

# Culture

Age Range 10 – 18

Subjects: Humanities, citizenship, media, PSHE, literacy, foreign languages

## Stage One: Identify the concept

The concept of culture is often used in two senses with two overlapping but different meanings:

- The arts and learning: the special processes of discovery and creative effort
- A way of life including common meanings, attitudes, values, beliefs, hierarchies, material objects and possessions, modes of perception, and habits of thought and activity

Teenagers are often keen to talk about their own culture or at least their own developing values, attitude, tastes and allegiances. They may also feel trapped in a culture or even culture-less. They are interested in questions about whether culture is a given or whether it can change; how they are influenced by culture and whether they can influence it; or if they feel influenced by more than one culture, which are the most important in certain situations?

Indeed, 'culture' is used in so many ways and in so many different contexts, that it is very unlikely you'll be able to develop a complete definition with your students. This should not put you off; in fact, it should do the opposite! Often the best (philosophical) dialogues begin with one question and end with many questions, and culture is a great concept to begin just such a discussion.

### Problems within the concept

- How many cultures does one person belong to?
- Can a culture exist with just one person?
- If a person lived as a hermit, would he or she still belong to a number of cultures?
- Do animals have cultures?

## Stage Two: Problematising the concept

The following dialogue with 14-year-old students was followed with an activity that required them to list every culture that they belonged to and then to identify the characteristics that were common to all of these cultures

TEACHER: What is culture?

SIMON: A group of people

TEACHER: We're a group of people, does that mean we're a culture?

SIMON: Sort of

TEACHER: Do we all belong to the same culture, then?

MOHAMMED: No, not all of us. Some of us are a different colour, and some of us believe different things

TEACHER: Does that mean everyone who's black belongs to one culture and everyone who's white belongs to another culture?

RACHEL: No that's to do with race, not culture

TEACHER: What's the difference?

SHAHEENA: Race is the colour of your skin whereas culture is about what you believe and how you act

TEACHER: So, if culture is to do with what you believe then if we all believed a particular football was the best in the world, then would we all belong to the same culture?

TAS: No that's just about football

TEACHER: Is there no such thing as a 'football culture' then?

TAS: Yes there is but that's about liking football

ANNA: And wearing sporty clothes and trainers and things

ALISON: But I wear sporty clothes but hate football so I'm not part of a football culture am I?

TEACHER: So, going back to the original question (what is culture?), are we saying that culture is a group of people who like the same thing, and perhaps wear the same thing as well?

VIJAY: Yea, that's right

TEACHER: But people who like the same thing and wear the same thing aren't necessarily of the same culture are they? For example, what about everyone who goes to see Kylie Minogue live? Presumably they all like the same thing (Kylie) and maybe all wear Kylie tour t-shirts

ANITA: OK, that doesn't work but it does if you think about the Goths. They all wear black and like the same music

ANNA: No we don't

ANITA: So, are you saying you're not part of the Goth culture?

ANNA: No, I'm not saying that because I am part of the Goth culture but I'm also part of the youth culture and maybe even this school culture, aren't I? But just because you're from the same culture, doesn't mean you like the same thing, do the same thing or even wear the same thing

TEACHER: So, what does culture mean then?

## Deepening the learning pit

WHAT is culture?

- Is culture the same as belief? If not, how do they differ?
- If people know your nationality, do they know your culture?
- Are cultures always changing?
- Do people belong to cultures or do cultures belong to people?
- Could a group of people create a new culture?

- Does culture cause people to believe certain things or behave in certain ways? Are we the effects of our cultures?
- Could there be a country in the world with a mono-culture?
- What does it mean when people say that Britain is more multi-cultural now?
- If your mother was Spanish, your father Chinese and you were born in the UK, which culture would you belong to?
- Do stereotypes of cultures have a basis in reality?
- Is language part of culture or is culture part of language?

What TYPES of culture are there?

- Do animals other than humans have cultures?
- Do fish have cultures?
- Is it possible for an individual to have his/her own culture?
- Is it possible for a person to not belong to any culture at all?
- If a group of people liked exactly the same things, would they share a culture?
- If a group of people thought the same things were important, would they share a culture?
- How big would a group have to be to be thought of as a culture?
- What cultures do you think you belong to?
- What cultures do other people in this group think they belong to?
- Does this group/class have its own culture?
- Why do cultures exist?

Which of the following creatures do you think have cultures?

Baboons	Chimpanzees
Fish	Mice
Dogs	Cats
Wolves	Jellyfish
Dolphins	Butterflies
Elephants	Ostriches
Ants	Bees
Rats	Bats
Spiders	Penguins

What is the VALUE of culture?

- Are some cultures better than others? If you think 'yes', how would you know? If you think 'no', why not?
- Should people always follow the values of their cultures?
- What if the values of two cultures that influence a person conflict? What values should that person take as most important?
- Think of some cultures you are influenced by. Do these cultures promote identifiable values?

## Exploring culture with examples

Are the following stereotypes or true reflections (or both?):

When we hear/read the words ...	We think of ... <i>(circle all that apply and add your own descriptors)</i>
British culture	reserved innuendo lager-louts music film
American culture	brash glamorous loud sporty television hamburgers
French culture	wine laid-back amorous food smoking
Indigenous culture	minority exploited proud integrated marginalised tribal
Laddish culture	beer unladylike drunk loud fun groups
Norwegian culture	Vikings fish skiing pine trees reserved proud
Swiss culture	neutral cuckoo cheese watches Geneva convention
Aussie culture	barbies Neighbours g'day Bondi beach relaxed
Latin culture	salsa passionate olive skin heat sexy tactile
Greek culture	architecture Adonis fiery music feta cheese classical
Youth culture	rebellious energetic passionate unruly gangs ASBOs
Japanese culture	sushi reserved efficient kimono karate tourist
This school's culture	
This group's culture	

## Stage Three: Construct understanding

Making comparisons between 'culture' and other concepts may help students to decide whether culture creates traditions, religions, cuisine and so on (whether these things emerge from a culture) or whether religions creates cultures. In other words what are the relationships of influence between social and political formations?

A comparison between 'culture' and 'language' is interesting in that language enables the shared members of cultures to express and develop shared meanings. It is also a connection between people that has formed the basis of nationalist demands for separateness.

A comparison between 'culture' and 'gang' could lead to a discussion of 'subcultures' and conflicting cultural influences on a person.

A comparison between 'culture' and 'race' raises questions about how the term 'race' is used. Is it used as a synonym for 'foreign' cultures, or for the different colour of someone's skin or facial appearance? Is it used to suggest differences between people that are beyond culture and in this way to justify a radical ideology of separateness?

What are the similarities and differences between the following pairs of concepts?

- Culture and family
- Culture and community
- Culture and civilisation
- Culture and gang
- Culture and language
- Culture and religion
- Culture and race
- Culture and traditions
- Culture and nationality
- Culture and environment
- Culture and nature
- Culture and cuisine
- Culture and language
- Culture and expectations
- Culture and education
- Culture and being cultured
- Culture and stories groups tell about themselves

## Stage Four: Reviewing the learning journey

Possible metacognition questions

- What cultures do you think you belong to?
- Is it possible for an individual to have his/her own culture?
- Do people belong to cultures or do cultures belong to people?
- Are some cultures better than others?
- Is culture the same as belief? If not, how do they differ?
- How does your idea of culture differ from the beginning of the lesson?
- What questions about culture are you left with?

## Notes