

Building the Beloved Community

Lesson 5: Culture and Values

3.3.2024

Objectives: Using simulation exercise and mapping cultural preferences, understand ways culture shapes our lives.

Materials: Flipchart, lesson attachments, (optional: someone's smartphone for music).

Time allotments suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ Do you prefer to hang out in groups or one-on-one with others?
 - ▶ Are you typically on time? What do you think of people who are typically late?
 - ▶ Are you a hugger or do you prefer high-fives?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Fun Learning Activity: Brief Encounters with Pandyas and Chispas (20 minutes)

Instructions: Youth will need space to move around for this activity. Explain that youth will adopt the cultures of two unfamiliar groups, interact with each other, and then examine their reactions.

- a) Divide the class into three groups, with two groups about the same size and roughly equal numbers of males and females as possible. A smaller third group of 2-3 youth will act as observers.
- b) Ask observers to watch closely as the two different cultural groups interact: the **Pandyas** and the **Chispas**. Observers move among the participants, but they may not touch or speak to them. Their observations will help the class view the interactions with a wider perspective during debriefing.
- c) Send the Pandya group and Chispa group to opposite corners of the room. Distribute copies of the Pandya cultural norms sheet to the Pandya group, and the Chispa

cultural norms sheet to the Chispa group. Each group should carefully read and discuss together until members are clear about their cultural norms.

- d) Teachers should divide and visit with the Pandyas and Chispas, to help clarify their respective values and *emphasize the importance of staying in character*:
- For Pandyas: Emphasize that male students should be chaperoned at all times. Remind them of their reluctance to initiate contact with people of other cultures.
 - For Chispas: Emphasize the importance of making several brief contacts rather than a few lengthy ones. Define *brief contact* as simply eliciting a non/verbal response from a member of the other culture. Remind them of their friendly, outgoing nature and eagerness to meet people from other cultures.
- e) Announce that these two student groups from imaginary countries have been invited to a party sponsored by an international student-exchange organization. The party organizers hope the two groups will get acquainted and learn about each other. When each group returns to their country and to their respective home schools, they will present reports about the other culture to their classmates. With that in mind, the students are now welcome to mingle, dance, and party.
- f) Start the music chosen by the student-exchange organization (if someone has smartphone) and encourage the two groups to interact. Observers and teachers walk among the groups, looking for behaviors that can be described during debriefing.
- g) After 10 minutes, call time and end the party. Ask groups to return to their opposite corners of the room, and take the next 10 minutes to discuss and prepare a brief report on the other culture.
- The Chispas' report will describe Pandya behavior and values that their schoolmates should expect to encounter if they visit the Pandya culture.
 - The Pandyas' report will create a similar description of what their schoolmates should expect if they visit the Chispa culture.
- h) Ask a Chispa representative to present their group report about the Pandyas to the class. Following their report, provide them with a copy of the Pandya cultural norms and ask a Pandya representative to read aloud Pandya cultural norms. Ask Chispas to comment on how their report compared with the stated Pandya cultural norms.
- i) Similarly, ask a Pandya representative to present their group report about the Chispas to the class. Following their report, provide them with a copy of the Chispa cultural norms and ask a Chispa representative to read aloud Chispa cultural norms. Ask Pandyas to comment on how their report compared with the stated Chispa cultural norms.

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: “*We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.*”

Teacher reads: (from poet and civil rights activist, Audre Lorde)

“*It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences [that divide us].*”

4. **Mapping Cultural Values** (20 minutes)

Teacher introduces: We continue to explore how cultural beliefs and values shape our identities and preferences, including *social* and *emotional* skills that shape relationships and how we learn together. Culture permeates our social life, shaping how each person defines success and quality of life. Because culture is like the “water in which we swim,” we do many things without thinking about why we do them or how we decided to do them.

- Hand out the attached *Mapping Cultural Values* worksheet, asking youth to take a few minutes to individually mark an “X” and place themselves on the continuum.
- Then for each cultural dimension listed, create a continuum across the room and invite youth to place themselves according to their marked preferences.
- Especially when there is wide discrepancy among positions taken, invite youth to share how they came to know their preference and why they feel it accurately describes them.

5. **Group Reflection** (10 minutes):

- How do schools in our culture look at time? If you do not fit into the cultural norm of following “clock time,” what happens?
- How do Minnesotans in general feel about personal space? How do middle school students feel about personal space?
- What do you do if someone approaches you for a hug but you prefer personal space?
- If we did not think to attribute these patterns and preferences to culture, what might we think of someone who does things differently from us? (*Think about the Cultural Iceberg theory and seeing only the tip of the iceberg.*)
- (Tough question) Are cultural differences just different? Or different in ways that are *wonderfully* different? Or *terribly* different? Or *mixture* of all of these? What specific examples come to mind?

6. **Extinguish the chalice**, saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

7. **Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets