represent?
- j. What color is the object?
- k. Does this object symbolize anything? What? How do you know?
- l. What does this object tell you about the culture that produced or uses it? Why do you think that?
- m. What questions does this object raise for you?

Homework

Show the class a example of an advertisement that is partially blanked out, make it very difficult to comprehend. I took labels from a bottle of fruit juice, a box of cereal, a package of microwave popcorn and a magazine cover and using Liquid Paper I covered up the majority of the product name. Ask students to create—do an original drawing or cut and paste—an advertisement to stump the class.

Lesson 3: Preservation of culture

Activity 1

Show ads (previous night's homework) and guess/discuss what they are and what they tell us about our culture.

Activity 2

Class discussion about how we learn about early cultures.

Activity 3

Put students in pairs or small groups. Pass out to each pair/group a part of a short story that has several letters, words, phrases and sentences missing (the story should be no more than one page in length). Each pair/group will receive a different part of the story. After 5-8 minutes ask students to tell their stories. This, of course, will be very difficult because they are missing so much. They will notice, however, that they all have some part of a whole story and collaboratively they will be able to piece together more of the story. (The purpose of this is twofold; one to show the benefit of cooperation and, second to see the importance of protecting documents from destruction.)

Activity 4

Discuss importance of cultural preservation and the difficulties of repatriation of artifacts.

Activity 5

Show the video *Plunder* or *Silent Witness*.

Optional Activity 1

Invite an archeologist to speak to the class about reading archaeological records and the difficulties involved with this. S/he may also be willing to talk about the past and current trade in artifacts and the affect this has on obtaining a clear picture of certain sites.

Optional Activity 2

Read "Message from the Inca" by Rudolfo Anaya and discuss what this short story tells us about Inca culture. Ask students to think about and discuss other stories or novels they have read that give insight into a culture.

Homework

Use the Internet to research the Archeological Resource Protection Act. Look for a statue that deals with International issues. Write a summary of the law.

Follow-up Activities

After doing this introduction to culture, I will begin a unit to study some of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, namely the Mayas, Aztecs and Incas. I intend to make my students aware of the fact that much of the culture that is evident today in Mexico, Central and South America has its roots in the pre-Colombian civilizations.

There are many other lessons that can be developed to investigate various elements of culture through examination of literature, interviews with family and/or community members and research through electronic technology. I always remember that one of the educational goals of any lesson is to provide interest and stimulation for the study of related subjects such as languages and linguistics, geography, history or religions. Another goal is to develop critical and lateral (looking for likes and relationships) thinking skills.

Handouts

Teacher Handout: What is Culture?

The anthropologist's definition of culture is people's way of being, knowing and doing. Culture is learned and shared, often unconsciously. Culture provides us with ways of acting, for example, how we greet friends and new acquaintances, how we dress for different occasions, how we view time, how we treat the earth and how we handle conflicts. The concept of culture allows people to orient and interpret their experiences and give them value and meaning. In her essay "What is Culture," Margaret Yocom tells us first what culture is not. "It is not "society" or "civilization" or "community," for these terms refer to groups of people. Culture

is more abstract; it is a system of designs for living, not the people who accomplish that living.” (in Cultural Reporter by Lisa Falk, 1995.)

Culture does not remain static. It changes as people’s beliefs, values and practices change. We can view culture by looking at people and placing them into cultural groups through their similarities, and by looking at things, the cultural objects, that are around us. Today the history of the world is at a turning point, economy which drives the world, is no longer national but global. Because of this, it is extremely important that we begin to know and understand the groups that make up the world and the objects and customs that they value. Yocom reminds us that “understanding cultural groups prepares us to better listen to, speak with, respect, and celebrate those who initially seem different. Skilled in crossing the borders between groups, we may be better able to speak for change when change is necessary.” Understanding and respecting culture offers us the opportunity to promote peace and justice for all groups.

Cantinflas, the beloved Mexican actor, says in every film “En la detalle está la diferencia” which means the difference is in the detail. In this statement he encompasses the meaning of culture: people have many similarities and the differences that they have is how they view or value these similarities.

Bibliography

Books

Banks, James A and C.A.M. Banks, eds. An Introduction to Multicultural Education. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1994.

Designed for the reader who has limited time to devote to this topic. It discusses goals, types of instruction and approaches to multicultural education. It focuses on changing the curriculum so that all students receive a quality education. Highlights major issues in multicultural education.

Dorson, Richard M. “The Value of Humanities: A Folklorist’s View.” National Forum: Phi Kappa Phi Journal. 69 (Summer 1975) 23-28.

Describes the value of folklore in providing an opportunity to view the difference between tradition and creativity. It presents an appreciation for oral history and of cultural diversity.

Falk, Lisa. Cultural Reporter. Watertown, MA: Tom Snyder Productions / Smithsonian Institution, 1995.

Cultural Reporter is a tool that shows classes how to create a product to depict some aspect of their community. It teaches the necessary techniques of research and investigation to help students understand their place in history and to appreciate their community’s rich and diverse resources. The program utilizes communication, decision-making, teamwork and critical thinking skills.

Galeano, Eduardo. Memories of Fire. New York: Pantheon Books. Translation copy 1985.

A trilogy by Galeano that is a good reference to show the inside/outside point of view when looking at

culture. It covers topics from creation myths of pre-Columbian America to modern day. It contains both fact and fiction and is neither a history book, an anthology nor a novel. It is three books filled with thought provoking snippets.

Griego y Maestas, Jose and Rudolfo Anaya. Cuentos: Tales from the Hispanic Southwest. Santa Fe: The Museum of New Mexico Press. 1980.

This book is filled with stories, legends and myths of the Hispanic culture of New Mexico and southern Colorado. It is a bilingual edition immensely rich in folklore from storytellers of New Mexico.

Hirsch, E.D. Jr. The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988.

Comprehensive guide to cultural heritage.

McCaulay, David. Motel of the Mysteries. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979.

A wonderful story and picture book describing the "lost" civilization of North America in the year 3850. It points out the need for careful research of archaeological sites. It is presented in a most humorous manner.

Page, Jake. The Stolen Gods. Ballantine Books, New York, 1993.

The events and characters in this piece of fiction are imaginary, but Jake Page has extensively researched Native Americans and draws his knowledge to form this novel. He has written hundreds of magazine articles and columns about Native Americans and their culture. His reference to the Federal Archeological Resource Act and repatriation of artifacts is truth.

Internet

ERIC - Educational Resource Information Center
Gopher to ericir.syr.edu
Look in Lesson Plans, Search for Cultural Awareness

Mayaquest - URL: <http://mayaquest.mecc.com> or URL: <http://informns.k12.mn.us>
Via Gopher: [InforMNs.k12.mn.us](http://informns.k12.mn.us) --Choose best of K-12

URL - <http://www.halcyon.com/treasure/trewna.html>
See "Fisher World Treasure News", Volume 5 Issue 1. "Kemp's Law" provides and overview of the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.

Video

Plunder, PBS Video - Frontline episode, 1990 60 minutes.

Looks at the black market in stolen pre-Colombian antiquities. In particular this documentary traces how

Peruvian artifacts from the tombs of the Lords of Sipan reached the United States, and how the legal processes of both countries were incapable of forcing the return of the artifacts to their rightful owners.

Sentinels of Silence, Paramount Pictures Video, 1980 18 minutes

This short documentary, which won two Academy Awards, presents views of the most important archeological sites in Mexico: Teotihuacan, Monte Alban, Milta Tulum, Palenque, Chichen-Itza, and Uxmal. The information is very basic, but the photography is outstanding.

Silent Witness: Protecting American Indian Archeological Heritage, Colores Video

The destruction and desecration of American Indian archeological resources has reached crisis proportions. Today, 50% of all known sites have been looted or vandalized. This film examines the complex issues that threaten the future of these resources.