

Name _____ Date _____

Culture

The Way of Life a Group of People Shares

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. Culture is a way of life shared by a group of people. The group can be bigger than a country or as small as a family. A culture includes holidays, customs and attitudes. Cultures are passed down from generation to generation through traditions, food, religious (or nonreligious) beliefs, values and goals.

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As you can see, there are many aspects of culture! We usually break them down into seven groups, or the seven elements of culture. They are social organization, customs and traditions, religion, language, arts and literature, forms of government, and economic systems.

Does this mean that everyone who shares a culture likes all the same things and has all the same traditions? Of course not! You probably have a different favorite food than your sibling or your best friend, but you can still share the same culture.

2. One element of culture is social structure. This is how groups of people, or social groups, are arranged and the relationships that exist among and between them. All the people who are registered to vote in your state make up a large social group. All the students in your class are a small social group.

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On the large scale, social structure can include social classes with different statuses. In ancient India, for example, a rigid caste system kept social classes separate. In the United States, we don't have the social structures of official caste or class systems, but economics can still play a role in social structure. Social organization can also refer to how families are made up. For example, in Spain, it is common for children to live with their parents until they get married. In many Asian countries, grandparents live with their families instead of in nursing homes.

3. Customs and traditions are common beliefs and ways of doing things shared across a culture. These can include things that are common practice but not written down, like having cake and getting presents on your birthday. They can also include written laws, like those that say stealing is illegal. Some traditional beliefs include superstitions, like the idea that seeing a black cat walk in front of you is bad luck or wishing on a shooting star.

Some traditions and customs come from religion. For example, some members of the Jewish community in New York City keep kosher. To keep kosher means to follow a set of rules about food. These rules come from religious texts. You can find many kosher delis and bakeries all over New York City. But that doesn't mean everyone in the community keeps kosher or that all traditions and customs in New York come from religion.

4. Sharing a language is a big part of culture. All cultures have a language. People who communicate in the same language sometimes share the same culture but not always. Think about the United States, Britain, Canada and Australia. These countries all have different cultures, even though many people living in them speak English.

One way the language of a culture is expressed is through the arts and literature of that culture. These are the products of human imagination and are one way to convey and pass on customs and beliefs. The arts, including music, theater, dance, visual arts, literature and folktales, are a way of expressing culture. They are culture in action.

Culture also includes different forms of government and politics. For example, Britain is a constitutional monarchy, which means it is ruled by elected officials and also has a king and queen. The royal family are like celebrities in Britain, and they are an important part of British culture.

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5. Imagine that you were born and spent your childhood in Maine, and then you and your parents moved to Texas. Do you lose your love of lobsters and blueberries just because you don't live in Maine anymore? Of course not! And does having one culture mean you can't pick up Texan culture? Nope! People can have many different cultures at once.

Sometimes, large groups of people who share a culture move to a new place, which is called migration. The culture they bring with them gets incorporated into their new local culture. The spread of elements of one culture into another culture is called cultural diffusion. For example, hundreds of thousands of Cubans have immigrated to Florida, particularly to Miami, since the 1960s. The city of Miami has been shaped by its Cuban residents. The downtown is called Little Havana, and the streets are lined with Cuban restaurants and Cuban-owned businesses. In 1978, Cuban-Americans in Miami wanted a way to express themselves and educate their American neighbors about Cuban culture, so they began a one-day celebration called the Calle Ocho Festival. The Calle Ocho Festival now happens every year and has grown to include all Latin-American cultures.

6. Sometimes when we talk about other cultures, we can make the mistake of emphasizing things that we think are true based on generalizations. These are called cultural stereotypes, and they can lead to misunderstandings and hurt feelings. To avoid stereotypes, it is important to remember that cultures are made up of individuals. Get to know people for who they are. Don't assume that something you've heard about a culture is true about every person who shares that culture. Learn more about a culture that interests you by reading books or watching movies about it and by talking to people who share that culture.

As you learn about different people and cultures, you may find that you have several things in common. You may also find ideas that are different than yours. Try to imagine what it would feel like to encounter your culture for the first time. Remember that when you meet someone different from you, they are meeting someone different from them, too: you. And most importantly, respect and appreciate the differences you find. Respect other cultures the way you would want somebody to respect yours!

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7. Just because people share a culture doesn't mean they have to share every aspect of that culture. Does everyone in the United States share exactly the same culture? Nope! When groups of people within a culture develop different cultural elements unique to their group, it's called a subculture.

An example of this is hip-hop culture. In the 1970s, black and brown youth in working-class neighborhoods in the South Bronx changed the way records were played and listened to. Party hosts began throwing rhymes over beats, creating "rap." Hip-hop culture soon included break-dancing, street art, styles of dressing and ways of speaking and rhyming. Rappers rhymed about what was going on around them politically, socially and economically. Since then, hip-hop has grown into a global cultural movement. In almost every corner of the world, people participate in creating and passing on hip-hop.

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