**UNIT 7 What is Culture? The Meanings of Culture**

**WARM-UP EXERCISE.** *Read the following quotes and discuss at least two of them in class*. *You can keep notes of your ideas before and after the discussion*.

* “The crucial differences which distinguish human societies and human beings are not biological. They are cultural.” - *Ruth Benedict*
* “Culture is not made up but something that evolves which is human.”

- *Edward T. Hall*

* “Cultural differences should not separate us from each other, but rather cultural diversity brings a collective [strength](https://www.keepinspiring.me/strength-quotes/) that can benefit all of humanity.” - *Robert Alan*
* “No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive.” - *Mahatma Gandhi*
* “The role of culture is that it’s the form through which we as a society reflect on who we are, where we’ve been, where we hope to be.” - *Wendell Pierce*
* “You don’t have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.” - *Ray Bradbury*
* “Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit.” - *Jawaharlal Nehru*

**NOTES.**

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**NAVIGATION. KEY TERMS.** *Study the following words prior to reading the text*.

**culture**: ideas, customs, values and social behaviour, specific to a particular society

**subculture**: the originalculture retained by people who live in a foreign country **culture-specific**: this term refers to the distinctive qualities of a particular culture **enculturation**: assimilation of a culture by an individual

**socialization**: learning to behave in a way that is accepted by the society

**social**: relating to society; in need of companionship and therefore living in a community

**sociable**: affable, engaging in activities with other people, friendly

**society**: community, people (living together in one location); animal group teleological: (in philosophy) - (Gr., τέλος: σκοπός) involving the belief that everything has a purpose or use

**cult**: a religion or religious group regarded as unorthodox

**lifeways**: any of the customs and practices of a culture

**READING Culture**

Culture is an umbrella term variously defined throughout the centuries, from its Latin origins through the Middle Ages to the early 21st century. One definition very frequently referred to is that by anthropologist [E.B. Tylor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Burnett_Tylor), according to whom, culture is "that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Culture is learned and it is often attributed to the people of a specific region or location.

The word ‘culture’ is based on a term used by the [ancient Roman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome) orator [Cicero](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cicero) in his [*Tusculanae Disputationes*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tusculanae_Disputationes), where he wrote of a cultivation of the soul or *"cultura animi,"* using an [agricultural](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture) [metaphor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor) for the development of a philosophical soul, understood [teleologically](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teleology) as the highest possible ideal for human development. By cultivating one’s mind and spirit, one acquires what we call ‘civilization of the soul’. As one anthropologist once said, “The soul of civilization is the civilization of the soul”.

Approximately twenty centuries later, in 1986, philosopher [Edward S. Casey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_S._Casey) wrote, "The very word *culture* meant 'place tilled' in Middle English, and the same word goes back to Latin *colere*, which meant, 'to inhabit, care for, till, worship' and *cultus*, signifying 'a cult, especially a religious one.' To be cultural, to have a culture, is to inhabit a place sufficiently intensely to cultivate it—to be responsible for it, to respond to it, to attend to it caringly."

Across the countries, there are numerous different cultures. Yet, however much cultures differ across the countries, there are certain features that all people have in common, and which anthropologists call ‘cultural universals’: language, arts, laws, the way of cooking, burying the dead, food, tools, etc. Actually, it was in the 1940s, when anthropologist George Murdock first recognized the existence of cultural universals while studying systems of kinship around the world and examined hundreds of different cultures in an attempt to determine what general traits are common to all cultures.

Humans acquire culture through the [learning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning) processes of [enculturation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enculturation) and [socialization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialization), as the diversity of cultures across societies shows. Culture brings together and connects the people of a community, men and women alike, providing them with a sense of having roots and belonging. When a community maintains, shares and transmits such cultural traits as music, religious beliefs, activities, and rituals from generation to generation, these form part of their tradition. [Cultural norm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_norm)sserve as a kind of guide to what is acceptable conduct in a society. They reflect a particular social group’s dress code, patterns of behaviour, the use of language and demeanour in a situation. This way, people know what to expect from others as well as what is expected of them.

Naturally, with the passing of time, with travelling, worldwide communication online and the overall influence of other cultures, a society’s cultural trends can gradually deviate from the norm and start to change to a degree. Once changes creep into the organized system of a community, the first cracks will likely begin to form, dependent on whether part of the population should go along with the new trends while another will not. Such an occurrence may breed inner or outer conflicts, causing a breach of relations among people, unless their perceptions change as well. In the end,whether these changes will in fact be accepted and implemented or not, at least, by the majority, and in how long, is debatable.

Apart from one people’s culture, there may be other groups, forming a ‘subculture’. The term ‘subculture’ may imply culture-specific groups of people, originating from a different location or country, who wish to preserve their own customs, dress code, food, or music, for instance, while they may embrace the host country’s culture little-by-little. On the other hand, ‘subculture’ may be a reference to groups of people, such as the deaf, the blind, hippies, environmental activists, criminal gangs, et al, who share similar lifestyles or belief systems and whose needs and interests differ from those of the dominant culture.

What is significant for a ‘guest-dweller’ is to feel – and to be - *recognized* and *accepted* as a member of society by people in the ‘host country’, rather than an outcast, in order to be able to adapt and to integrate into the new society and the new culture. Especially in a multicultural society, it is very important for both, ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’, to reach an understanding where there might be essential cultural differences, or misunderstandings on account of these differences. When reconciliation of differences is not feasible, particularly, if repeated over and over again for a long time, feelings of rejection may lead to isolation or generation of conflicts, and even violence. Hence, cultural clashes can cause people from different backgrounds to segregate.

Adopting new ways of thinking, acting and behaving may be very difficult to begin with, sometimes. Yet, once respect and understanding prevail, along with the will to communicate, inherent cultural differences can be bridged and people can be united, living in peace.

**TASKS.**

**Task 1a.** *True or False*?

1. The word ‘culture’ has a variety of meanings. T/F
2. Culture does not concern women. T/F
3. Tylor’s definition of ‘culture’ has been widely used by many anthropologists. T/F
4. Cultural norms define the way one should conduct oneself in a society. T/F
5. Cultures never change. T/F
6. ‘Subculture’ refers to groups of people, whose lifestyles, needs and beliefs

are different from those of the dominant culture. T/F

1. All people share some common features throughout the world, regardless of their country of origin. T/F
2. Cultural changes are always welcomed by a society. T/F

**Task 1b.** *Answer the questions* *below*.

If you met someone, whose cultural background was different from yours …

**(a)** How would you react?

**(b)** What would you do to approach that person?

**(c)** Should there be great differences, what would you try to do, to bridge the gap?

**(d)** What would you expect the other person to do, in order to understand you?

**Task 2a.** *Vocabulary*.

Give the meaning of the following words.

1. **behaviour**:
2. **demeanour**:
3. **ritual**:
4. **custom**:
5. **lifeway**:
6. **host country**:
7. **norm**:
8. **enculturation**:
9. **integration**:
10. **teleological**:

**Task 2b.**  *Writing*.

*Situation*: “You are an anthropologist and you wish to study the lifeways of a certain tribe.”

*Preparation*: Study something about the tribe of your choice and the place they are currently living or had once lived in, so that you have some idea what to talk about, based on some evidence.

*Procedure*: Imagine that you strike up a conversation with the chief of the tribe. How would you proceed?

You may wish to keep notes before starting writing down your ideas.

**Task 3.** *Team Work or Individual Work*.

**(a)** Use the internet to find and watch a short video of your choice on what *culture* is. Remember to make a note of the wording and the link you will use, in order to find the desired video. In this way, you will know how to retrieve it next time.

**(b)** Write down the words you wish to remember while listening.

**(c)** Make an oral and/or a written summary of the short video.

**Task 4.** *Crossword puzzle*.

**Across:**

1. The first to discover something is a … (7 letters)
2. An object is also called … (8 letters)
3. The sum of ideas, beliefs, creations and language is … (7 letters)
4. Easily breakable … (7 letters)

**Down:**

1. The way one behaves is called … (US spelling) (8 letters)
2. Music, paintings, photography etc. are different kinds of … (3 letters)

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**Task 5.** *Food for thought.*

Read the following questions. Make a choice you are interested in and discuss it with your fellow students and instructor.

1. How would *you* define culture?
2. Which cultural aspect(s) do you consider the most important? Why?
3. In your experience, whether personal or by hearsay, in which ways do you think that culture is a positive influence?
4. Do you think that culture *itself* may have negative repercussions on individuals or a social group? If yes, please, state what you think and why. You may refer to examples.
5. Do you think that culture might, in fact, at times, be an obstacle and detrimental to a community’s spiritual development? If so, say how and why something like this can happen.
6. Speaking about different matters that touch upon personal experiences or one’s own or another’s culture may require an open mind – and an open heart – on the part of the listener as well as the speaker. In such a discussion, can culture be a prohibitive factor, sometimes? If so, can that change and how?
7. What are some kinds of cultural change?
8. Do changes in culture take time to occur? If so, compare the past with the present days.
9. Cultures usually unite a country’s residents because of the common features they share, e.g., language, traditions, etc. However, things are changing rapidly in our days (21st c.). Do you detect any loss of interest in culture (or some of its aspects) in your country of origin?