

# Folklife Education: Why Teaching Students the Skills of Ethnography Matters

by Linda Deafenbaugh

I work at the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS) in Philadelphia. New teachers coming to teach at our school are unlikely to have had any courses in folklife education in their preservice training, so we kick off new staff orientation with a day that digs into the mission of the school, defines folk arts and cultural treasures, and provides a brief orientation to folklife education. One day working with terms, concepts, and methods gives them a taste and the flavor of the school and why folklife education is such a critically important and powerful approach to teaching and learning in a multicultural society. Teachers also appreciate gaining language to explain to others what their new school is all about when they are inevitably asked “What is FACTS—folk arts and cultural treasures?”

At FACTS, we are dedicated to developing advanced practices in folklife education, and as a charter school, we take seriously our role to share what we are learning with other educators. As we share at conferences and workshops, teachers and educational administrators and community tradition bearers alike give feedback about how important it is for them to have language to explain folklife education in ways educators can easily grasp. Such explanations help them to explain and justify the importance of teaching their students about culture and convince those they are working with of the value of using this educational approach. This article captures some of the language we use at FACTS for teacher professional development to communicate why the skills of ethnography and folklife education matter for student learning.

## What are folk arts and cultural treasures?

Culture is layered and complex. See the [Classroom Connections Activity Sheet](#) to begin to create learning around how one might define “culture.” Before I start to define folk arts, I acknowledge that I also use the words “folk arts,” “folklife,” and “folklore” interchangeably. These three terms have a lot of overlap, but it's not a complete overlap. “Folk” most simply means ordinary people—in other words, all of us. “Art” is simply defined as creative expression, “life” as ordinary daily living, and “lore” as words. The overlap is knowledge—the shared knowledge of a cultural group of people that underlies their creative expression, ordinary daily life, and words. But because “folk arts” is in the name of my school, I will consistently use the term folk arts in this section.

## Folk Arts: Leveling the Definition

Kindergarten: Folk arts are what we do in our cultural communities.

Middle School: Folk arts are how a culture expresses itself.

Elevator definition for adults: Folk arts live at the intersection of art and culture. Every culture creates unique practices, call them arts if you will, and these practices make the most sense and have the most meaning when situated within the culture that creates them.

To teach within this intersection of art and culture, it is important to bring in community members to the classroom to teach about their folk art practice and to help students explore how the students' own culture(s) may do something similar—or something very different. For example, Veronica Ponce de Leon comes to FACTS to teach about her cultural remembrance traditions (Mexican Day of the Dead). She guides students to explore their remembrance traditions while they create sculptures within her visual arts tradition. Students may have experienced skeletons as scary Halloween artifacts, but in Veronica's tradition, skeletons are comforting. Used to remember those who have passed, they hold three layers of meaning that she shares with the students. In a folk arts residency with Veronica, students investigate how they remember their dead. It may be similar to parts of Veronica's tradition (celebratory visits to graves), or not (with examples that include different practices using photo albums, chairs left empty, or talking through the wind or incense smoke).

One comparison for the topic of death and remembrance can be made in our school using the vertical curriculum model developed by Teacher Biaohua Lei on the history and traditions of the Tomb Sweeping Festival — 清明节 Qing Ming Jie. Students engage instructional topics on traditions about death, as well as remembrance, and the worldview values they reinforce. [Learn more in the 2022 Journal of Folklore and Education.](#)

### Folklife Education: Major Components

Folklife education engages three core areas:

- 1) Community knowledge and resources,
- 2) A toolkit that includes skills developed in support of ethnography, and
- 3) Cultural concepts and vocabulary that support nuanced and differentiated student analysis. (Figure 1)

The community knowledge component of the folklife education pie reflects the importance of using primary sources as resources for study. Some community knowledge resources may be in print form, but most are not. Community knowledge resides in the heads of community members. Perhaps this knowledge has never been recorded or written until students begin to re-present what they are learning from their study with community knowledge holders. (See Appendix for additional discussion of each of these major components of folklife education and its connections to formal education.)

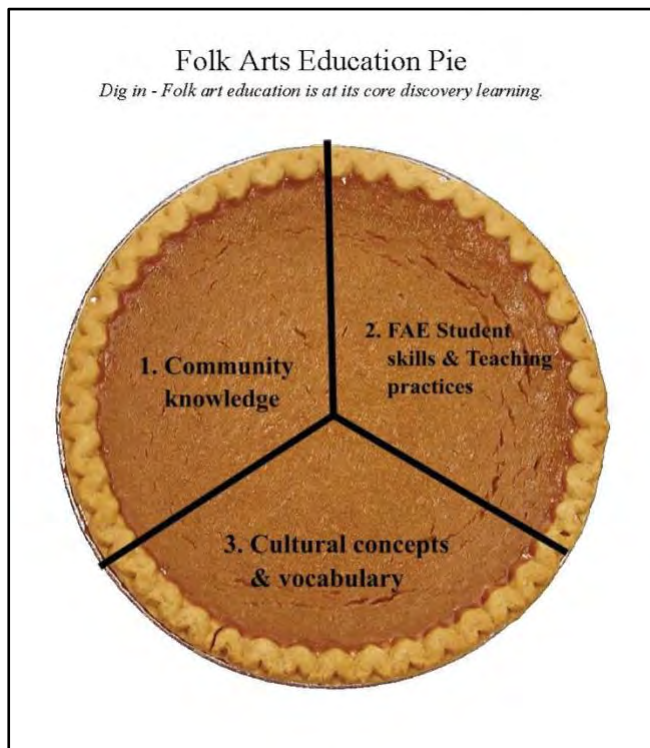


Figure 1. Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School Folk Arts Education Pie. © Linda Deafenbaugh 2021 (reprinted with permission).

In folklife education, students access the knowledge within the experiences of their families and communities through this specialized toolkit. Students become creators of knowledge resources,

or primary sources, while becoming themselves active community members through experiential learning methods. Every community member holds golden nuggets of knowledge providing unending resources for investigation. The best thing is that this gold resides in every community, so through folklife education, rich resources for learning are easily accessible to every learner regardless of locale, economic, and other considerations and common limitations (Deafenbaugh 2015).

### **Primary Texts and Diverse Cultural Communities**

Getting students into activities or texts that have them interacting with others from different cultural communities is exciting for both teacher and students. I just caution teachers not to move too quickly to interactions with others, for doing so shortchanges the exploration of themselves that students need to do beforehand through activities like Me-to-We. This process builds the bridges that lead to inquiry rather than immediately to categorization. Without preparation for the encounter, students risk learning new stereotypes. “It is depressingly difficult to change stereotypes once they have been acquired. The evidence strongly suggests that it is easier to strengthen negative stereotypes than to weaken them” (Stephan and Stephan 2001, 38). So, avoiding teaching and reinforcing stereotypes is essential (Deafenbaugh 2017).

The folklife education approach is constructivist, as students create new knowledge through inquiry and discovery learning methods to explore the socio-cultural world we live in. We respectfully use authentic cultural resources when we tap into the community knowledge holders. Teachers guide students into exploring their own experiences and then connecting and comparing these experiences with those of others to arrive at new understandings of how culture works in a teaching technique called Me-to-We. (See the [Classroom Connections for an extended activity on Me-to-We](#)). By attending to ordinary daily life, teachers can direct students to slow down and focus more deeply on small moments encoded with cultural information—again presenting endless opportunities for learning about cultural processes. Frequently inviting students to pause and reflect on what they are learning in their study of culture helps solidify and expand student thinking in useful ways. Synthesizing activities furthers students’ skills as knowledge builders. Teaching students the skills of ethnography actively engages them in learning from and with their communities about culture.

### **Teaching Students the Skills of Ethnography**

Why emphasize teaching students the skills of ethnography? When we look at other fields like science or art education, those content areas seek to teach students the habits of mind of scientists or of artists. Likewise, folklife education helps students develop the habits of mind of folklorists and closely related fields that study culture (like anthropology and oral history). Developing students’ ethnographic skills is the central cornerstone for exploring culture—both one’s own and other cultures students may encounter throughout their lifespan. The method of approaching a new-to-them or a different-to-them culture with a question rather than an assumption will go far to fostering positive social interaction across differences in society. Developing the capacity for tolerating and respecting difference is teachable (Deafenbaugh 2017).

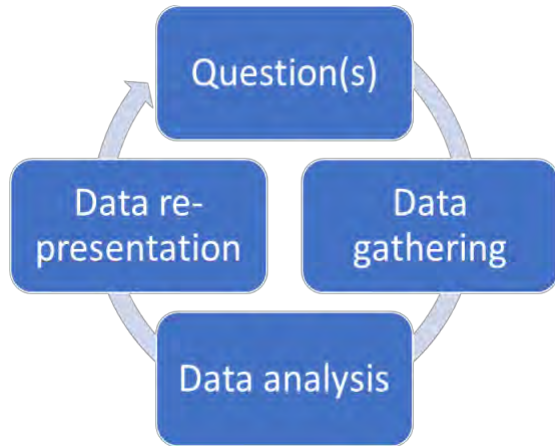


Figure 2. Ethnographic inquiry’s iterative cycle.

The iterative process of ethnographic inquiry (Figure 2) illustrates how students begin with question(s), go through a process of steps to investigate the question(s), and then go back to more questions to pursue by engaging in the ethnographic inquiry cycle again. Science educators may recognize overlaps between ethnographic inquiry and scientific methods. These similarities can open the door for folklife education and science education to be allies. But there are limitations. Ethnography has overlap with science’s study of the natural

biological world, but it diverges from laboratory scientific methods. Culture is a uniquely dynamic phenomenon to study and folklife education equips students with ethnographic skills to investigate the social cultural world.

I developed a grid to help make visible some of what students are learning when we teach them to work with data in ethnographic inquiry (Figure 3). Although the question(s) students start and end with are not presented, questioning is an integrally important part of ethnography.

Ethnographic Inquiry	Folk Arts Education	Tangible Skills (Capabilities)	Intangible Capacities (Habits of mind)
Data collection	Noticing deeply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation</li> <li>• Interviewing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curiosity</li> <li>• Perspective shifting</li> <li>• Mental flexibility</li> <li>• Working with ambiguity</li> <li>• Openness</li> </ul>
Data analysis	Making meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizing</li> <li>• Finding patterns</li> <li>• Making connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Inductive reasoning</li> <li>• Hypothesis construction</li> <li>• Empathy</li> </ul>
Re-presentation	Sharing with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation</li> <li>• Building an argument/story</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self and social advocacy/action</li> <li>• Confidence in engaging with others across differences</li> </ul>

Figure 3. What we are teaching when we teach students the skills of ethnography through folklife education.

The first column lists common vocabulary for describing what ethnographers do as they move through the ethnographic inquiry process. These terms are recognized and used in and by the field of those who study culture professionally.

The second column provides terms that are more friendly-to-young-students for describing each step of ethnographic inquiry. FACTS is a K-8 school, so teachers appreciate having simpler language to use with their students when explaining and discussing the activities they are learning to do in their folklife education learning experiences.

The third column lists some of the tangible skills that teachers are teaching to develop student capabilities in each step of the ethnographic process. These are skills that can be concretely and directly taught. Students can be measurably seen to develop and become more capable in these skills through doing these steps of the ethnographic inquiry process repeatedly in a variety of folklife education learning experiences. Students develop listening skills as they learn to conduct interviews and record responses from their interviewees. To notice deeply, students develop skills in observing and record their observations from data they may gather through any of their senses.



FACTS 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students in Chinese Shadow Mask Puppet Theater residency. Photo by Messiah King.

To illustrate these skills, I will share an example from a FACTS 4<sup>th</sup>-grade student's reflections after studying Chinese Shadow Mask Puppet Theater with master artist Hua Hua Zhang. In this classroom experience, the artist guided students to make and wear animal masks to act out a folk tale behind a shadow screen. The student wrote, "Before I thought shadow puppet was when people put their hand inside a puppet. But now I think it people who do shadow puppet."<sup>1</sup> When students learn by doing, as they do in folklife education, they become participant observers and record deeper insights into a cultural tradition.

When students develop analytical skills in making meaning of the data they are gathering, they learn to find patterns, look for similarities and differences, and make connections. By relying on the data gathered, students seek explanations that the data supports. The 4<sup>th</sup>-grade shadow puppetry student described how she overcame her fear of performing with the mask as she recorded, “it made me feel brave...You couldn’t really tell who was on stage because it was shadow puppet!” The student continued her analysis with a further connection that showed the meaning she was making about the importance of this learning experience for herself and other students, “In school, you have to be brave enough that you will raised your hand.”

Re-presenting or sharing their data and the meanings they made through analysis is an important step. Students can develop their skills for sharing what they are learning through writing assignments, presentations, and synthesizing final projects. The 4<sup>th</sup> grader we are following wrote her findings in a one-page document that she placed in a decorated folder with some of her observation notes. She shared the new knowledge she had created with her classmates and her folder was hung in the school hallway for more students to see and learn from her insights.

The fourth column is not as easy to measure as the tangible third column is. It contains some of the capacities and habits of mind that students develop as they become more capable in the skills of ethnographic inquiry through folklife education. It is difficult to directly teach mental flexibility, empathy, or other habitual ways of thinking that are useful for positive functioning in a multicultural society. But students do develop these capacities as they become more capable with the skills of ethnography.

Reflection is an important practice at FACTS. Reflective thinking is used during data collection when students recall their prior experiences. Remembering and working with their memories to notice the details of their experiences more deeply helps them develop their observation skills while building mental flexibility. In thinking about that previous experience, the student is in a different place and time and can zoom into their memory to explore details and zoom out to examine the entirety of the experience. Students are developing the fundamentals of multiple perspective shifting as they look at their memories from different perspective points and the fundamentals of mental flexibility as they engage in shifting between these perspective points.

Reflection is also used in meaning making. Teacher-prepared reflective writing prompts guide students into exploring the data they have gathered about their own and others' experiences to find the connections, similarities, variations, and differences. As students discover underlying common bonds between what they may have previously thought was complete difference, they develop a pathway for seeing others with more empathy. Whether students truly have become more empathetic to others is hard to measure tangibly, but they do develop a way of thinking that allows them to see others in a different light—and to see their underlying connectedness to others through surface differences. This mindset equips them with a pathway to developing empathy.

## **Conclusion**

This article has focused on terminology and some of the underpinnings of what is taught in folklife education. I hope I have been able to convey that folklife education is much more than just content, and more than simply teaching artists coming in to work their magic with students. There are teaching methods that are useful for teaching the content that involve meaningful sustained

interactions with knowledge bearers. There are learning experiences within cultural ways of knowing. There is learning with and from tradition bearers. And there is exploring one's own cultural experiences. Folklife education orients education to a particular worldview .

We are all familiar with the dominant paradigm operating within education, which aligns the field of education with the field of psychology. This pervasive worldview focuses on the primacy of teaching and learning as taking place within individual brains. Thus testing, and more specifically standardized testing, has become a major tool to see what the individual student knows. Folklife education, however, aligns with the fields of anthropology and folklore. This worldview focuses on the primacy of the cultural context of learning. In folklife education, it is not just the study of culture, but it is also the attending to the culture of the classroom and the school. It is attending to the whole child in a learning environment. As the FACTS Teaching Artist Ngô Thanh Nhân explains, students can only creatively express themselves as individuals when they are full members of the ensemble. It is in being part of the group that they learn to be an individual.

Because culture is so complex, and the contemporary world is so mobile, it is a certainty that our students will be interacting with culturally different people throughout their lives. If not sooner, then later. If not in the community, then in the workplace. Folklife education takes the knowledge, skills, and methods of those in the professions that study culture and makes them available to children and youth. Students already grapple with cross-cultural interactions, with misunderstandings, bias, and racism. They need help doing this. Folklife education is a welcome educational approach that empowers students to interact in their culturally complex lives with the confidence to figure out how culture works and how to have positive intercultural interactions. I look forward to hearing some of the definitions for conceptual terms that you readers develop to use with your students and some of the insights your students gain as you engage them in folklife education learning activities and the primary sources that can be found in your communities.

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#### **Endnote**

1. Student grammar has been retained from original assessment products throughout this article. This assignment was encouraging written expression—getting ideas down—rather than spelling and grammar.

#### **Works Cited**

- Deafenbaugh, Linda. 2015. Folklife Education: A Warm Welcome Schools Extend to Communities. *Journal of Folklore and Education*. 2:76-83.
- . 2017. Developing the Capacity for Tolerance Through Folklife Education. PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh.
- Stephan, Walter, and Cookie Stephan. 2001. *Improving Intergroup Relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing.

## Appendix: Folk Arts Education Pie

*Dig in - Folk arts education is at its core discovery learning.*

### 1. Community Knowledge – The resources we use in folk arts education

- Texts from cultural communities (broadly defined to include songs, sayings, stories, visual art, etc.)
- Students' experiences (families, folk groups)
- Community presenters/visiting artists in the classroom
- Community field investigation
- Home investigation

### 2. FAE Student Skills and Teaching Practice – What students are learning to do and how to teach it.

*Folk arts education equips students to investigate the social/cultural world around us. FAE skills fall squarely under the skills of ethnography.*

#### **Tangible skills of ethnography**

Data gathering = Noticing deeply

Deep listening, observation (subjective and objective), interviewing, reflection, etc.

Data analysis = Making meaning

Finding patterns, making connections, similarities, differences, etc.

Re-presentation = Sharing with others

Presentations, synthesizing projects, building an argument/story, etc.

#### **Developing habits of mind – Intangible capacities that come from skill development\***

- Curiosity, perspective shifting, mental flexibility, working with ambiguity, openness
- Problem solving, inductive reasoning/hypothesis construction, empathy
- Self and social advocacy/action, confidence in engaging with others across differences

\* These skills are elusive to measure but are outcomes of students' educational arc. They support FACTS Social Emotional Learning activities.

#### **Teaching practices**

Me-to-We, attending to ordinary daily life, reflective writing, respectful use of authentic cultural resources, synthesizing activities, constructing new knowledge, inquiry, discovery learning, etc.

### 3. Cultural Concepts and Vocabulary

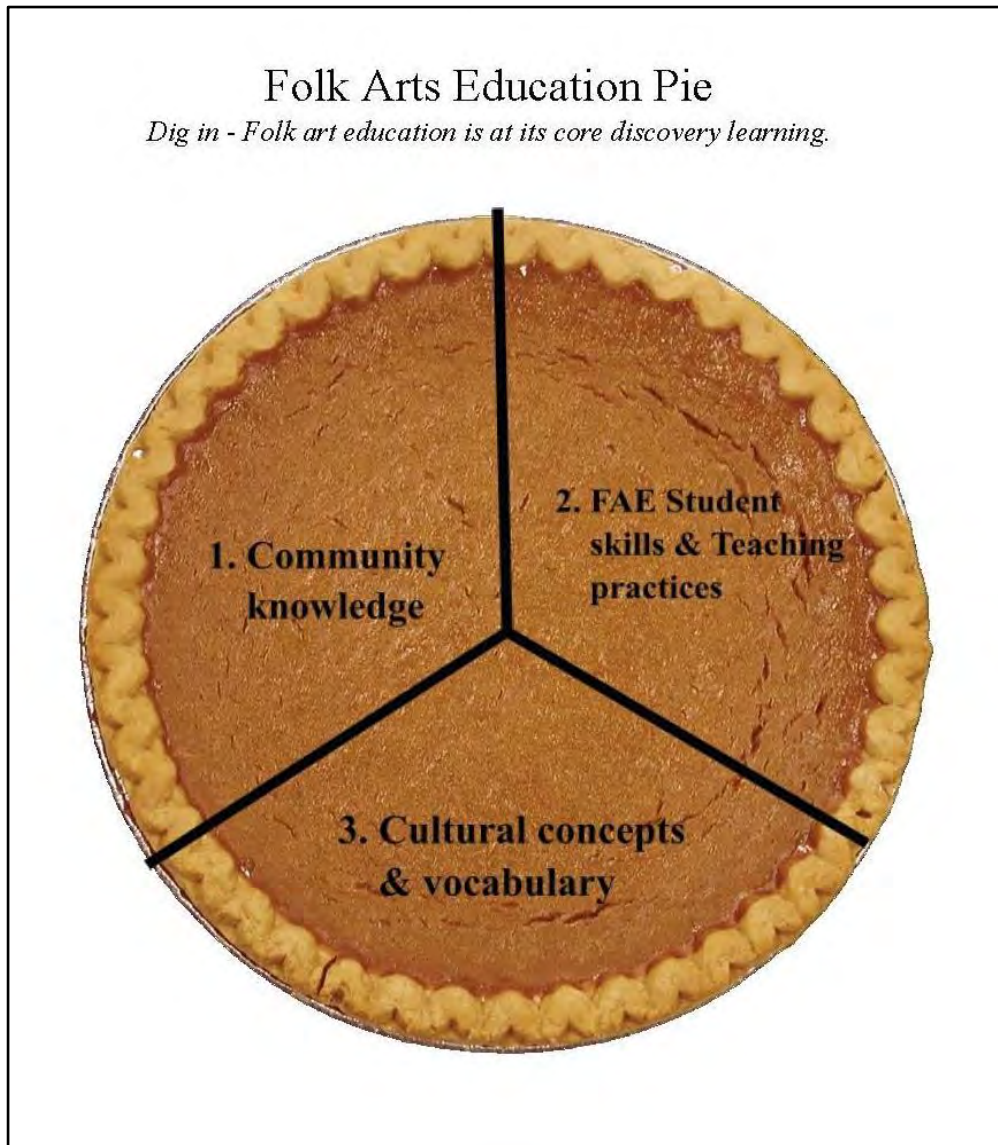
**“Big Ideas” about culture, including** Folk groups, traditions, cultural rules, roles and participation, folk/popular (commercial)/elite, worldview, etc.

**How culture works, including** We learn our culture in our folk groups from other people; change is constant in culture; every person is multiculturally constituted; we shape our folk groups, and they shape us; etc.



**Enduring understandings, including** Communities have artistic ways of sharing what is important to them; art forms arise from the needs, history, resistance, struggles in a community; artists go through training in their form; learning an art form is a process that takes time to master; the art form serves as a record keeper of a group of people and is a way to teach about the history of the group and self-identity; etc.

**FACTS folk arts standards, including** Recognizing folklife as an active force in our society; explaining the processes by which traditions are created, maintained, altered, lost, and revived; understanding how traditional art forms are shaped by social, political, and economic conditions; expressing themselves appropriately within a range of traditions; etc.



Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School Folk Arts Education Pie.  
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## Classroom Connections: A Me-to-We Activity

*This pedagogical practice involves starting students with exploration of selected aspects of culture within the student's own experience and then expanding to explore the same or similar aspects of culture within others' experiences.*

### Planning a “Me-to-We” Lesson

Determine what aspect of culture you want students to explore. With primary and intermediate grades, folklife practices like “home remedies” or “stories about how someone got their name” are very accessible for students to explore. With middle school students, folklife practices continue to be accessible, but you can challenge them to dig deeper into how culture works by selecting a cultural process for students to explore.

This instructional practice makes use of **comparison** as the basis for seeing variations and patterns in cultural practices. Starting with self, and then comparing with others, helps students cognitively reframe differences as variations and recognize more nuanced, complex comparisons, especially as they experience this comparative process multiple times, with culturally diverse others. Reframing differences as variations is important to the recategorizing process for eliminating or countering intergroup biases (Deafenbaugh 2017; Stephan & Stephan 2001).

In this activity to illustrate Me-to-We, I have picked a concept “cultural rules” from “3. Cultural Concepts and Vocabulary” in the Appendix above. Key to students gaining an understanding of a concept is to identify when this aspect of culture is likely to occur in their lives. Culture is complex, so any given aspect is likely to occur in multiple ways or re-occur at multiple points. This repetition in culture increases the accessibility of abstract concepts for students by giving them multiple entry points to explore aspects of culture’s inner workings and structure.

### Example:

*Cultural Concept:* Cultural Rules

*Folklife Practices in Student Lives:* Students identify all the “rules” they know about a celebration that they may know well—The Fourth of July. Suggest a different occasion, like Thanksgiving, as an entry point for students with no experience with Fourth of July.

*Cultural Processes for Students to Discover:*

- 1) Many cultural rules are rarely, or never, spoken.
- 2) Culture is both visible and invisible. Like an iceberg, there is a lot going on below the surface.

### Start with “Me”

Assign students to gather data from memories of their own experiences. They are to record everything they can remember about a family/extended-family celebration: What are all the activities, what are the preparations, who does what and when and how and why, etc.? Prompt them to remember deeply and record the details. Once students are inside their memories, ask them to be sure to record things that are always the same, or done the same way, anytime their family does this celebration (Noticing deeply/Data collection).

### Transition to “-to-”

In pairs or small groups, students share their memories with each other. The task of listening is very important, since the listener must ask questions to get the sharer to explain in more detail or

clarify aspects unfamiliar to the listener (Expanding the data collection to include data from someone else’s experience). Pairs/groups can be tasked with figuring out what was the same, or similar, or somewhat different, or very different between their celebrations or the ways each family “always” does them (Making meaning/Data analysis).

**Go to the “We”**

Pull the class back together to discuss what they have found was done similarly or differently. You then can restate/revoice their findings as “rules.” Verify with the students that your rewording is correct and then put these up on the board (e.g., men do all the grilling at one student’s Fourth of July picnic, while anyone can grill in another family). By asking the students what might or did happen if someone broke this “rule,” you can guide them to see that there are indeed cultural rules operating in this celebration. By asking students if anyone ever sat them down and specifically told them this “rule,” you can guide them to discover that cultural rules are not always spoken, yet everyone in that family cultural group knows their rules. To guide students to understanding their common bonds, the “We,” ask students to explain what is the same between these two families whose grilling rules are different. Students quickly grasp that “they both grill” or “they both have rules for cooking” (Making meaning/Data analysis).

Then organize this analytic insight into a way to present it, as in this graphic organizer:

<i>We are the same:</i> We both have rules for who can grill at a picnic	
<i>Variation 1:</i> Only men can grill.	<i>Variation 2:</i> Anyone can grill, but it is usually done by someone who is really good at it.

**Assessment**

Students then return to their pairs/small groups to work together to create their own list of rules by putting them into a graphic organizer that shows the similarities and variations. Instruct students to put a star next to any of their rules that are unspoken, that they have never heard anyone tell them. Then determine how you would like students to share their work, like by presenting to the class or hanging clusters of graphic organizers on a board with yarn linking rules that may be related (Sharing with others/Representation).

Reflection writing prompts after a Me-to-We lesson can usefully direct students to reflect on what they learned about their own culture or what they learned about how culture works.

Activities in which students interact with someone from a different culture in the community should align substantially with the explorations students have been doing of their own culture. In this way, students can repeat the Me-to-We process they just did with their classmates, but this time with whomever they are interacting with from a different cultural community. Alignment between students’ exploration of their own cultural knowledge and their exploration of a community person’s cultural knowledge contextualizes interaction and facilitates the exchange to productively continue the development of their inquiry skills important to Developing the Capacity for Tolerance. (Deafenbaugh 2017)

## Classroom Connections: Defining Culture While Teaching the Skills of Ethnography

Wouldn't it be so easy if there were a one-page vocabulary list about culture containing simple definitions for everything students needed to know? But the reality is that culture is so complex, such a list would become quickly useless. Users would realize how much it left out, how limited its perspective was, or even that the list contained biases.

This folklife education lesson guides a group in defining a conceptual term about culture by leading participants (students or educators) through the ethnographic inquiry process. When I do this activity to define “cultural treasures” with new teachers, it allows them to experience discovery learning, an important aspect of folklife education. I do this lesson with a group of teachers, but it is easily adaptable to do with students.

### Lesson Objectives

- To reset participants' expectations away from seeking simple phrase or sentence definitions of cultural phenomenon and toward more expansive definitions that better embrace culture's complexities
- To develop participants' ethnographic inquiry skills

### Lesson

#### *Step 1: It All Starts with a Question*

I use a metaphor to introduce the task the group is going to do together by asking participants to “think of a basket.” A basket can hold many things. We are going to first fill our basket with the incredible range and diversity that make up just one aspect of the human cultural experience. We want our basket to hold one cultural concept with all its variations. Then we are going to describe what goes in our basket to make a basket-shaped definition of the conceptual term: What is a cultural treasure?

NOTE: I prefer to not explain the ethnographic process we use in the lesson until the end of the activity. Inquiry is powerful when participants engage and experience the excitement of discovering. When we reflect on our learning during the wrap up, we then review the steps in the ethnographic process we followed throughout the lesson.

#### *Step 2: Data Collection or Noticing Deeply*

On the board write: Cultural treasures.

Ask participants to work together as a large group to give examples of cultural treasures. Rather than writing down all the specific items participants call out on the board, I rephrase their examples as generalizations.

→ For example, a teacher says, “my grandmother’s necklace.” I would write “family heirloom,” “special family object,” or even “special object/item.” The way I record their contribution helps all participants think more generally while holding in their memories the specific items that fall within the examples of cultural treasures listed on the board.

Participants begin by drawing examples from their lived experiences and knowledge of the world, and we move together to expand the list to include examples that did not readily come to mind.

Although I am ready with prompts to guide the direction of their thinking, it always happens that when one person comes up with an example, that shifts the direction of the board; others can more easily brainstorm in new directions. At minimum, examples of cultural treasures I would like to see on the board include:

- Physically tangible examples - like artifacts, foods, tools, clothing, etc.
- Temporally tangible examples - like stories, songs, dance, celebrations, etc.
- Ways of doing something - like healing, rituals, governing, cooking, making something, etc.
- Those who know how to do something - like grandparents, folk artists, ceremonial leaders, healers, etc.

This board full of examples becomes our data to work with as a group to form the definition we seek for the cultural treasures concept.

### *Step 3: Data Analysis or Making Meaning*

Ask participants to work independently to find the commonalities between examples on the board. They write down the categories they see in their own words (this is data analysis or making meaning out of our data). Their ways of categorizing help them to come up with, or discover for themselves, what all belongs in the basket for the conceptual term of cultural treasures.

We again work together as a large group to create a new list of categories on the board (or a separate piece of flipchart paper). Individuals share their ideas with the whole group. I do not quickly or necessarily accept all commonalities they suggest. The curated discussion I lead in this step includes asking them to explain their thinking and then possibly asking other participants to build on this or offer a more generalized rephrasing. I then check in with the original speaker to see if the rewording others suggest still captures the common bond that the original contributor saw in the data on the board. With their agreement, I will then add the co-created commonality to our new list of categories.

### *Step 4: Re-Presentation or Sharing with Others*

Once we have generated a list of cultural treasures commonalities, I explain that although we found these as common bonds among some examples, not all the examples of cultural treasures we initially came up with were included in every category and there are millions of other examples of cultural treasures we don't even know about that could fit within our categories. Nonetheless, our list of categories, when considered together, all represent the definition of what can be considered as cultural treasures. At this point, I am modeling the process called re-presentation: re-presenting our findings gained during data analysis.

Next, I present a different re-presentation by introducing the canonical knowledge while honoring the learners' knowledge as being equally valued. I begin to describe what the teachers have found out by using other words—by using terminology from the field of folklife education. I discuss that the teachers have found out or discovered that cultural treasures can be:

- Tangible (like things that can be seen, heard, touched, felt, tasted)
- Intangible (like knowledge that is not readily able to be seen, heard, touched, felt, or tasted)
- People who possess their culture's knowledge and practice it

I then reference the [UNESCO protection of intangible culture](#) and several countries' practice of honoring masters of cultural traditions, for example, the [U.S. National Endowment for the Arts Heritage Fellows](#) and [Japan's Living National Treasures programs](#).

#### *Step 5: It Comes Back to More Questions*

I ask participants to voice any questions they now have. Then I ask them some questions to consider: Are they themselves a cultural treasure? Are their students each a cultural treasure—even the youngest kindergarten students? If the teachers don't bring this up, I can point out how all members of a culture, even the young ones, know something about their traditions. I ask teachers to consider what impact it might have if they could help their students know that each of them is a cultural treasure.

#### *Lesson Wrap Up or Assessment*

This is the assessment point when we review what we learned about culture. We reflect upon participants' experience using the ethnographic process to craft definitions of cultural phenomenon. I can go over the steps of ethnography, teaching into any step that teachers have questions about. We can also discuss ideas for guiding students through exploratory inquiry learning.

I typically like to end with a culminating assessment activity. I challenge teachers to craft a vocabulary definition appropriate for their students' developmental level. To help them do this, I may give them a rough draft they can edit—or scrap—as they write their own, such as: Cultural treasures are the people of a cultural group and what they know about their culture and what they do to practice their cultural traditions.

**One final question I ask the teachers in my workshop, and I ask you the reader of this activity, to ponder: Now that we have defined cultural treasures, which way of gaining definitions has greater impact toward increasing your understanding of culture: 1. Just receiving a one-sentence definition of cultural treasures or 2. Discovering the “basket” definition for yourself?**

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#### **URLs**

Infokit 2011: What Is Intangible Cultural Heritage? <https://ich.unesco.org/en/home>

National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowships <https://www.arts.gov/honors/heritage>

Living National Treasure <https://www.japanesewiki.com/title/Living%20National%20Treasure.html>