**UNIT 8 Cultural Perspectives**

**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*.

* “That is true culture, which helps us to work for the social betterment of all.”

- *Henry Ward Beecher*

* “Real cultural diversity results from the interchange of ideas, products, and influences, not from the insular development of a single national style.” -*Tyler Cowan*
* “Culture makes people understand each other better. And if they understand each other better in their soul, it is easier to overcome the economic and political barriers. But first they have to understand that their neighbor is, in the end, just like them, with the same problems, the same questions.” - *Paolo Coelho*
* “Preservation of one’s own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures.” - *Cesar Chavez*

**NOTES.**

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

**sophistication**: experience, knowledge, worldliness, urbanity

**parlance**: speech, vernacular

**stratify**: distinguish, differentiate

**capital**: available assets, wealth

**encode**: convert into a coded form

**decode**: decipher, work out

**Kulturbrille** (German):culture glasses

**READING Cultural Perspectives**

In the [humanities](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanities), one sense of culture as an attribute of the individual has been the degree to which they have cultivated a particular level of sophistication in [the arts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_arts), sciences, [education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education), or manners. Sometimes, the level of cultural sophistication has also been used to distinguish [civilizations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilization) from less complex societies. Such hierarchical perspectives on culture are also found in [class-based](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_class) distinctions between a [high culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_culture) of the social [elite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elite) and a [low culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_culture), [popular culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_culture), or [folk culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_culture) of the lower classes, distinguished by the stratified access to [cultural capital](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_capital). In common parlance, culture is often used, to refer specifically to the symbolic markers used by [ethnic groups](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnicity) to distinguish themselves visibly from each other, such as [body modification](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_modification), [clothing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clothing) or [jewelry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewelry).

Although anthropologists worldwide refer to Tylor's definition of culture, in the 20th century ‘culture’ emerged as the central and unifying concept of American [anthropology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropology), where it most commonly refers to the universal human capacity to classify and encode human [experiences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experience) [symbolically](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol), and to communicate symbolically encoded experiences socially.

Hence, American *Anthropology* is organized into four fields, each of which plays an important role in research on culture: [Biological anthropology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biological_anthropology), [Linguistic anthropology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistic_anthropology), [Cultural anthropology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_anthropology), and in the United States and Canada, [Archaeology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology). The term *Kulturbrille*, or "culture glasses," coined by German-American anthropologist [Franz Boas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Boas), refers to the "lenses" through which a person sees their own culture. Danish author Martin Lindström asserts that *Kulturbrille*, which allow a person to make sense of the culture they inhabit, "can blind us to things outsiders pick up immediately."

**TASKS**.

**Task 1.** *Read the text above and answer the questions below as befits their context*.

1. What do you understand by:
2. … ‘a particular level of sophistication in the arts’, etc.?
3. … ‘distinguished by the stratified access to cultural capital’?
4. … ‘communicate symbolically encoded experiences socially’?
5. Who was the first to invent the term “Kulturbrille”? What does it mean?
6. What is your viewpoint on Martin Lindström’s remark on “Kulturbrille”?

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

Write down the meaning of the following words/phrases.

1. **in common parlance**:
2. **in the Community parlance**:
3. **stratified access**:
4. **cultural capital:**
5. **marker**:
6. **encoded**:
7. **cultured person**:
8. **cultivated person**:

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

“Imagine that you embark on a bus - or other means of transportation - to go to your destination. An incident occurs between two persons of different cultural backgrounds while on board the bus. Describe your experience. Alternatively, describe a situation where such an event actually occurred.”

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

**(a)** Use the internet to find and watch a short video of your choice on ‘How Culture, Anthropology and/or Archaeology are connected’.

Remember to make a note of the wording as well as the link you will use, in order to find the 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 written summary of the short video.

**Task 4.** *Writing.*

Given the following situations below, write a short composition on one - or both - of them.

*Situation 1*: You meet a new student at your institution, or a new member at work. She/He comes from a foreign country. You can communicate, but you observe small habits you were not aware of until then. For example, people from India oscillate their head, at times, while talking together; others may say ‘hello’ or ‘good-bye’ in a way, which may be different from that of your culture.

Think if you know of such a person. How do you react when someone else is different in certain cultural respects?

*Situation 2*: Have you ever noticed *others* react in some kind of way, if they think *you* are culturally different from them?

**TIP:** Try to be as objective as possible. To do that, become an observer of others and of yourself, depending on what you will talk about, by placing yourself ‘outside’ who you think/ know you are.

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

Read the following questions. Choose at least two or three you are interested in and discuss them with your instructor and fellow students.

1. Typically, cultures unite a country’s residents who share common values and characteristics. Individuals, too, however, may also have their own ‘individual culture’, so to speak, i.e., their own way of thinking and acting. In what way is that important? How does this influence one’s personal life and/or social life?
2. Cultural interchange occurs at a faster pace nowadays through technology.

(a) How does that affect you?

(b) In your opinion, how does that affect people in your society?

1. We might say that the Internet, the T.V. and the social media are a cultural universal, nowadays. How does information (the Internet) influence communities worldwide? (Think of the speed, the news, the Arts, etc.).
2. Do you regard technology as a culture of its own? Discuss.
3. What is ‘cancel culture’ (or, ‘call-out culture’)? Comment on it.
4. How are culture and civilization connected?
5. Can culture / civilization ‘create’ and ‘direct’ people’s minds in certain ways?
6. Culture – Civilization – Education (Gr., *paideia - Παιδεία*) and Human Values. Love – peace – non-violence – justice – trust - faith.

Please, discuss to what extent you think these universal human values may affect one people’s way of living and their standard of living.

How important are they to our progress as a human race?

1. Compassion, cooperation, forgiveness – productivity. To some, these may be just ideals. However, they are inner needs, even though a number of people seem to shun them for different reasons.

If all people in a society felt they were really cared for, listened to and that they mattered (to others, as well as to themselves), could that be a starting point for humanity to see the beginning of a more humane world, able to live in peace?

1. To live in peace, we first have to be at peace with ourselves. To put oneself in someone’s shoes, to cooperate with one another, to not aspire solely to make a living but to actually see who we really are, and what our true nature is, then, perhaps, will it be possible for all cultures to transcend their limitations and reach higher spheres of co-existence. Then, humanity can live as one big family. Comment, please.
2. In an uneasy world, could cultivated people help to make it a ‘better and safer’ place?
3. One should override comparisons, for comparisons may often breed discord and conflicts. What kind of comparisons may hurt young/ older people emotionally in a familial or social context?
4. What makes up the ‘heart’ of one people’s culture, after all? Is it the passive learning, acceptance and implementation of (even dying-out) traditions? In what way(s) does tradition of hundreds of years ago affect younger generations in the new world? How essential is tradition and to what extent?
5. Can traditions and, hence, social structure be updated?
6. Imagine how the world would be, if you were alone on planet Earth. Would there be some form of language to express the human thought?
7. Comment on Ivor Cutler’s poem *Alone*:

If

you are mortar

it is hard

to feel well-disposed

towards

two bricks

you are squashed between

or even

a sense of

community.