

INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE STUDIES

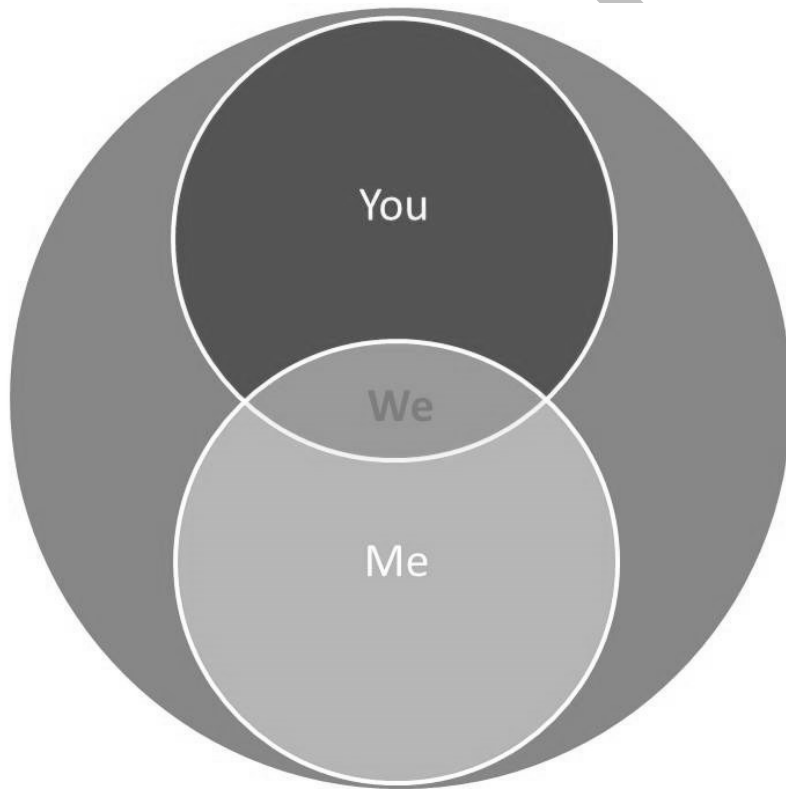
Introductory Activities for Exploring and Comparing Cultures



Andrew Reimann

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Andrew Reimann

About the Author

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CONTENTS

Unit	Description	Page
Introduction	Cultural Identity Profile, Introductory Questions, Picture description and analysis	1
Unit 1 What is Culture?	Cultural models, definition, examples, levels of culture, cultural awareness,	5
Unit 2 Identity & Membership	Groups and communities, experience and perspective, family, age, names and identity	10
Unit 3 Values & Perspective	Perceptions, Stereotypes, Perspectives, Values, Proverbs, Meaning	17
Unit 4 Globalization	Global Village, Marketing and Media, Minority Cultures, Country Comparison and Presentation	23
Unit 5 Beliefs	My beliefs, World Religions, Research, comparison and presentation, Superstitions	32
Unit 6 Community & Society	Marriage, Education, Work, Leadership, Taboos, Crime and Punishment	36
Unit 7 Beauty & Aesthetics	Cultural Beauty, Universal Beauty, Fashion, Art, Architecture and Music	43
Unit 8 Conclusion	Review and Survey, Cultural Awareness and Communicative Competence Self-Assessment	51
Resources	Maps, Presentation Planning, Data Organization and Analysis	56
Reflection & Notes	Vocabulary, Reflection, Questions, Comments	62

Introduction

This book is intended as a guide to introduce various topics in culture studies. Before beginning to explore some of the ambiguous and abstract notions of culture, it is important to understand your own worldview. If you have a good understanding of your own identity, community and perspective, then objectively learning about, experiencing and interacting with other cultures will become easier and more enjoyable. Please keep in mind that in the endeavor of cultural studies, *the journey is its own reward!*

Cultural Identity Profile

Complete the chart below with your information and draw or paste a picture of yourself

	Name
	Hometown
	Hobbies or Interests
	Cultural Experiences
Favorite food	Least favorite food
Favorite movie	Least favorite movie
Favorite song	Least favorite song
Favorite sport	Least favorite sport

Introduction Questions

In small groups ask and answer the following questions. Take notes in the space provided.

Where are you from? Introduce yourself.		
What is something interesting or unique about yourself?		
Where have you traveled? What did you experience?		
Describe your ideal vacation?		
Describe your family.		
What sort of things does your family do together?		
What is your dream for the future?		
What is your most embarrassing story?		
What is a strange or interesting story from your work?		
What is your best or worst memory?		
What is the most important lesson you learned at school?		
What would you like to change about yourself?		
What is your nickname Who gave it to you?		
What is your greatest challenge now?		

Interesting Information Questions

If you could communicate with any type of animal, which animal would you choose?		
Who is the most interesting person you have ever met?		
If your life was a TV show, what would the title be?		
What's your theme song?		
If you could be married anywhere in the world, where would the wedding take place?		
If you could be invisible for one hour, where would you go and what would you do?		
Who do you think is the most beautiful person alive today?		
What do you think is the most beautiful sound?		
What would you like to be famous for?		
Name the most delicious and most disgusting things you have ever put in your mouth.		
Has a television commercial ever moved you buy the product? What was it?		
If you learned that there actually was a Heaven and Hell, what would you change in your life?		
If you could find out that one work of fiction was actually true, what book would you select?		
If you could have the answer to any question, what would you ask?		
If you could be the pet of any person on earth, who's pet would you choose to be?		
Which month of the year do you think would best describe your personality?		
If you could travel into the past or future, how far would you want to go?		

Draw or attach a picture of something important to you and describe it.



Description:

Why is it important?
Is its value particular (you) or universal (everyone)? How is your picture different from others?
Can others understand and appreciate its importance? Why or why not?

Compare your information with others.

What are similarities and differences? What can we learn from these?

1

What is Culture?

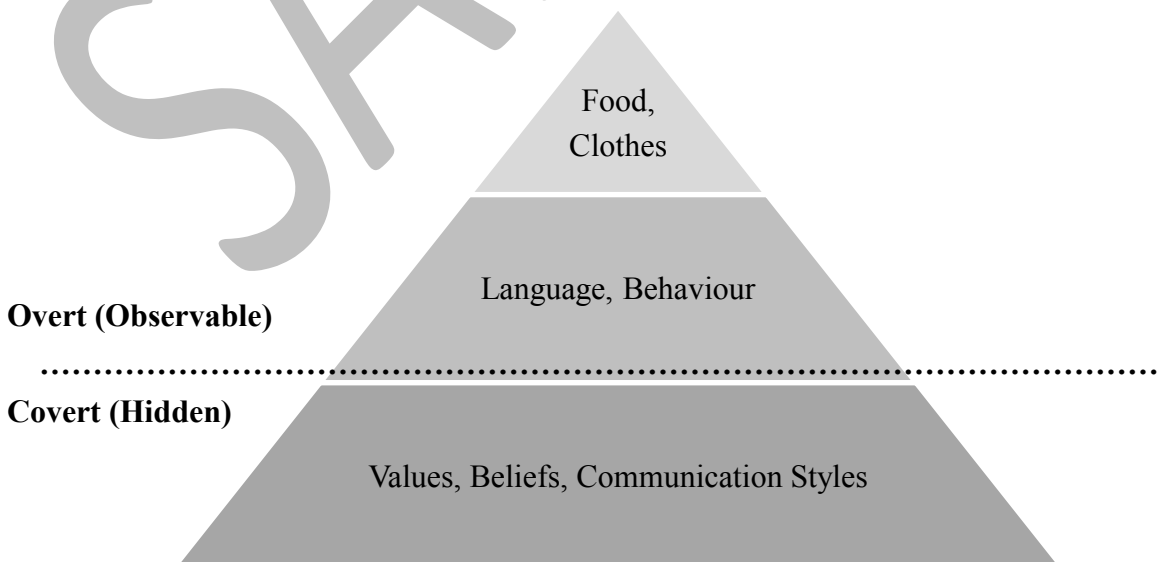
Culture is a set of perspectives shared by a group of people and reflected in their actions, relationships, communities and artifacts. The key to understanding culture as it relates to communication is developing an awareness and acceptance of different perspectives.

Perspectives can be described and categorized as follows:

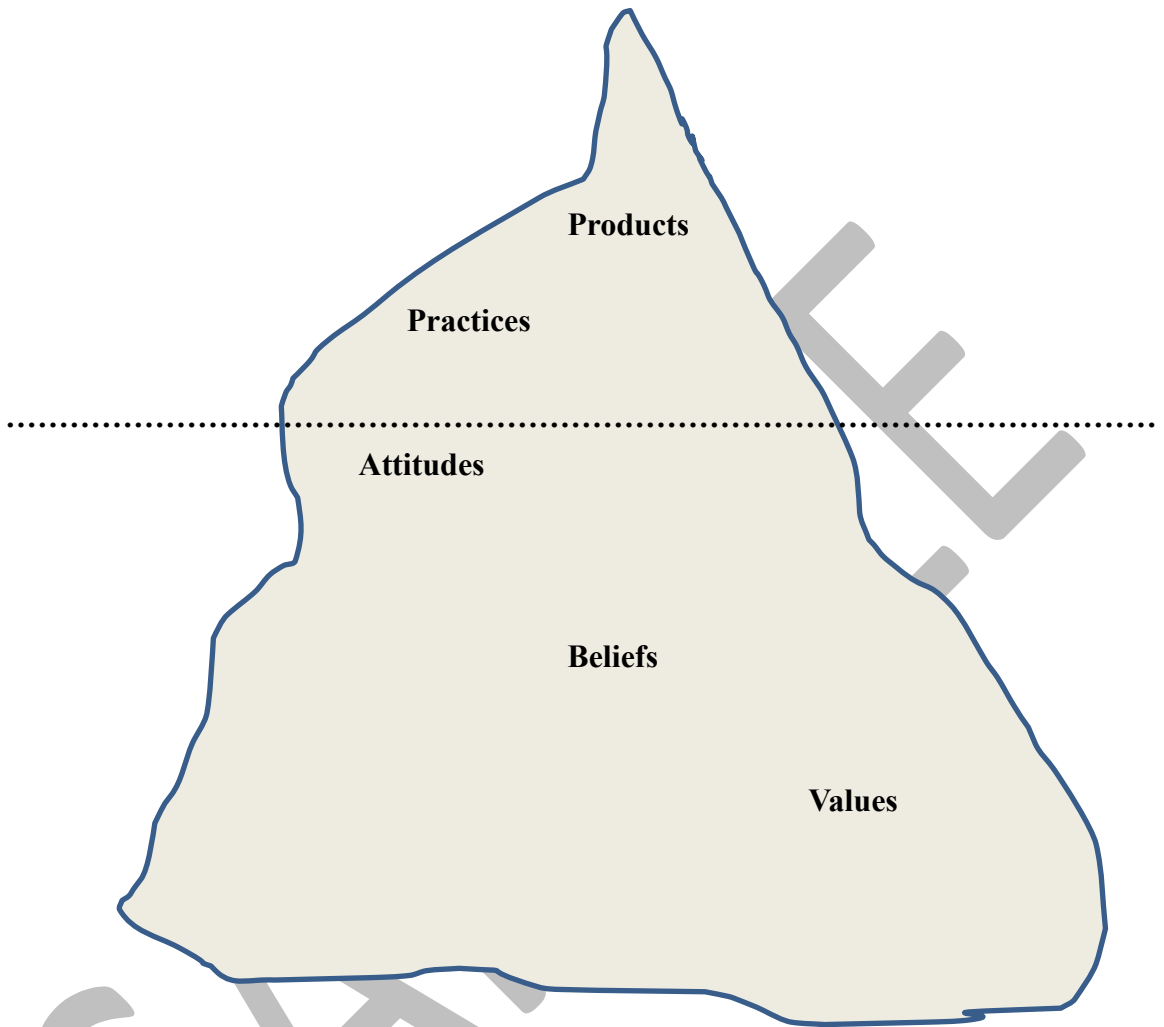
- **Perceptions:** Our experience of the world, how we get and interpret information.
What we see, what we ignore; what we notice or disregard.
- **Beliefs:** What we think is true or false.
- **Values:** What we feel is right or wrong, good or bad.
- **Attitudes:** How we act and react based on our interpretations.

The important elements of culture which form perspectives are often hidden and make up what is called *covert culture*. However these can be observed or experienced through various interactions involving representative practices or products, which are called *overt culture*. A common analogy showing this relationship represents culture as an iceberg with most of it hidden under the surface and only the tip or smallest parts exposed above the surface. To understand cultural differences and succeed in intercultural communication, we need to access and become consciously aware of the deep covert culture.

Hierarchy of Culture



Iceberg Model



Label the aspects of culture below on the iceberg.

1. Chopsticks	2. Time	3. Religion	4. Expressions
5. Beauty	6. Work	7. Manners	8. Family
9. Leadership	10. Music	11. Personal Space	12. Gender
13. Art	14. Friendship	15. Education	16. Dance
17. Fashion	18. Gestures	19. Public & Private	20. Rules
21. Your ideas:			

Levels of Culture

Not all human behavior can be attributed to culture. Some things are shared by people all over the world (universal) and some things make each person unique (personal).

Universal

Actions, perspectives and products which all people share.

Cultural

Actions, perspectives and products which people of one particular group have in common with other members of that group.

Personal

Qualities and characteristics which make each person different from others in their group

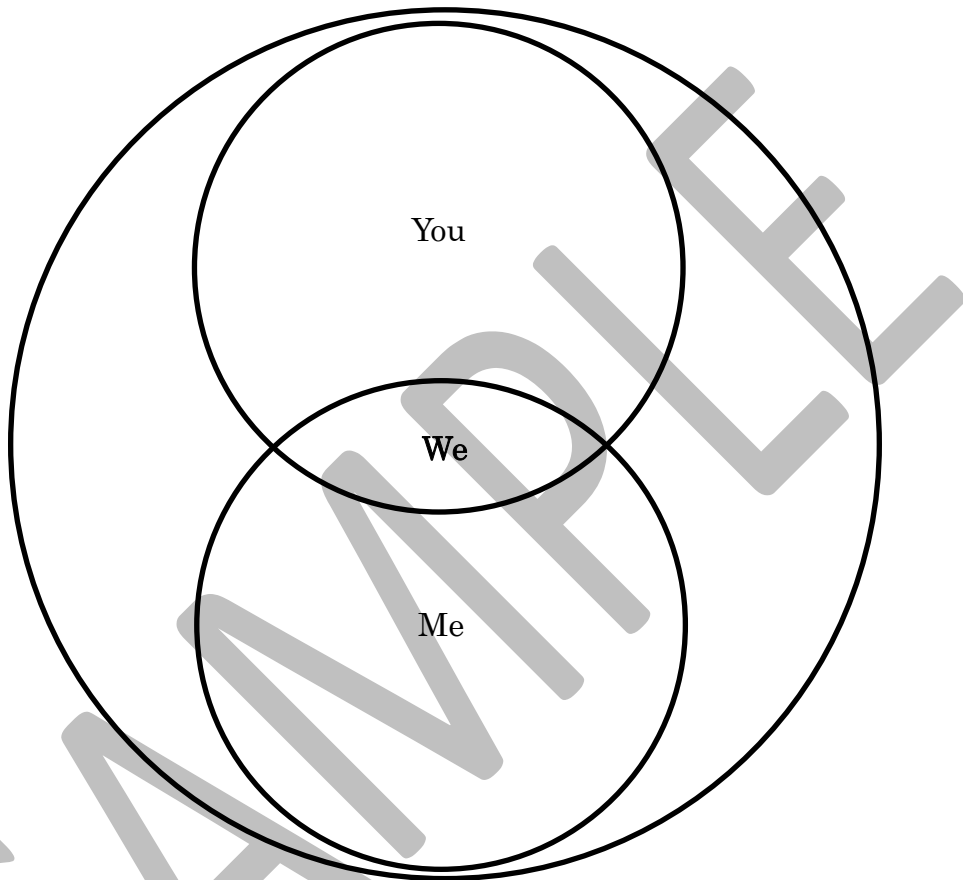
Match the numbers in the chart with the level of culture. Add your own ideas.

1. Covering your body with clothes	2. Making noise when you eat	3. Not eating some foods
4. Taking shoes off inside	5. Respecting your parents	6. Displaying affection in public
7. Putting on makeup in public	8. Challenging a superior	9. Avoiding eye contact
10. Opening a door for a woman	11. Spitting on the street	12. Giving up your seat for an older person
13. Drinking alcohol	14. Sleeping on the floor	15. Eating breakfast
16. Laughing at a funny story	17. Hitting an animal	18. Being on time
19. Saving money	20. Driving too fast	21. Telling a lie
22. Respecting life	23. Wearing a mask	24. Paying for a meal
25.	26.	27.

Cultural Awareness

Label the chart with personal, cultural or universal information.

What sort of things do you have in common with others?



What things represent culture for you?

Try to identify some subcultures in your community?

What do you associate culture with? (nationality, race, identity, arts...)

Can you clearly define or describe your culture? If so what is it?

Summary and Notes

Use external sources or media to find further information which supports or contrasts your ideas, Summarize or paste your article here and indicate where you found it.

Key Words and Ideas

Further Research and External Sources

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Instructors Comments and Evaluation

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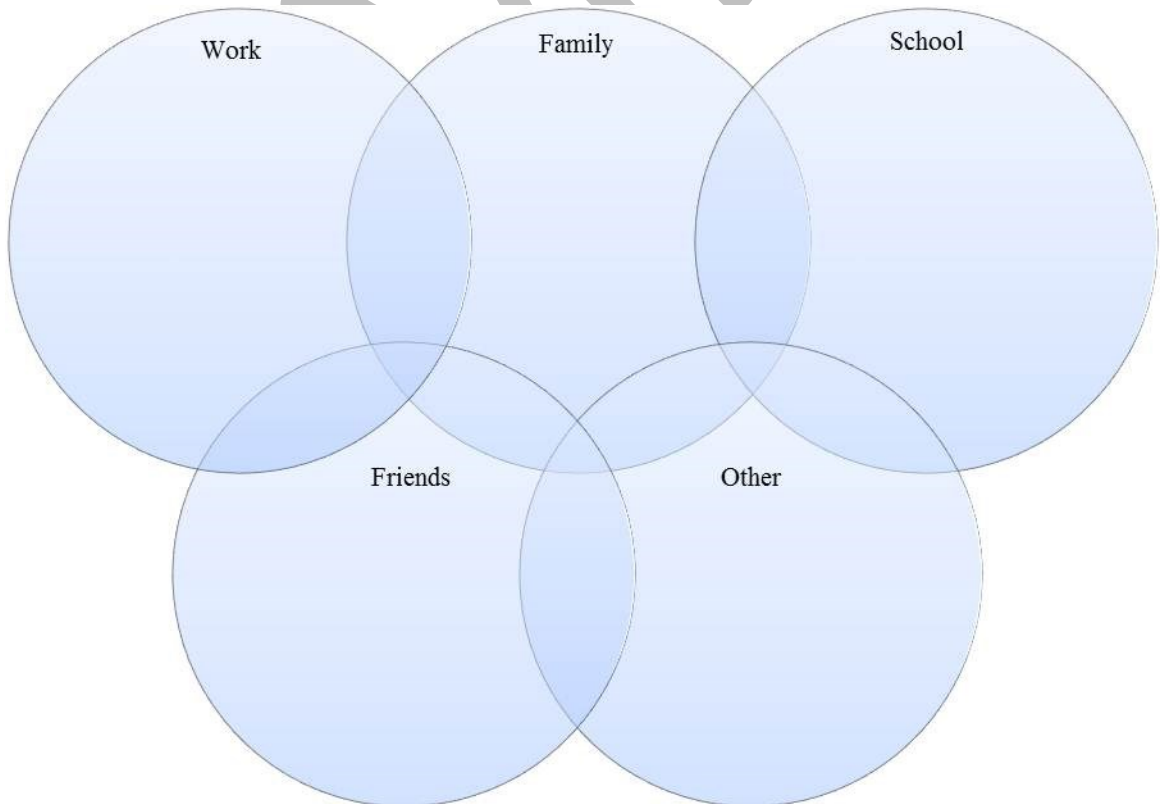
2 Identity & Membership

Groups and Communities

Community is based on relationships built through shared activities, behavior events as well as geographical qualities. Think about all of your relationships in the different communities you belong to. (brother, sister, student, teacher, coach, neighbor,) What are they? How do you interact with each group differently? What special activities do you do? Do any of these groups intersect? What is their influence on your identity and outlook?

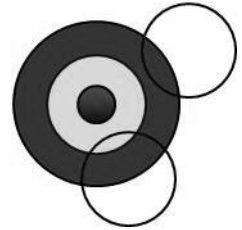
Identify 3 communities you belong to, for example family, neighborhood, school or work. Who are the members of each community what is their relationship to you and to each other? Do your communities intersect or influence each other in anyway? Are there any actions, events, behaviors or perspectives they have in common?

Using the chart below, indicate your relationships and connections with others.



Family, Memberships and Community

Draw or paste a picture of yourself and your family.



Draw circles to indicate your *personal*, *private* and *public* space.

Which people, communities, relationships or memberships intersect?

Family

When you have finished, think about how your family influences you and has shaped your identity and world view. Compare your chart with others in your group. How are your families different? Think about how often you see the people in your family and the type of relationship you have with them. What do you expect of each other? Remember family is the oldest and most basic human community. Without family society would not exist. Through family we have our first social experiences and learn emotions such as love, fear, sadness and anger. We pass through different stages of family life from baby to child to parent, to grandparent. Our relationships, needs and roles change. We are born into one family and create another when we marry. How does this universal building block of society shape culture? What are some similarities and differences between all families. What are the most important qualities and values of family? What does family mean to you?

Age

At what age is someone an adult? Explain.

At what age do you consider a person to be old?

Is it important to know someone's age? Why or why not?

Why is it sometimes inappropriate to ask someone their age? Explain.

At what age is it appropriate to:

Be a student		Fight for your country	Be a boss/leader	
Drink alcohol		Watch cartoons/anime	Get a full time job	
Read comic books		Get married	Retire from work	
Go to amusement parks		Have children	Have your first love	
Hold hands in public		Live alone	Take care of a pet	
Collect toy figures		Get a part time job	<i>Other:</i>	

What are life stages in your culture?

What type of clothes and activities are associated with different life stages?

Are these stages age based or determined by other factors?

How does your culture celebrate or mark age, milestones or life stages?

How are the roles and responsibilities of young people and old people different in society?
Give examples.

Summary and Notes

Use external sources or media to find further information which supports or contrasts your ideas, Summarize or paste your article here and indicate where you found it.

Key Words and Ideas

Further Research and External Sources

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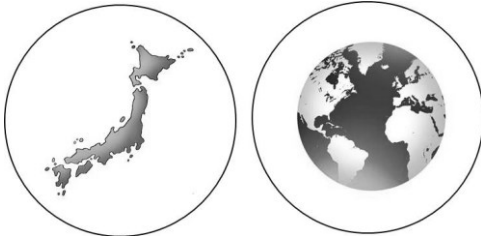
Instructors Comments and Evaluation

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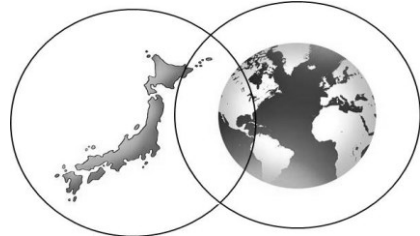
Values & Perspectives

Contrastive Perspective



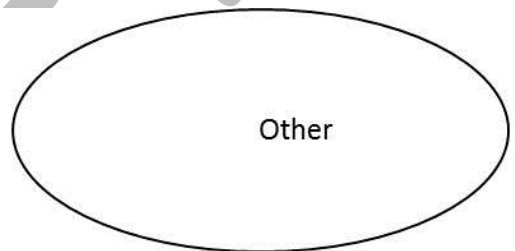
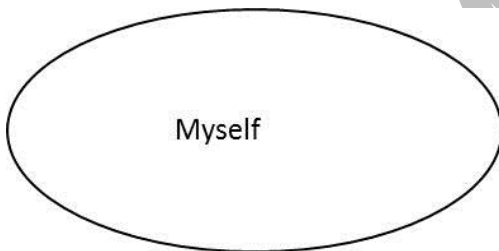
- Differences
- Barriers
- Facts
- Curiosity

Inclusive Perspective

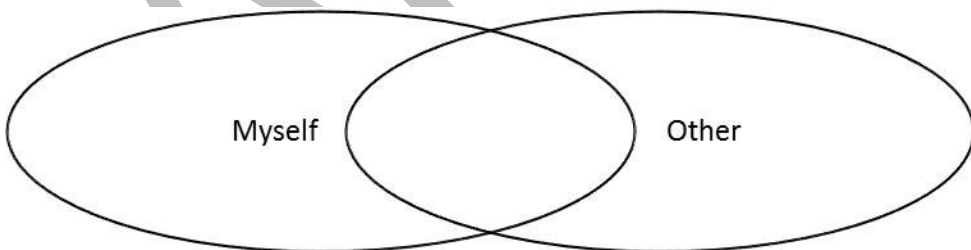


- Similarities
- Connections
- Understanding
- Learning

My Contrastive Perspective (*Focus on differences*)



My Inclusive Perspective (*Focus on similarities*)



Walls and Bridges: In communication, using the word “*foreigner*” separates you from others. Try making connections by using more inclusive language.

Contrastive (Walls and Barriers)

- Where are you from?
- Can you eat sushi?
- Can you use chopsticks?
- Your Japanese is good.

Inclusive (Bridges and Connections)

- Where have you traveled?
- What's your favorite food?
- What sports do you like?
- What languages can you speak?

Stereotypes and Perceptions

The word stereotype originates from early printing presses when the same “type” was used and reused many different times. Being able to generalize like this made printing simpler. Although stereotypes may appear to make our understanding of other people and cultures easier, they are usually inaccurate and wrong because every situation, context, culture and individual is unique. Although stereotypes are useful for learning, protection and other cognitive processes, grouping people into simple categories limits our understanding and ability to form a complete picture. In short stereotypes cause ignorance, which results in prejudice (pre judgment) leading to misunderstanding, discrimination, racism and conflict.

Perception – Nature or nurture

Is our worldview innate? Do we develop biological ways of organizing our sensory experiences which determine how we view the world or do we learn how to perceive the world through our experiences of it?

Perceptual Set – *We see what we want to see.* Often our expectations, beliefs and values influence how and what we perceive and as a result our reactions and interpretations may not be accurate. This usually results in ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotypes, racism and discrimination. When this happens between people and cultures communication becomes very difficult or impossible.

Questions

What do you think shapes a person’s worldview?

Do you think all people of a culture share exactly the same worldview? Explain.

Without lifting your pencil off the paper, connect all nine dots using only 4 straight lines.



Could you do it? Could anyone else?

Why do some people get different results?

Stereotypes and Values

What are some stereotypes you often use?

Positive Stereotypes	Negative Stereotypes
Learning: Grammar rules, laws of physics	Prejudice: People from “X” are all the same.
Safety: Fire is hot. Tigers are dangerous.	Discrimination: Women can’t be leaders.
Your example:	Your example:

Look at the following proverbs. What do you think they mean?

Don't judge a book by its cover.

Don't judge someone unless you have walked a mile in their shoes.

How do they relate to stereotyping? Can you think of anymore?

What are some stereotypes about people from your culture or community?

Complete the following statements. Then compare your answers with someone else?



- **Americans are...**
- **Japanese are...**
- **Chinese are...**
- **Koreans are...**
- **French are...**
- **Germans are...**
- **Italians are...**
- **People from _____ are...**
- **The people in the picture are...**

Why did you choose these descriptions?

Do other people think the same way you do?

What is the origin of your belief about these groups?

Do you think they are true, partially true or totally false? Why?

How can we develop our understanding of others beyond stereotypes?

4

Globalization

Draw a map of the world and label as many countries as you can.



If the World were a Village of 100

If the world were a global village of 100 people what would your position be?

Name:	My Global Village Ranking:	/100
-------	----------------------------	------

Make a list of how you think the global village would be distributed.

Category	Number/Percent
Race: (Asian, Caucasian, Hispanic...)	
Language: (English, Mandarin, Japanese...)	
Demographics: (Age, Gender)	
Religion: (Christian, Muslim, Hindu...)	
Economics: (Rich/Poor, unemployed)	
Education: (High School, University)	
Technology: (Computer, Telephone, Internet)	
Health: (hospitals, doctors, fresh water)	
Region: (Asia, Europe, North America)	
Other:	

What is your responsibility to make the world a better place for everyone?

What do you do in your daily life to make the world a better place?

How could you change your lifestyle?

Describe what the perfect global village would look like.

Country Ranking

What are the 5 best countries in the world? How did you decide this?

Country	Reason
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	

What makes a country great?

Which of the following are most important for you? Rank and give examples.

Safety	Education	Economy	Health	Services	Housing
Cost	Lifestyle	Transport	Nature	Other:	

If you were born today which country would provide you with the best opportunity for a good life?

Besides your home country where else could you live? Why?

How does your country help or aid other countries?

Are you satisfied with your countries efforts to provide the best quality of life for its citizens? Explain.

Media, Marketing and Trade

- What products do you have right now that are from other countries?
- In what ways is your country dependent on other countries?
- In what ways are other countries dependent on your country?
- What could your country teach other countries?
- What could your country learn from other countries?

How are different countries connected? (culture, economy, language, ideology)

Which connections are strongest? Why?

Country	Connection		Country
U.S.A.	weapons	oil	Saudi Arabia
Japan			
China			
Korea			
Australia			
Brazil			
Canada			
Germany			
Saudi Arabia			
Russia			
Other:			



What does this picture communicate?

Media Survey and Analysis

Choose 5 brands, products or companies you like or are familiar with.

- How do they advertise and market their goods or services? (where, when, how)
- What is the target demographic? (Age, gender, social status, etc...)
- What is the marketing strategy? (fear, anxiety, inadequacy, comparison, humor, etc...)
- Which do you think are most effective? Why? Is the company foreign or domestic?

Company/Product/Service	Description	Target Demographic	Date/Time/Source
1)			
Slogan:		Logo:	
Marketing Strategy/Comments:			
Company/Product/Service	Description	Target Demographic	Date/Time/Source
2)			
Slogan:		Logo:	
Marketing Strategy/Comments:			
Company/Product/Service	Description	Target Demographic	Date/Time/Source
3)			
Slogan:		Logo:	
Marketing Strategy/Comments:			
Company/Product/Service	Description	Target Demographic	Date/Time/Source
4)			
Slogan:		Logo:	
Marketing Strategy/Comments:			
Company/Product/Service	Description	Target Demographic	Date/Time/Source
5)			
Slogan:		Logo:	

Minority Cultures

Research and compare two of the following groups.

First Nations (Canada/U.S.)	Maori (New Zealand)	Aborigines (Australia)
Ainu (Japan)	Quechuas (Peru)	Other:
Interesting Information:		
Similarities and Differences:		
Status: (population, location, language, culture)		

Is their language or culture endangered? How can we preserve/maintain their heritage?

Maintaining Culture

What are important activities, rituals, events or artifacts in your culture?

How often do you do the following? Give examples.

eat traditional foods	visit traditional places
practice traditional customs	appreciate traditional literature and art
wear traditional clothes	reflect on your cultures heritage
honor your cultures heroes	consider your cultures religion

What are some customs that you think should be preserved or forgotten? Why?

5

Beliefs

“I consider myself a Hindu, Christian, Moslem, Jew, Buddhist and Confucian.” *Mohandas Gandhi*

Introduction Questions

Most people's religions and beliefs differ based on how they answer the following questions.

What do you believe? Are you religious?

What is Religion?

Is there a God?

Can I talk to God?

How was the world created?

What happens when people die?

How should I live my life?

Why do bad things happen?

How can we celebrate special times?

Why are some objects and places special?

Do you believe in luck or destiny?

Do people have freewill or is our fate predetermined? Explain.

Are you superstitious? Explain.

7

Beauty & Aesthetics

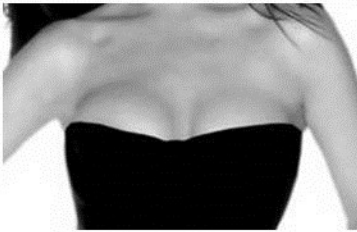
Cultural Beauty



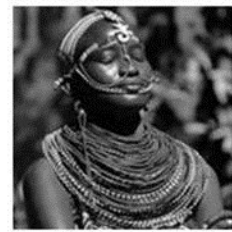
Pale skin and a slender neck are traditional beauty in Japan.



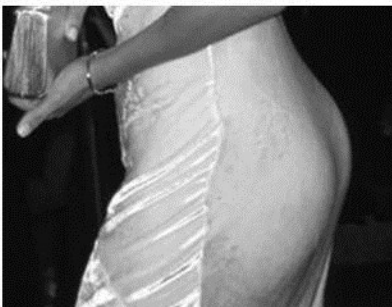
In pre 20th century China small feet were a sign of beauty.



In North America breasts are often symbols of beauty.



Many Asian and African cultures piercing, bright colors and ornaments are symbols of beauty.



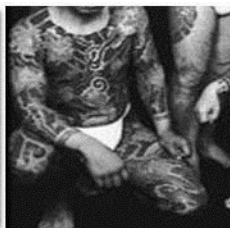
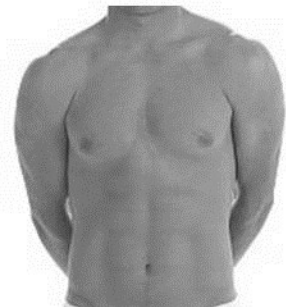
Latin cultures emphasize hips.



Western European fashions tend to display long legs



Male physical beauty usually focuses on qualities of power, strength and hunter/warrior abilities.



Tattooing is now a cross-cultural practice. Aboriginal forms from Papua New Guinea and New Zealand made warriors more fearsome.

Fashion

Paste and compare two images of Fashion from your culture and from another culture in the chart below.

<i>Example of fashion in my culture</i>	
Description and Interpretation	Qualities
<i>Example of fashion in another culture</i>	
Description and Interpretation	Qualities
Summary and Comparison	
Similarities	Differences
Universal	Cultural

Final Survey *Cultural Awareness and Communicative Competence Assessment*

How well do you understand or use the following: Give examples

Competence	Evaluation	Example
Qualities Tolerance for uncertainty Empathy Cooperativeness		
Attitudes Learning about cultural differences Respect for different beliefs and practices Positive intercultural interaction		
Skills Managing stress, difficulty or differences Communication, listening and observation Cultural knowledge and information		

Write short answers or indicate your ability (not at all, sometimes, not sure, good, excellent)

How well can you describe your own culture?
How well do you understand other cultures?
How well do you adapt to new situations.
How well do you deal with culture shock?

How well can you identify sub-cultures in your community?

How well do you understand stereotypes and discrimination?

How well can you understand nonverbal communication?

How well do you communicate your opinion to others?

How well do you communicate with people you don't know?

How well do you work in a group?

Describe your personality.

I think I am...

Other people think I am...

List some situations in which you would have difficulty communicating.

NOTES

SAMPLE

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