

A Textbook-Free Activity for Your Class: Creating a Culture String.

Some adults and children may think that they have no culture, that they are “just regular.” Others can name their “culture,” but they may not feel like it is a comfortable fit for them. The fact is that each of us has a culture and each of us is also growing into and out of “cultures” throughout our lives.

The goal of the culture string activity is to help each child see how s/he is both *different from* and *the same as* others even in the same school and community. They will also be able to recognize that culture is not static but changing.

Creating a Culture String (10 minutes)

Ask students to write their answers to these questions on a sheet of scratch paper.

1. Do you live in a city, town, or rural area?
2. Name your religion or religious denomination, if any.
3. List the languages spoken in your home or by members of your family.
4. What world country or which state of the U.S. did your ancestors (or you) come from?
5. How do you identify your ethnicity?
6. What is a favorite food prepared in your home?
7. What kind of music is played or listened to on the radio, CD player, etc., in your home?
8. What is the level of education of your parents?
9. What type of job do the workers in your family do?
10. What kind of clothing do you like to wear?
11. Name a hobby or activity that you do often or well?
12. What kind of sport do you like to play or watch?

I Am Cultured—and How! (20 minutes)

Say “Now write your ‘culture string,’ a description of yourself in one to three sentences using just the answers that seem most important to you. Examples:

I'm a rural Lutheran country-and-western-dancing, macaroni-and-cheese-eating Texan.

I'm a hip-hop city girl who likes Taco Bell; my mom is a teacher, and my dad is a salesman. I babysit my brother, clean our apartment, and fix supper.

I'm a Midwesterner who moved to Texas so my dad could teach in the community college. My mother taught me to count in Swedish, and she still makes Swedish cookies at Christmas, even though she has never been to Sweden. My best sport is football.”

Allow time for students to write sentences, then call on volunteers to read their culture strings. Do not evaluate or comment on student answers; just point to the next raised hand. If possible, allow all who are willing to read their sentences.

When all volunteers have finished, take a quick poll to find similarities (differences are more apparent!). Ask students to stand or remain seated in answer to “similarity” questions. Then ask, for example:

Stand up if you have more than four people in your family.

Stand up if you hardly listen to music at all.

Stand up if your family considers religious activities important.

Stand up if you are the oldest child in your family.

Stand up if your family speaks more than one language.

How Cultures Change (10 minutes)

Say “The things that are important to you and your family make up your culture. Some of those things will change from time to time during your life. How might your answer be different 20 years from now? Look into your crystal ball, and imagine yourself as yourself at age (32) and write a culture string for yourself.”

(Repeat the culture strings questions softly as students write.)

Then say

“Your first answer describes your *culture of origin*.

Your second answer describes your *culture of choice*. What you do between now and then is what will make your ‘culture of choice.’”

Say “Take this test again in 20 years to see if you were right!”

If you wish, say

“I’m going to give each of you a (check mark) for your participation in today’s activity. We could not have done it without the information each of you brought to the table.”

Or

“If you like, you may compare your ‘culture of choice’ with that of your neighbor until the bell rings.”