

What is culture?

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Introduction

Culture is a term that plays a prominent role in the lives of students that attend the diverse high school where I teach, yet it often seems to be haphazardly thrown around when it comes up in conversation. My students use the term in a familiar way and can likely tell you that different foods they eat are impacted by culture, yet if they were asked to write a definition for the term or create a list of factors that contribute to a person's culture, they would likely struggle and leave out significant details. According to Merriam-Webster, culture is made up of "the characteristic features such as customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group in a particular place or time". The definitions for culture continue to include a group's values, conventions, attitudes, goals, practices, tastes in fine arts and technical skills, and patterns that are transmitted across generations¹. The range of international food options available to students as they drive down any given street in our town, has led to cuisine being the most visible aspect of other cultures and students creating an oversimplified association between the term "culture" and foods.

However, living in an area where students are constantly surrounded immigrants or those that have different cultural backgrounds than their own, makes it imperative for them to understand the multiple and complex ways culture impacts their lives. Yes, they have the ability to walk into the local Farmer's Market and choose from Amish baked goods, 'authentic' Italian pizza, or Mexican street corn. However, they have little understanding of how living in a community that provides these options benefits them. Students need to develop an understanding that along with global cuisines, these people bring values and customs that are different from their own, and have the ability to contribute different perspectives in our community. Developing a greater understanding of culture and the benefits of interacting with people of different backgrounds will create a group of students that are more open-minded and accepting of differences.

Demographics

William Penn High School, the school at which I teach, is the largest high school in the state of Delaware and is comprised of a diverse student population that comes to us from a range of backgrounds. Since my school is the only high school in the Colonial School District, our 2300 students come from a range of areas in the eastern portion of New

Castle county; our students that live in the southernmost portion of our district's boundaries live in area that is generally more rural and affluent, while those that live in the northern section of the district mostly come from poorer neighborhoods that are in the city of Wilmington or just along the outskirts, and those in the middle part of the district live in a working-class suburban area. During the 2017-2018 school year, seventy-five percent of students identified as part of a racial/ethnic minority, with nearly forty percent of our students coming from families that have been identified as earning low incomes. This means that all students in the school receive free breakfast, lunch, and meals if they stay after school for sports or extra-curricular activities. In addition, nearly one-fifth of our students receive special education services and seven percent are identified as English Language Learners.

William Penn has recently gained recognition on both a state and national level for revamping the high school experience our students have and increasing the level of college and career readiness they have upon graduation. At the start of their high school careers, each of our student chooses one of over twenty degree programs, which are divided into three different colleges. Our business college offers career pathways such as Air Force Junior ROTC, Culinary Arts, and Financial Services. Students in the humanities college take classes towards Education, Legal Studies, or Visual and Performing Arts pathways. STEM college students participate in degree programs such as Agriculture, Engineering, and Health Services. The courses that students take in their chosen degree program are top-notch and have served as a model for other high schools throughout the state that want to implement a similar career pathway program.

The goal of these programs is to set students up for success whether they choose to attend college or enter the workforce following graduation. This can be seen in the fact that our Culinary students graduate with the foundational knowledge that will help them succeed if they choose to go to culinary school but also have catering experience, ServSafe certifications, and restaurant management exposure gained during internships, which makes them marketable for jobs in the restaurant industry right out of high school. The same holds true for our Health Services students that graduate as certified phlebotomists but have also learned the perseverance that will be necessary for medical-related classes in a post-secondary setting and our Engineering students that participate in a certification program at the local community college for half a day throughout their junior and senior years.

The heartiness of these programs has created a school environment that looks towards the future and strives to demonstrate the connections between classroom content and students' actual lives, as well as the interconnectedness of various content areas. On any given day in William Penn High School, you are likely to see Culinary students preparing meals for sale in the Bistro from foods that our Agriculture students raised or grew at Penn Farm, Construction students assembling and finishing guitars that our music students will be using in next semester's guitar class, or Legal Studies and Forensics

students working together to recreate accident scenes with dead deer. Our students are experiencing the fact that what they learn in high school does matter and will be used in their lives.

Rationale

The idea of culture makes an appearance in each of the social studies courses I teach. In the civics portion of my on-grade-level ninth grade course, students are asked to determine how culture impacts government structures around the world, and to analyze the role culture plays in urban planning, as well as the roles of cultural diffusion and assimilation, in the geography portion of the year. Culture comes into play in various units of the United States history course I teach, as we examine American values, interactions with people around the world, and material artifacts that require knowledge of people from different places and time periods. I also teach Advanced Placement Human Geography, in which students spend an entire unit interacting with the concept of culture, specifically the differences between popular and folk culture, as well as the language and religious aspects of culture. Despite the fact that I have personally and professionally interacted with various cultures and referenced the word often, I felt that I was still unsure of exactly all of the aspects that contributed to developing a person or group's culture, and therefore the way I taught this concept to my students was lacking.

In thinking about the unit that I would be writing, I knew that I wanted to create something that would improve upon an area that I felt like my content knowledge was weakest. Creating something that would provide an overview of what culture actually is, with additional information that delved deeper into specific aspects of culture seemed like the most logical idea. This allows me to apply parts of this unit to each of the courses I teach by providing a clearer introduction to culture for my ninth graders, connecting culture to various points in history for my eleventh graders, and being able to delve deeper into what culture truly is with my Advanced Placement students.

As I began the research process and gained more information about culture, it was evident that cultural aspects can be seen in all parts of our lives. In the past, I had always grappled with providing examples of my own culture to students who were struggling to understand the concept in the past, due to the fact that my family does not have any strong ties to other parts of the world and does not do anything that separates us from "regular American culture", which can be hard to identify if it is your everyday norm. However, I realized that nearly everything I do in a day is dictated by my culture- the grooming habits I engage in when I wake up in the morning, to the iced coffee I stop for on the way to work, the eight-hour day I work, the shows I watch on Netflix in the evening, and the suburban ranch-style house I live in.

This realization, combined with information I was gaining from seminar and my research led to the idea that students would be able to develop a better grasp on what

culture is, if the content and instruction they were presented with were focused on mainstream “American culture”. Since it is more difficult to determine things that are unique of one’s own culture, it will be beneficial for students to develop an understanding of cultural features and how they impact their own lives, and then apply that knowledge to groups that exist in other times and places, as opposed to vice-versa. Focusing on what makes American culture different from other cultures will prevent students from feeling like they do not have any unique cultural characteristics, as I did before starting to create this unit.

Although developing an understanding of culture is an important part of the content I teach my students, as is evident in its’ inclusion in state and national standards, increasing their cultural knowledge has benefits that go beyond the formal curriculum. This year, my school administration is taking on an important initiative of working toward improving the climate throughout the school by building relationships among students, as well as between students and staff, with the idea that a more positive school climate will cut down on the conflict that often results in the need for disciplinary procedures and make it so that everyone enjoys being in our building more.

Culture has the ability to play an important role in the process of building relationships that are necessary for improving everyone’s experiences at William Penn High School. Students that have developed an understanding of what culture is comprised of and the benefits of living in a part of the country that is so culturally diverse are likely to develop higher levels of tolerance and empathy for people that are different from themselves. In just one of the classes I teach, I have students who are either first- or second-generation immigrants from Ghana, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, India, Laos, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Costa Rica. I also have students that were born in the United States but have a lot of pride in their Polish and Italian heritage, and those that moved to Delaware from Alaska and Georgia. Among just that one group of students, there are so many different perspectives, family values, religions, languages, and experiences that can make positive contributions to our learning environment. Using content to help students develop an understanding of how each of these contributions enhances everyone’s experience in the classroom, will build a tolerant nature that students will carry with them beyond their high school social studies class. A unit on culture will provide students with the information they need to value the differences and diversity within our classroom, as well as understand how culture influences the type of governments in various countries around the world, and the structure and look of locations around the world.

Learning Objectives

As students work through this unit, they will gain an understanding of the fact that culture is a fluid set of learned practices that shape who we are. Some features of our cultures are based on material items and how we interact with them, which are extrinsically visible to those we come in contact with. Other aspects of our cultures are non-material but important in shaping our identity, such as religious beliefs and the values we have.

In learning about the factors that influence a person's culture, students will develop global awareness by being provided examples of how these features are impacting cultures around the world, as well as in other parts of the country, and our own community. This will enable them to develop a greater sense of appreciation for the diverse nature of the part of the country where we live.

Content Objectives

Aspects of culture

In order to develop an understanding of the concept of culture, it is essential to develop an understanding of the features that contribute to defining a person's culture. People frequently understand that a person's culture may relate to the cuisine they regularly eat, the language they speak, and the religion they practice, but are unlikely to realize that the fact that they are wearing blue jeans² or their hygiene practices³ are also factors that make up their culture. A person's culture is made up of the practices, ideas, and items that appear in their daily lives—specifically those that are unique to a specific group they belong to. Culture can be simply defined as peoples' "shared understanding of the world"⁴. Cultures have developed based on the needs and circumstances of people living across time and space. Although various groups may have similar motives, their traditions are likely to evolve and be passed from generation to generation differently. The amount of interaction a particular group has with others will determine whether similarities or differences emerge.⁵

Comparing culture to an iceberg, as Edward T. Hall did in his Cultural Iceberg Model⁶, may be a useful analogy to use with students, in order to demonstrate the fact that it has surface-level material aspects that you are able to see and touch, much like the portion of an iceberg that is above the water's surface, as well as non-material components that cannot be seen, which are represented by the portion of the iceberg below water. The material portion of culture provides the physical representations of human culture. The houses that we live in, as well as the items that you would find within these houses are all important parts of material culture⁷ because they provide a look into the things we value and our daily routines. The way groups of people interact with these items provides information about their daily lives and the roles various people take on in their lives. Students are likely to have some degree of familiarity with looking at material culture artifacts from non-Western societies, as a means of learning about people that lived in the past, but probably have not made the connection that the items they use every day could be used by people from different cultures, to learn about them⁸. These "mundane artifacts of contemporary living" are often overlooked by the general public, as well as anthropologists. However, examining the material items used by cultural groups through the lenses of cognitive science, anthropology, psychology, and sociology

enables us to understand the various networks of human and non-human items that make a culture unique⁹.

The non-material characteristics of a culture are made up of things you cannot see about them, such as how members of a group identify themselves, what they value, and their customs¹⁰. It also includes the group's spiritual beliefs, decisions they make about how to spend leisure time, their customs for socializing, and the ways they interact with their environment¹¹. One important non-material aspect that can be used to create distinction between cultures is how they progress through the various stages of life and the role played by people in each stage¹². For example, in American culture, families generally see themselves as having a responsibility for taking care of older members, while the !Kung, an ethnic tribal group from Botswana, depends on hunting and gathering for subsistence and makes the choice to leave behind older and weaker members of the group, as they move on to the next source of food. This is a necessary action, as slowing down for older members of the group or having to be responsible for them could harm the rest of the group or expose them to predators¹³. Since leaving elders behind to die on their own is not a practice of the mainstream American culture, and Americans are unlikely to have been in a position where they had to make that choice, this cultural practice can be difficult for us to understand.

Our cultural traits and practices are non-instinctive and therefore have to be taught to members of a group from a young age. Humans are born without any genetic programming that causes them to be predisposed towards learning a particular culture, therefore we learn our culture from those that are around us¹⁴. To help students gain a better understanding of our learned cultural traits, it may be helpful to refer to them as the "software of the mind" due to the patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that are shaped by our learned practices¹⁵. Within a particular group, cultural characteristics are informally transmitted through the interactions one has with their family, friends, members of their community, and the media¹⁶. This can be related to one's own experience of learning a language. Humans begin to pick up words from those that they are around at a young age, and continue this practice throughout their lives. We also have the ability to learn new languages through formally through schooling and informally through traveling or exposure to another language being spoken¹⁷.

In some instances, learned features of a particular group's cultural practices are influenced by their collective history. The invention and widespread adaptation of agricultural practices caused humans to abandon hunting and gathering practices in favor of permanent settlements, which were made possible by the dependable food supply that came along with raising crops and animal husbandry¹⁸. In Alaska, Inuit groups have learned how to adapt their culture to the harsh environmental factors that they have experienced throughout their history. Over time, they have learned and adapted from observing community members and animals. This has been especially important as they mirror the behavior of seals in order to attract the whales they are hunting. Learning from

your environment, as well as about it, can play a significant role in shaping cultural practices¹⁹. The learned component of culture can also be related to one's personal history, as author Bill Bryson shared in his account of what he experienced moving back to the United States after twenty years of living in England. This experience resulted in Bryson having to relearn aspects of American culture that had changed or been forgotten while he was living in Europe, such as on which days Americans celebrated holidays in honor of presidents²⁰ and the fact that pizza could be considered a breakfast food²¹. The cultural beliefs and practices we learn throughout our lives are what enable us to make meaning of the situations we are in and interactions we have on a daily basis²².

Cultural Change

Culture is a concept that is both static and ever-changing, flexible and elastic. Prior to the advanced communication and transportation networks we have today, cultures were more likely to remain isolated from one another, resulting in little change beyond that which took place when members of the group learned something new and integrated it into their culture. However, increases in technology since the Industrial Revolution have created a world where people are able to interact with those that are culturally and spatially different from them, instantly. The globalization that has resulted from the ability for people and information to move freely around the world has greatly increased interaction between cultural groups, thus adding a global aspect to culture as well. As people conduct business and share public spaces with people from other parts of the world, interact with media created in other countries, and immigrate, specific cultures are diffused from their original hearths. This globalization of culture has created popular cultures that share many similarities, even though they are geographically separated²³. For example, you are likely to see the same songs topping the charts in the United States and England, while the same movies are showing in theatres in Canada and India. The environments that humans live in are constantly changing, and they will always adapt to best fit their environment²⁴. As people move across space, they are likely to integrate the traditional customs of their own cultures with those of groups they come into contact with, resulting in fusing that creates diverse cultures around the world²⁵.

As a cultural group adopts new practice, though, they will also subtract some of their existing practices. The process of assimilating, or losing one's own cultural features so that they cannot be distinguished from a dominant group²⁶, has been happening throughout human history. One of the most accessible examples of assimilating into a new culture, for students, is likely to be the results of Native Americans' interactions with European Americans that were moving west at the start of the nineteenth century. Native Americans, whose culture was seen as primitive and savage, were looked down upon by the Europeans that wanted access to what they believed was unclaimed land. The United States government sponsored programs aimed at changing Native Americans' culture by forcing them to abandon their traditional dress, distinct languages, and nomadic lifestyles. This is just one example of the negative effects smaller, more traditional cultures can

experience when they come in contact with dominant cultures. Around the world today, traditional languages, architecture styles, ways of dress, and religions are in danger of becoming extinct, as group members choose to incorporate aspects of popular cultures into their daily lives.

Folk Culture

Culture exists in various forms, one of which is folk culture. The term “folk culture” originated as a way for anthropologists to describe cultures that were assumed to be simple and not metropolitan, but were also not primitive. Today, we tend to associate folk culture with homogeneous groups living in rural areas²⁷ that have more conservative values that place importance on the family and a cohesive local identity. Folk customs have generally developed in areas that are more isolated and have remained relatively unchanged due to group members remaining in rural areas that are geographically separated from others and the culture only spreading if members of the group physically relocate. Traditions are foundational in folk cultures and people are likely to pass things down within their families, from material goods, to stories and songs, to directions for preparing foods.²⁸ Characteristics of a folk culture can be seen in a group’s acknowledgement of their cultural roots and their preferences for music that tells a story, clothing styles that adapt to climate, food sources that are native to the specific environment, and building materials that are found in the part of the world where they live²⁹.

Although folk and popular cultures differ greatly, neither is higher in level of importance than the other. However, the overwhelming diffusion and popularity of characteristics of popular culture have begun to threaten the preservation of folk cultures. Globalization and rising income levels around the world are increasing the demand for material goods that are associated with popular culture, which are making their way into folk cultures as well. In many instances, members of the folk cultural group are adopting technological advances and other popular culture relics, which are in turn making changes to traditional cultural practices³⁰.

The most notable example that would be familiar to all of my students, due to close proximity, is the Pennsylvania Dutch. Nearly everyone living in Northern Delaware has traveled to “Amish Country” or seen a horse and buggy along the side of the road at some point. Belonging to the Amish cultural group is tied to membership in the Amish church and the adoption of its’ religious practices. This group can trace their origins back to the Anabaptist group that emerged in 1525, as a result of the Protestant Reformation, and was then split into the Amish and Mennonite branches in 1693 due to a disagreement over the practice of shunning those that went against traditional religious practices³¹. Strong ties between the Church and governing bodies in eighteenth century Europe made life difficult from those that dissented from the Catholic church, forcing early Anabaptists to migrate to other parts of Europe to avoid persecution³² before taking advantage of the

religious freedom William Penn was offering in Pennsylvania and immigrating to America in small groups³³.

Today's Amish are often regarded as a "living history" tourist attraction³⁴ and suppliers or high-quality cuts of meat and carpentry. However, their separation from mainstream American culture have enabled them to retain distinct features of the culture. The Pennsylvania Dutch dialect of German spoken in Amish communities and their strong emphasis on maintaining the family unit are important characteristics that set members of this group apart. In addition, we can visibly see the distinction between the Amish and mainstream American culture in the plain clothes they wear, their use of horse-drawn covered buggies as the primary method of transportation, and the large electricity-free homes and barns that members of the community build by hand³⁵. This group's aversion to using many modern, time-saving tools, their recipes, their reputation for building high quality furniture and buildings, and their close-knit communities are all examples of folk culture that would be easily accessible to the students I teach.

However, it would also be useful for students to understand that the Amish have not been able to maintain complete isolation from the modern technology that accompanies popular culture in America. The growth of tourism in areas where the Amish culture is present, such as Lancaster, Pennsylvania, has made significant contributions to altering cultural traditions. Tourism has been embraced by members of the Amish community, to an extent, due to the economic possibilities that accompany flocks of people coming into town to indulge in buttered noodles and shoefly pie at all you can eat smorgasbords, or purchase solid wood rocking chairs. In some instances, a "well-organized tourist enterprise" has strengthened the Amish sense of uniqueness and pride in their cultural traditions, creating a barrier between the folk culture and tourists, as Amish begin to avoid coming into town and can no longer afford to purchase land in the area³⁶. However, in other instances tourism has brought Amish closer to mainstream American culture by exposing them to non-agricultural employment possibilities, creating a need for learning the English language, and highlighting the importance of communication technologies for promoting their businesses³⁷. These cultural changes that result from contact with the outside world have the potential to create conflict within members of the Amish culture, as they struggle to come to an agreement about which changes are acceptable and which are not. Today it would not be uncommon to see Amish families living in less isolated areas, purchasing automatic washing machines, installing solar panels on their barns, creating a website for their business, boarding a plane to vacation in another part of the country, or "Amish hacking" by hiring a driver to get around the church frowning upon driving automobiles.

Popular Culture

In contrast to folk culture, popular culture has a significant impact on my students' lives every day. Popular culture relates to many aspects of their lives, such as the music they listen to, the time they spend Snapchatting their friends, and the Netflix series they watch. These aspects become a part a part of popular culture when the same variation of the trait is widespread across geographic locations. Forms of entertainment, such as artistic expression, play a large role in contributing to pop culture, as well as trends in building styles, food, clothing, and leisure activities³⁸. The globalized nature and number of people that are a part of these types of cultural groups make it susceptible to rapid change. This is partially due to the use of advertising and media that allows trends in popular culture to spread quickly, over a large area, adding an aspect of uniformity across multiple places³⁹. The spread of uniformity, however, is likely to eliminate characteristics that make an area unique and overpower folk cultures in ways that reduce their prominence, create a more homogenous global culture⁴⁰. The slang terms students use, viral dances they know, songs they listen to, social media they use, and clothing they wear are all dictated by pop culture.

Technology and media play an important role in shaping popular culture, as many trends are created by corporations seeking to make a profit⁴¹ and are transmitted through the use of media. Television and film are an important factor in the dissemination of popular culture trends, due to their widespread audience. This technology became dominant in the United States in the 1950s and spread to Europe shortly after. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, access to televisions with local and global broadcasts reached Africa and Asia, growing exponentially in developing countries. Today, people around the world have near-universal access to televisions. This has caused watching television to become the most widespread leisure activity in the world, with people across the globe watching for an average of three hours each day⁴². Television access around the world has reached the point where popular culture is considered “media-saturated”, causing multimedia sources to be integrated into various cultures as an important medium for learning. This is evident in both traditional educational settings, as well as how we learn culture.

Widespread use of the internet has also propagated trends in popular culture, particularly through the use of social media. The global diffusion of internet access has followed the same trends as that of television, but at a later point in time. In 1995, when television access was available on every continent, only nine percent of the world's population had internet access. This spread quickly, bringing an additional thirty five percent of the global population into connectivity over the next five years. Global internet access has continued to increase rapidly, but it still not universal. Today, people have the least likelihood of having interned access in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in developing countries⁴³. In many instances, the use of social media accompanies the introduction of internet technology. This is a concept that students will be able to relate especially well to, as my students shared that they spend significantly more time interacting with their social networks than watching television. According to a

Pew Research Center study, American social media use has grown exponentially in the past six years. Facebook and YouTube dominate as the most-used social media sites, while large percentages of Americans, especially those under thirty, share that they also use Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter multiple times each day⁴⁴. Smart Insights, a marketing advice company, highlights the fact that global internet and social media usage numbers are continuing to grow. Their data shows that in 2018, fifty three percent of the world's population are classified as "internet users", with forty two percent actively using social media⁴⁵. This means that eighty percent of the global population that has internet access is using the technology to interact with others. As with prior media-based technologies, the internet is least accessible in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, while being most accessible in Europe and North America⁴⁶.

Although people around the world have wide-spread access to social media, our cultures shape the way we interact with this technology. Ethnographic research shows that in China, for example, restrictions in the population's offline lives make it so that their online lives give them the ability to express themselves, build relationships, and interact with aspects of modern lifestyles that are present in other parts of the world. It is not uncommon for young, migrant Chinese factory workers to place more value in the relationships they build online, than those they have established in person. Similarly, people in Latin American countries view social media platforms as a means of expanding their social networks. People using social media platforms in this way are likely to have a significantly higher number of "friends" on social media, as they make connections with friends of friends, both within and outside of the countries they live in. These experiences differ greatly from those of people living in England, where stories about the negative consequences of interacting with strangers online are common in the media, thus causing the English population to be most likely to use social media to interact with people they know offline⁴⁷.

This technology gives the ability to interact with people that belong to cultures and live in places that are very different than their own, thus enabling them to learn about features of different cultures and begin incorporating aspects of globalized popular culture into their own culture. An example of this that my students found particularly relatable is the spread of South Korea's K-Pop phenomenon. Many of my students regularly listen to Korean Pop (K-Pop) music, have seen K-Pop artists in concert, and spend their free time learning the words and dance moves of popular songs. This was surprising to me, considering that so many other parts of the world have embraced American music as a part of their popular culture. The diffusion of K-Pop beyond the Korean Peninsula is no accident, though. South Korea's government has played a huge role in the development of K-Pop artists and diffusing the music around the globe. This is an important focus, due to K-Pop fans' increased interest in Korean culture, as well as the tourism and economic implications of this cultural phenomenon becoming globalized⁴⁸. The South Korean government is using the media and technology to generate the economic gains that accompany the diffusion of popular culture.

Globalization has become an important factor that contributes to the spread of popular culture. Throughout the twenty-first century, there has been an “acceleration and intensification of economic interaction among the people, companies, and governments of different nations” that has created connections between places that are geographically separated. The connections were established for economic reasons, as countries began to manufacture specialized products and trade with one another, but has been enhanced due to communication technologies⁴⁹.

American Culture

Since the country’s inception, America prided itself on being a “melting pot” of diverse cultural groups. In colonial times, settlers from various parts of Europe immigrated to the United States, bringing language, religious beliefs, and food preferences from their home countries. These different cultural traits blended with those of others living in the same community, creating the first “American” culture, with influences of the folk cultures of settlers’ home countries. Continued immigration from various parts of the world, combined with the fact that people are likely to settle near others that immigrated from similar parts of the world, has continued to shape the mainstream American culture and caused some distinction between regions within the country. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, Jewish and Italian immigrants became known for their involvement in organized crime in the ghettos of New York and other major cities, fueling Americans’ interest in gangsters. This interest began to make its way into films, which in turn integrated Jewish and Italian gang-related slang into Americans’ vernacular. Today, we still use the term “beef” for a disagreement and “gat” for a gun⁵⁰. We can also trace current musical preferences within the United States back to groups that immigrated to the Bronx in the 1970s. A large group of Jamaican immigrants, who brought aspects of African cultures with them, settled in this neighborhood and transformed the American music industry with their “bricolage” technique of making music with limited resources. The hip-hop beats that began with DJ Kool Herc can still be heard in popular songs today⁵¹.

Cultural differences across the United States have resulted in the development of multiple distinctive regions. Although there are cultural traits that apply to the majority of the American population, such as speaking English and utilizing social media, there are also significant differences throughout the country. The United States can be divided into regions based on many different characteristics. One of the most simplistic means of creating regions in the United States is in relation to an area’s history, as Colin Woodard does in his book, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America*. He classifies “Yankeedom” as the area that was founded by Puritans and still reflects some of their values, “New Netherland” as the area that was accepting of persecuted groups and became a global commerce hub, the “Deep South” as the area that still has values tied to the “West Indies-style slave society” that was duplicated there, and

“El Norte” as the area where Spanish is widely-spoken and the hard work of those that immigrated north from Mexico is valued⁵². The history of various regions can also be tied to variations in present-day religious practices, which have become another possible way of categorizing differences across the country. The south eastern portion of the United States has become known as the “bible belt” due to its’ high number of Southern Baptist congregations, while Protestantism dominates the Midwest and the west coast is predominantly Roman Catholic. There are also pockets of ethnic religions that can be used to create regions within the country, such as Judaism in the north east, most highly-concentrated around New York and New Jersey, Islam in Florida, and Buddhism in California and Washington state⁵³.

Language is another useful means of demonstrating the differences that distinguish regions within the United States from one another. Although English has become a predominant lingua franca across the country, as well as the world, many different dialects of it are spoken within the country. In some instances, the differences are in the names we have for certain things, such as whether we refer to a fizzy drink as soda, pop, or coke and whether we drink out of a water fountain or bubbler, while other distinctions arise when we look at how specific words are pronounced, like pajamas, mayonnaise, and crayon⁵⁴. To highlight further distinctions, we can look at the regions like Minnesota where the sound made by the letter O is stretched out, the ever-present twang in Southern areas, or the islands of the coastal Carolinas where Gullah is spoken, a variation on English and Creole that is indecipherable to most others⁵⁵.

The differences highlighted above are indicative of the fact that there is not one single American culture. However, people in other parts of the world have developed a generalized understanding of what American culture is, based on what they have seen in popular culture and from American corporations abroad. Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with a group of educators visiting from Saudi Arabia, who shared that prior to traveling to the United States, their impression was that Americans are rude, overweight lovers of McDonald’s, who have much less conservative values than their own. InterExchange, a website developed for foreign exchange students, reinforces some of these generalizations about mainstream American culture by identifying everything being larger, from portion sizes to vehicles, eating on the go, thriving on competition, and being assertive as some of the most important things for foreign students to know about the country’s culture before moving here⁵⁶. Since we learn dominant cultural norms from a young age, practices that are uncommon in other parts of the world, such as customizing orders at restaurants, taking leftovers home, or expecting drinks to come with ice and free refills, seem normal to us⁵⁷.

Globalization has been an important factor in spreading “American” popular culture throughout the world. As with most factors of globalization, widespread Americanization was initiated by the dominance of American businesses abroad. As citizens of other countries had increased interactions with Americans that were traveling for business, they began to embrace cultural characteristics that had previously been unique to Americans.

American restaurants are becoming prominent across the globe, even in countries that traditionally take pride in their local cuisines. This Americanization of global cuisines has also influenced the dining experiences and eating habits of people living in other countries. For example, drinking coffee is a customary leisure activity in Italy, as people gather at independently-owned cafes to relax and drink their coffee. However, the introduction of Starbucks, which is built around the American cultural norm of grab-and-go coffee is quite contradictory to the Italian cultural norm. This has created a situation in which there is a rift between cultures⁵⁸.

Benefits of Cultural Diversity

The information students learn about the concept of culture throughout this unit will help them develop an understanding of what makes them unique, as well as what makes them similar to others. This understanding of group identity and diversity should be harnessed and used to foster an environment that values the contributions of people with different backgrounds and cultures. In order to wrap up the unit, it would be beneficial for students to work together to discuss and develop a set of multicultural classroom norms. This would allow students to have an open dialogue about the importance of recognizing cultural differences and the value of interacting with diverse groups of people. Coming up with a set of classroom norms also provides students with the opportunity to understand how the content they have learned in the classroom is directly related to their lives and enables them to put what they have learned to use in class each day.

Teaching Strategies

Many of the students at my school are significantly below grade-level when it comes to reading and writing, so the social studies department has been focusing on weaving literacy skills into our own curriculum. This is especially true for underclassmen, who we are trying to arm with skills that will be enduring and increase their success as they progress to higher-level courses. In ninth grade social studies courses, we aim to expose students to disciplinary texts with challenging language and practice using context clues to interpret them, increase the reading endurance of our students that are used to reading short passages, select the most important details of a reading in order to write summaries, and make claims that are supported by specific evidence.

Modeling

When students are unfamiliar with something they will be doing, it is highly beneficial for the teacher to model the way students should be doing the activity. In many instances, high school teachers seem to assume that their students are familiar with what is being

asked of them and simply explain the instructions and send students on their way. This can set students up for failure, putting them in a situation where they do not know what is expected of them or are overwhelmed by a vague understanding of the assignment. Modeling is especially useful when introducing students to disciplinary-specific texts, which varies greatly from the types of reading they are familiar with; many social studies teachers have become so familiar with the type of thinking we need to engage in order to interpret social studies sources, to the point that it becomes second nature. When modeling these sources, it is necessary for teachers to prepare the source by reading through it for specific contextual clues about the information, the author's main idea and supporting details, words or phrasing that may be unfamiliar to students, and questions that could be asked of the document. This prepares them to model their thinking for students and allows our students to see examples of what they should be looking for in primary sources.

Reading Images

Our students spend all day, every day looking at pictures and taking in the images that are surrounding them. However, they are likely to process, interpret, and make meaning of the things they see in ways that vary greatly from the ways social scientists “read” images that we are trying to extract information from. Our students will be able to identify the main idea of an image easily and will likely be able to pick out all of the components of the picture. However, they are generally less skilled when it comes to contextualizing what they see and drawing conclusions from the image. This means that it is necessary to guide them through the process of how to read images and make meaning out of that they see. Students need to be led through gathering information about sourcing the image to draw conclusions about when and why it was created, what is in the picture including subjects and positioning, and draw conclusions about what things are not included in the image and why. Once they have done this, students need to understand how this information can be used to determine what message the artist is trying to present. Reading images, as they relate to other cultures, will require students to shift their thinking away from comparing the culture of another group to their own, and towards looking for details that help explain something about the culture.

Collaborative Pairs

Using collaborative pairs is a great way to ensure that all students remain engaged in the activity and learning the desired information from the lesson, while identifying any misconceptions. In a world where students seem to prefer to live in their own worlds and would much rather communicate with others through digital formats, getting them to engage in actual conversation with someone else seems to push some students outside of their comfort zones. Making deliberate choices in student pairings can serve as a means of providing support for students that perform at a lower level and encourages students to acknowledge the ideas of others, instead of simply taking their own ideas as fact.

Working in pairs eliminates the intimidation that can accompany speaking in front of larger groups or the possibility of one student being overruled by a majority group that shares the same ideas or opinions. Collaborative pairs are often used during *Think-Pair-Share* activities, where students are asked to start by coming up with their own ideas about a particular topic before exchanging ideas and discussing with their partner, and ultimately having a class discussion on the topic. This unit uses collaborative pairs in order to compare the culture of the Nacirema to mainstream American culture.

Writing Summaries

One of the most surprising struggles my ninth graders face in their writing is the ability to write summaries after interacting with some sort of text, whether in print or digitally. They have an idea of what it means to summarize something and if I ask them to summarize the class period or something else that they have experienced first-hand, they are easily able to pick out the main ideas and provide a short overview of a large amount of information. However, when asked to summarize in an academic situation, whether verbally or in writing, students often have difficulty and pick out secondary details but overlook the main idea. This makes it important for students to continually practice writing summaries and refining their skills. When we work with summarization at William Penn, students are reminded of the acronym TWINE (topic, what you learned, in your own words, not too long, and essential vocabulary), which tells them that summaries should tell the reader the topic of what they are summarizing, explain what they learned, be in their own words, not be too long, and include essential vocabulary. The primary source exposure that is included in this unit provides a challenging, yet academically beneficial, opportunity to summarize the author's main idea in language that is more familiar to students.

Evidence-Based Writing

Another area of writing that my students display weaknesses in is making claims that are backed by evidence, as well as explaining how the evidence they have chosen is helpful in supporting the argument they are trying to make. Being pushed to write in this fashion can be unfamiliar and uncomfortable for students that have grown used to hunting for answers within a text and copying it down on their worksheet word-for-word. My school uses the acronym CSET (claim, support, evidence, tie-up) to provide our students with a framework for what evidence-based claims ought to look like. Students are taught that their writing should generally follow the format of making a claim, supporting the claim with their own words, providing evidence from the source and then explaining the evidence as they tie it up. It is generally most difficult for students to choose textual evidence that best supports their claim and then go beyond a simple conclusion to tie-up their writing piece. In this unit, it would be useful for students to use written evidence in order to describe the trends in social media usage around the world.

Expert Groups

Expert groups are a useful strategy when asking students to interact with concepts or texts that are more difficult to understand or are academically challenging for them. The main purpose of the strategy is to allow students to engage in productive struggle with one chunk of the work, as opposed to all parts. When participating in this method of instruction, all students are assigned to two different groups- an expert group where they will complete their portion of the assignment, and a small group made up with a student from each expert group, in which students report their findings to those that completed other portions of the assignment. Using expert groups is useful in the primary source work included in this unit, due to the fact that reading what was writing by the various political philosophers can be challenging and having to read each of them is likely to overwhelm students. It will be much more useful to push their abilities with one text and be taught about each of the others by their classmates.

Digital Mapping

In addition to increasing students' literacy skills, I believe it is important to teach them the educationally-appropriate ways they can benefit from the use of technology. This unit lends itself to incorporating technology through the use of online mapping software, such as Google Maps and ArcGIS. The use of Google Maps is beneficial to this unit, as it provides students with an opportunity to explore how culture has impacted the spatial arrangement, architectural styles, use of public space, and types of businesses within a specific location. Esri's ArcGIS software will allow students to construct their own maps out of cultural data, in order to see the spread of popular culture or differences between different regions.

Classroom Activities

Title: The Nacirema

Essential Question: How has our learned culture shaped the way we perceive other cultures?

This lesson is intended to help students develop their own understanding of the fact that everything we do is shaped by the cultural practices we have been taught and how our own culture enables us to make sense of other cultures.

Anticipatory Set: How would you describe your daily hygiene routine to someone from another country?

Lesson Details: Many students come to my class with a vague idea of what culture is from their middle school social studies classes, but are unlikely to realize the true scope

of it. This lesson is intended to introduce the unit and help students realize that all aspects of their lives are shaped by their culture. The lesson will be focused on students completing a close reading of an excerpt from Horace Mitchell Miner's *Body Ritual among the Nacirema*⁵⁹. As they read, students will indicate which of the Nacirema's practices are similar to their own, as well as those that are different from their own. They will then compose a written summary of the differences between Nacirema culture and mainstream American culture. The lesson will conclude with a class discussion in which students are asked to make predictions about what part of the world the Nacirema live in, before it is revealed that the text is actually describing Americans. The class will then debrief by sharing differences they identified and determining what aspect of American culture is actually being discussed.

Title: Social Media Around the World

Essential Question: How does culture impact the way different groups around the world use social media?

This lesson is intended to demonstrate that even though globalization has enabled some aspects of popular culture to become widespread, unique features of the cultures the places where the phenomena spreads cause variations.

Anticipatory Set: How do you interact with social media on a daily basis? What do you think the purpose of social media is in the United States?

Lesson Details: Students' background knowledge prior to working through this unit is likely to include the fact that social media is used by people around the globe, and they may have even used social media to interact with someone living in another part of the world before. During this activity, students will work in expert groups to gain information about how people in a specific country interact with social media. Students will use excerpts of ethnographies from the University of Central London's Why We Post series in order to learn about trends in social media usage in an English village, Southeast Turkey, Northern Chile, Industrial China, Rural China, Southeast Italy, South India, Brazil and Trinidad in order to create a description of how social media is used within that area and how these practices are reflective of the area's culture. Students will work in a small group to become experts on the practices of one country, before meeting with a larger group that contains an expert from each of the countries being studied, to exchange information. The lesson will conclude with students creating an evidence-based written response about how culture impacts social media usage around the world.

Title: Culture and the Landscape

Essential Question: How does the culture of a specific place shape the way the place looks?

This lesson is intended to help students develop their own understanding of how culture manifests itself visually upon the built landscape.

Anticipatory Set: Students will look at a photograph taken within our community to discuss how aspects of local culture have impacted what we see within the image.

Lesson Details: In order to complete this lesson, students will choose (or be assigned) an unfamiliar city or town in another part of the world, in order to look for evidence of the impact of folk and popular cultures. Once a location has been decided, students will view the location on Google Maps, where they are able to change the layers in order to see the street patterns and physical features or satellite images, as well as digitally walk down the streets of the location and explore the insides of some buildings. In order to demonstrate their understanding of the activity, students will create their own map using Google Maps and drop ten pins on locations where there is visual evidence of the impact of culture on the area. They will then have to explain the impact that is seen in the description of the pin the place on the map.

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Appendix A: Standards

Delaware Geography Standard Three, 9-12 Benchmark: Students will understand the process which result in distinctive cultures, economic activity, and settlement form in particular locations across the world.

Students will work towards meeting this standard throughout the course of the unit, as they develop an understanding of how cultures are distinctive and examples of differing cultures around the world. They will be able to demonstrate that they have met it with the final classroom activity, in which they identify specific examples of a culture impacting settlement patterns and activities in a particular location.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

Students will meet this standard as they write argumentative pieces explaining how the unique culture of an area has impacted the social media usage and preferences of members of the group. These writing pieces will require students to use specific evidence in order to support their claims.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

Students will meet this standard while reading about the Nacirema and determining how similar the culture being described in the text is to their own. As they read each chunk, students will be asked to summarize the information, which will enable them to create an understanding of how democratic ideas develop throughout the text.