

**Activity**: What is Culture?

**Instructor:** Leia Duncan & Holly Joyner

**NSE Goal Focus**: Personal Growth & Cultural humility

MATERIALS:

* Dry erase board and markers
* Iceberg Image Sheets
* Questions about Culture worksheet

**Cultural Iceberg Activity:**

Put the word "culture" on a dry erase board and ask students to brainstorm what the word means. Record these ideas on the board. (Examples would be cuisine, music, clothing, language/dialect etc.) Next to these ideas, draw a large iceberg on the board. Ask students what they know about icebergs. Where should the waterline be on the iceberg? (Only about 20% of an iceberg is above the surface of the water.) Explain that some people have likened culture to an iceberg because there are some things you can tell about a person's culture just by looking at them (the 20% above the water). Most of the aspects about a person's culture are not so obvious, though, and are hidden below the water's surface. Where on the icebergs would you place the aspects of culture that we brainstormed? Write them up on the board in the appropriate places on the iceberg. To help them differentiate between the tip and below you can use the example of the Greek cuisine, Meze (pronounced meh-zeh). Meze is a meal made up of many dishes that are served over a long period of time and shared with several people. While it is a style of food in Greece, what it tells you about Greek culture is that they deeply value the long time spent in community eating a meal together. Meze is on the tip of the iceberg but time together at meals is beneath the tip of the iceberg. Chances are that most of what they brainstormed will have been "tip" type things.

Ask the students to think of some of the aspects of culture that are not as readily apparent and would lie under the surface of the water (e.g. gender views, or family structure). Most of these will have to do with values and perceptions of a situation. While music may lie above the water and be obvious, what the song is about, or the style of instruments used, can tell you about the history, the traditional sounds or moods in songs, or the type of stories important to the culture.

**Lead class in reflection** (suggested questions)

o Which was easier (sorting above the line or below the line)?

o What aspects of culture do we tend to know most and least?

o When you meet somebody, which of those items do you use to understand them culturally? Is this consistent with how you would want to be viewed or understood?

o Is culture the same as national identity? Is “American” one single culture?

o What happens if we only see the tip of the iceberg of other cultures?

o In what ways can we become more aware of the ideas below the waterline?

PART 2: Distribute blank icebergs and pencils to the students. Explain that they will now reflect on their own culture and complete an iceberg that reflects them. They can list more than one culture if they are part of multiple cultures daily (e.g. you grew up in Tennessee and your family are second generation immigrants from Vietnam). Invite students to share a few aspects of their culture with the whole class.

**Partner Culture Interviews**

Have students break into small groups and interview each other using the worksheet “Questions about Culture.”

Ask students to then share with the whole class about the differences and similarities they found with one another’s culture.



**QUESTIONS ABOUT CULTURE WORKSHEET**

**The Task**

The idea behind this exercise is for you to get to know one another’s cultural identities. Interview one another using the questions below to get as much detail as possible about the culture of your group members. We’ll ask you to report back to the class what you have learned. You are encouraged to answer questions in so far as you are comfortable.

**Concrete Expressions**

1. What are typical foods served in the culture?

2. Are there any typical styles of dress?

3. What do people do for recreation?

4. Do buildings have identifiable features?

5. How is public space used? For example, do people tend to “hang out” on the street, or are they in public because they are going from one place

to the next?

**Recognized Behaviors**

1. How do people greet one another?

2. Describe how a holiday is celebrated.

3. How would a visitor be welcomed to someone’s home?

4. What are the norms around weddings? births? deaths?

**Explicit Beliefs**

1. How important is hierarchy?

2. How are gender roles perceived?

3. How do people view obligations toward one another?

4. What personal activities are seen as public? What activities are seen as private?

5. What are the cultural attitudes toward aging and the elderly?

**Deeply Embedded Beliefs**

1. How important is the individual in the culture? How important is the group?

2. How is space used (e.g., how close should two people who are social acquaintances stand next to one another when they are having a conversation?)

3. How is time understood and measured? (e.g., how late can you be to a business appointment before you are considered rude?)

4. Is change considered positive or negative?

5. What are the criteria for individual success?

6. What is the relationship between humans and nature? (e.g., do humans dominate nature? does nature dominate humans? do the two live in harmony?)

7. How is divine power viewed in relation to human effort?

8. What is humorous?

9. How do individuals “know” things? (e.g., are people encouraged to question things? are they encouraged to master accepted wisdom?)

10. Are people encouraged to be more action-oriented or to be more contemplative?

11. What is the role of luck in people’s lives?