



Social Studies
Grade 7

Living
Respectfully

Respecting
Diversity

Preventing
Prejudice

Culture and Environment: What's the Connection?

Contributor

Maureen Leew, teacher, Thomas B. Riley Junior High, Calgary, Alberta, Calgary Public School District No 19.

Objective

Unique cultures and ways of life result from adaptations to the environment. The purpose of this lesson is to help students understand the relationship between culture and geographical environment. It also helps them understand that, even when the environmental factors that initially shaped culture no longer exist or apply, many unique aspects of a culture remain. The lesson uses a simulation activity to re-create the struggles of early people in meeting their basic needs and developing their unique cultures. This lesson sets the stage for ongoing discussions of culture throughout the course. Use it to introduce the concept of ethnocentrism and conclude by pointing out the need to appreciate cultural diversity and respect for others' cultures.

 **Time** A one-hour class (can be extended if more discussion time is warranted)

Getting Started

Knowledge Now

How societies satisfy their needs is one of the main reasons that cultures develop in unique ways. Students should understand concepts related to physical, mental and social needs prior to beginning this lesson. This lesson should occur relatively early in the unit. It is also helpful to write a list of other patterns of culture on the board. This will provide focus and help organize group discussions.

Engaging Interest

Organize the class for a brainstorming session and make sure that all answers are recorded on the board. Ask the question—Why are cultures different?

Note: You may have to give hints to guide the discussion toward the notion that meeting needs within a particular environment is a major factor influencing the way a culture develops.

At the end of the brainstorming session, review the ideas related to how cultures meet their basic needs. For example, physical needs such as food, clothing, shelter and fresh water are met by using resources that are available in the environment.

Learning Activities

Break the class into small discussion groups of three or four students each. Establish a scenario using your best storytelling techniques. Tell students to imagine that they are on a field trip (the teacher missed the plane) in one of two planes and that both planes crash. Miraculously, no one is hurt in the landing. One plane crashes on a tropical island, and the other plane crashes in the Arctic. Neither group has technology to contact the outside world, nor is there hope of rescue for at least a year. Assure them that none of them will succumb to the environment, but the luggage they brought was lost in the landing. All of their worldly possessions are gone. Make the story positive and optimistic.

Ask each group to determine what resources they would need to survive. These resources will become building blocks for creating the basic elements of their new culture. Ask them to speculate what their culture would look like in one year, in 10 years and after several generations. Remind them that, as time passes, different needs would become important to the group. Initially, the survivors would concentrate on meeting their physical needs; however, over time they would begin to develop social, economic and political systems.

Allow 15 to 20 minutes for the discussion. Have each group develop a chart to record the differences between the two groups of survivors. You might consider having half of the groups take the role of the tropical survivors and the other half develop ideas for the Arctic survivors.

After the small group discussion, ask each group to present its ideas and discoveries to the whole class. Compile a complete list of similarities on the board as they present the various elements of culture.

After all groups have presented, introduce examples of different customs, traditions, artifacts or parts of culture from actual cultures from around the world. For example, I bring in or show items such as fur parkas, grass skirts and shell bowls. Explain that these customs, traditions and artifacts have developed over many generations. The people have adapted their ways of life and behaviors to survive in their unique environment.

Explain that different cultures develop different characteristics primarily because of adaptations to environments. Traditions often begin as people find rituals and routines that help them survive. These traditions often remain as part of culture long after their practical value is no longer apparent. Traditions become cherished practices that cultures maintain and protect for reasons that are not always evident.

Introduce the concept of ethnocentrism. Explain why it is important to learn about a whole culture without judging it based on what is familiar to us. Continue to reinforce the importance of not being judgmental as you study various cultures throughout the year. It is always important to respect individual and group differences. Try to adopt the attitude that differences are very interesting rather than “Ooooh that’s weird.”

Assessment/Analysis

This lesson is designed to stimulate interest and begin a more extensive review of cultures. Formal evaluation is not necessary at this stage. Check for understanding by asking questions. Set the tone for appropriate dialogue and respectful language.

Application

This lesson provides a benchmark to remind students of the unique ways in which cultures develop. This is especially important if they lapse into intolerance or have misunderstandings. I try to have my students examine each group with an open mind. They should try to think about where certain diverse customs might have originated rather than judging them based on their own experiences.

Social Studies 7 Learner Outcomes

Topic A Culture

Knowledge: What is culture? Culture is a learned way of life shared by a group of people.

Attitude: Respect for the rights, needs, opinions and concerns of self and others.

Appreciation of the need for cooperation in group work and community life.

Confidence in expressing one's own ideas.

Safe and Caring Topics and Concepts

Respecting Diversity and Preventing Prejudice

Recognizing and Appreciating Contributions Made by Culturally Distinctive Groups

Builds Respect for Diversity

- Studying different cultures, religions and lifestyles in society and in the school

Living Respectfully

Working Cooperatively in Groups

- Respecting and appreciating others' ideas, insights, solutions and contributions

Teaching Strategies

Go to www.sacsc.ca for <i>Strategy/Resources</i> for strategy descriptions	Cooperative Learning	Inquiry Learning	Direct Instruction
	•	• Problem Solving	

Generalization and Transfer	Peer Teaching	Empathy/Affective Education	General Teaching Activities/Ideas
• Simulations			• Brainstorming