

# Lesson Plan: Exploring Culture



## Learning objectives:

- To increase knowledge and confidence to discuss subjects such as culture and difference.
- To explore the definition of culture and the way in which individuals, groups, and institutions “have”/embody/demonstrate culture(s).
- To explore the different characteristics and representations of culture, what can be easily seen/perceived and what cannot.
- To develop awareness of factors that influence culture on an individual or group level.
- To explore the cultural influences that exist in one’s own life.

## Key Definitions

### **Culture:**

The description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way.

### **Sociological definition:**

The ideas or physical objects (or “things”) that represent a group or society.<sup>1</sup>

### **Exploratory definition:**

Culture shapes almost every aspect of human experience – our senses, perceptions, behaviour, interpretations, what we hear, smell, taste, feel and see. It structures our social world and our social interactions. It provides us with a set of beliefs, values and explanations that form our ‘worldview’.

## Success Criteria

- Students are able identify the various elements
- Students are able to recognise that everyone exists within a culture and is influenced by multiple cultures
- Students are able to recognise that culture is fluid rather than fixed or static.
- Students develop a sense of pride and appreciation of their own culture, as well as those of others.

<sup>1</sup> Open Education Sociology Dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved from: [https://sociologydictionary.org/culture/#definition\\_of\\_culture](https://sociologydictionary.org/culture/#definition_of_culture)

# Establish group rules

## Introductory points:

- Inform students that today's lesson will involve exploring their own values, beliefs and culture.
- Highlight to students that whilst open conversation is encouraged, it is completely up to the students as to the extent to which they would like to share their personal information – students can speak to experiences of friends (external to the school), family, or those that they have heard in media.
- As a group ask the students to define a list of rules to guide the conversation.
- Encourage students to define their own boundaries in the discussion, however some suggestions or core rules could include:
  - Confidentiality – what students share within this class, remains in the class
  - Demonstrate respect for others' opinions by listening, not interrupting, using respectful language if providing feedback or challenging someone
  - Not making jokes or using offensive language about the beliefs, values or culture of another
  - Informing the teacher if any of the content of the class was particularly difficult or challenging
  - Participation and contribution by all – even if it does not involve disclosure of personal information
  - Understand that we are all learning

For more information regarding facilitating conversations around culture & discrimination, consider:



**Facilitating conversations about racism guide**

**VCAA Teachers Guide: Navigating Intercultural Issues in the Classroom**



## Check in activity:

### “Ambassador tea party” (5 - 10 mins)<sup>2</sup>

- Split the students into four groups
- Provide each group with a role card detailing the scenarios described below:
- Ask the Ambassadors to attempt to meet and network with the Ambassadors from the other country for a couple of minutes using their best behaviour

## You are the Ambassadors from Lavinia

In your country it is a sign of respect to consider another person's words very carefully. You never respond immediately when someone speaks to you. Usually you wait about 10 seconds before replying. When you arrive at the tea party you will be trying to show a great deal of respect to the people you meet at the party.

## You are the Ambassadors from Montza

To be friendly in your country means speaking very loudly and using your hands a great deal. In addition it is considered polite to begin speaking before the other person has completed a sentence to show that you are really listening. When you arrive at the tea party you wish to be very friendly and especially polite to everyone, as you haven't met many of the people there before.

## You are the Ambassadors from Zhabori

In your country it is considered very impolite to look directly at the person with whom you are speaking. Therefore your eyes will always be on the ceiling or the floor, never directly focussed on the person. It is also polite to maintain a good amount of distance from someone when you are conversing. When you arrive at the tea party you will be trying to be very polite.

## You are the Ambassadors from Valdesta

In your country it is natural to stand very close to a person when speaking to them. The closer you are, the more comfortable you both should feel. When you arrive at the tea party you will obviously be trying to make you and everyone else as comfortable as possible.

## Discussion: What is culture?

(10 mins)

- In one large group, or in smaller groups, brainstorm ideas on how culture can be defined, considerations may include:
  - What is culture?
  - Who is seen to have culture?
  - Does culture exist outside of groups of people such as schools, sports clubs, governments, nations?
  - What are the characteristics of culture?
  - How is culture demonstrated, formed, practiced?
  - How is culture perceived, interpreted, valued?

- As a group, reflect on the following definition of culture? Does it capture all the points raised in the brainstorming activity?

**Definition:**

*Culture shapes almost every aspect of human experience – our senses, perceptions, behaviour, interpretation, what we hear, smell, taste, feel and see. It structures our social world and social interactions. It provides us with a set of beliefs, values and explanations that form our ‘worldview.’*

- As a group, consider some of the responses from the “Ambassador tea party” activity:
  - What stood out from this exercise?
  - What did it feel like to try and have a respectful, friendly interaction with the other ambassadors?
  - What does it suggest about the way we tend to treat each other?
  - Like a country, a place can have a culture. What are some of the aspects of our school’s culture?

## Activity: The Cultural Iceberg

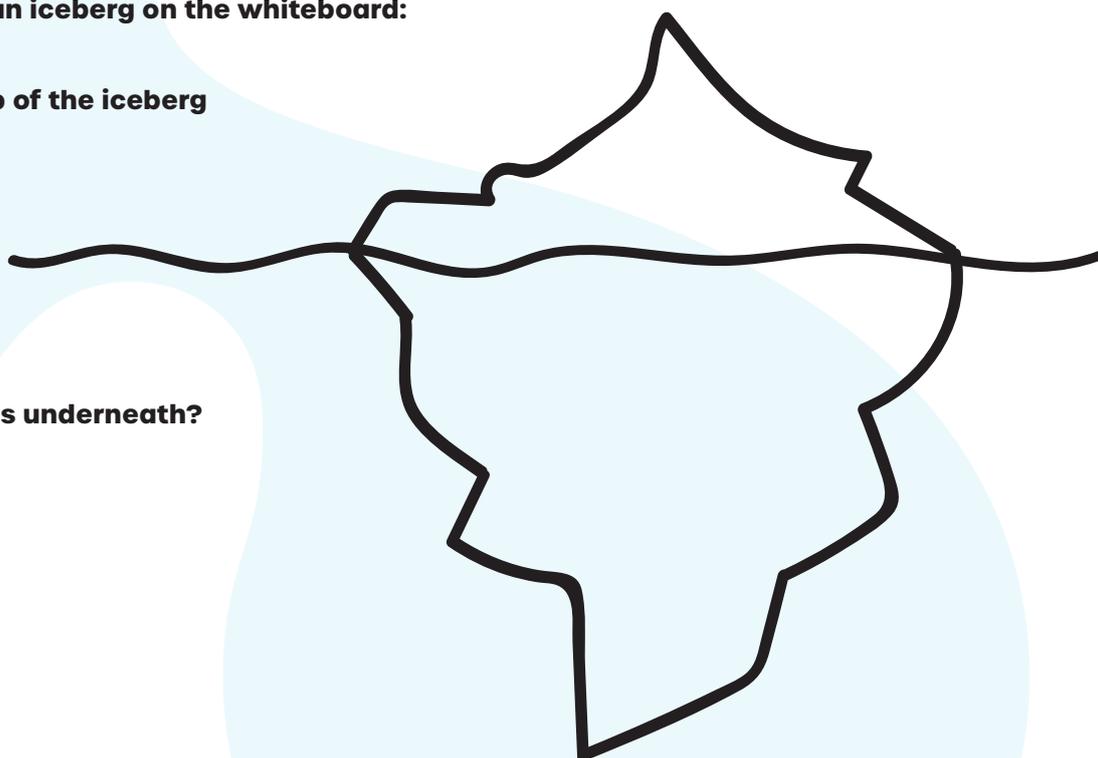
(10 mins)

**Introductory note for teachers:** *Many students will come to this activity without considering that they have a culture (particularly those of Anglo-Australian background). The intention of the activity is not to describe any one “culture”, but to develop an understanding of the different kinds of values, behaviours, beliefs, expectations and influences that shape every culture, or indeed the multiple cultures that make up the identity of a person.*

- **Draw an iceberg on the whiteboard:**

**The tip of the iceberg**

**What is underneath?**





## Utilising points from the previous conversations, discuss the analogy of an iceberg considering factors such as:

- **What do we know about icebergs?**
  - What is visible is just the 'tip', the vast majority of the iceberg is below the water line. This is a metaphor for culture in that what we are able to see is just a small part of what our culture is, and what is not able to be seen (and often unconscious to the person themselves), forms a much greater part of a person's culture.
  - There are also elements or factors that influence culture, which in the iceberg metaphor could be wind and water which influence the shape, size and direction in which the iceberg is travelling.
- **What aspects of culture are visible?**
  - What are the things that identify us as being from a cultural group?
  - What are the aspects of a culture that make us look at a person and say "Oh, I know something about your culture"?
- **What aspects of culture are not visible or 'below the waterline'?**
  - These are the things that are not easily observed but are just as important aspects of culture
  - They could include values, beliefs, traditions, social roles, parenting styles, power structures – as students identify some of these aspects it would be good to ask them to elaborate or provide an example
  - Note: there can be elements that are both visible and not visible ie. Language, body language, or how we interact
- **What happens if we only see or understand the visible section of the iceberg?**
  - We can make assumptions and misunderstand.
  - We can interpret what we see above the water line of someone else's iceberg by what is below the line of ours.
- **What are the 'waves', 'currents' or 'winds' that affect and shape our cultural icebergs? Examples can include religion, country of birth, friends, media, gender, or politics.**
  - These are the external factors that influence how culture is practiced, expressed, understood. For example country of birth may affect the cultural aspect of your gender or religion.
  - Exposure to different cultures – through friends, family, community – may influence how you understand your own culture, or how you enact your culture in different settings.

- **Is the 'waterline' fixed or can it move?**
  - Politics, media and social movements may impact how we express our culture – for example a woman's choice as to whether or not wear a hijab may be affected depending on the changing laws of a country or feelings of safety.
  - Age can affect the expectations and social norms of a person within certain cultures.
- **This activity is intended to guide students to consider the diverse and dynamic nature of culture, and to illustrate that culture is something that we all possess. Some useful points to emphasise can include:**
  - The visible aspects of our culture are largely defined by what is underneath the waterline – for example "respect" can be exhibited in different ways across different cultures.
  - When we judge, appraise or interpret the behaviour of others, we often do so based on what is above their waterline and below our own. Therefore, how we understand another person's behaviour is often an assumption based on our own values and beliefs.
  - We can belong to more than one culture at any one time, and within cultures, subcultures can exist. Cultures can intersect and overlap.

\*\*Please refer to example iceberg for further suggestions on discussion points.

## Activity: Individual Icebergs

(15 mins)

- **Provide each student with a *My Cultural Iceberg* handout (see attachment).**
- **Ask students to consider the following questions when filling out their iceberg diagram:**
  - What do people see about you? (above the waterline)
  - What don't people see about you? (below the waterline)
  - Emphasise that their iceberg can be influenced by multiple cultures and groups to which they belong.
- **Ask students to consider the multiple cultures, groups, identities and influences impacting on what is in their iceberg, including:**
  - Does your iceberg fit into one traditional 'culture'?
  - Is your iceberg the same at home? With family or friends?
  - Do you ever have to hide things from above or below?
  - Was your iceberg the same when you were younger? Do you think it will change as you get older?
  - Instruct students to walk around the room and find one person with whom they share a similar aspect of culture or influence. Ask students to share this similarity back to the class.

### Required Materials:

- White board or wall space/poster paper or blackboard
- Whiteboard markers or markers or chalk
- *My Cultural Iceberg* handouts ([see attachment](#))

# Cultural Iceberg – Example and Facilitation notes

## Above the waterline: observable/conscious

- Dress/clothes
- Dance, music, art
- Food
- Celebrations – events such as Christmas, Ramadan, birthdays, etc.
- Rituals – e.g. daily prayer, etc.
- Scarring/piercings/tattoos
- This group is often called the 3Fs: Food Faith and Festivals!

## On the waterline: both observable and not observable

- Language
- Body language
- How we interact

## Influencers:

- Politics
- Country of birth
- Age
- Media / social media
- Laws
- Sexuality / gender
- Birth order
- Colonisation
- (Dis)ability
- History
- Birth order
- There are many!

## Below the waterline: Not observable / unconscious

- Values
- Expectations
- Power structures
- Beliefs
- Understandings of friendship / loyalty
- Ethics
- Parenting style
- Religion
- How respect is conveyed
- Gender roles
- Collectivist vs. individualist societies
- Social norms (what is considered right and wrong)
- Notions of hospitality/ friendliness
- Affiliations (sports clubs, corporate culture)

# Additional

## Facilitation Notes:

There is much to discuss within the topic of culture, and the context of the environment and people's experiences will greatly influence their perceptions and answers. As a facilitator, using examples that you are comfortable discussing and that suit the context of your group is very important - however using examples that the group may not have considered can also be very helpful in broadening understanding of culture.

Below are some tips and examples of how various points have been approached during previous facilitation of this exercise:

### Highlighting the key messages:

- **What is below the water line drives what is above the waterline**

*Example:* Our values, social roles and responsibilities drive the behaviours that we display above our waterline. Ask the students to consider the example of respect.

- How might it be conveyed differently between friends, to family, to teachers?
- What behaviours indicate respect in a professional Western culture? Shaking hands, eye contact, type of language used (no swearing, not too casual)
- Does anyone have examples of how respect is conveyed in other cultures? Not making eye contact, not speaking until spoken to, not shaking hands of different genders, one or two kiss introductions?

- **We tend to judge what is above someone else's waterline by what is below our own.**

- Using the previous example of respect, a student looking away from their teacher may be considered disrespectful when they are actually very engaged and trying to convey respect.
- Recognition of the above tendency allows us to avoid making assumptions by understanding that we cannot fully appreciate the factors that contribute to someone's observable culture.
- Cultural awareness or cultural responsiveness can be seen as looking sideways from beneath the waterline of your own culture, to below the waterline of another.

- **Culture is dynamic, it changes over time and context, and we each embody multiple cultures.**

- **There are many influencers that shape the cultures within and around us - they can be seen to create 'subcultures' within cultures. There is as much diversity within a culture as there is between cultures.**

# Exploring 'influencers':

## Religion

- Religion is often equated with culture. Indeed religion influences both visible and invisible aspects of culture, however ask students to consider how many millions of Muslims, Christians and other faiths there are and how culturally diverse they are.

## Country of birth / ethnicity

- Whilst also commonly recognised as an identifier of culture, country of birth or ethnicity are better understood as influencing factors. Consider how the values, behaviours, beliefs about social and gender roles may differ between two people of the same ethnic background who have grown up in different countries.

## History

- Historical events greatly influence the evolution and expression of culture. Consider the influence of WWII which required women to enter the workforce to take up roles traditionally filled by men and the impact of this on gender roles in Australia / the West.

## Economics / socio-economic status

- Socio-economic status can impact visible identifiers such as dress, what we eat, places we frequent.
- They can also impact our access and opportunities for education, employment, recreational activities and influence invisible factors such as values, what we consider right and wrong, behaviour.

## (Dis)ability

- Ability levels can influence our role within a family, how we are perceived, educational and employment opportunities.
- Disabilities can embody a culture of their own – consider deaf culture.

## Age

- Age can determine your role within a family culture across different social and ethnic groups.
- Age groups can be seen to have their own cultures for example 'youth culture' or generational stereotypes such as baby boomers, generation x and y, millennials.

## Place you live

- Geographic location can influence culture – consider rural vs urban cultures.
- Country of birth and migration experience are also highly influential.

## Groups and memberships

- The groups with which we interact and participate in can influence our culture. They can also embody cultures of their own - consider sports clubs, corporate culture, 'hip hop' culture, surfers, 'soccer mums'

There are many 'influencers' – exploring the different ones that student's recognise is a great way for breaking down stereotypes and broadening cultural understanding!

# My Cultural Iceberg

