Identity & Culture Activity

Essential Questions

› In what ways are my personal identity and culture similar and/or different to others?
› How can the loss of personal identity occur?
› What might happen if my personal identity is taken away?

Knowledge

Culture refers to a people’s way of life – their ideas, values, customs and social behaviour. Culture includes things like the way we do weddings and funerals, the food we like to eat, the way we dress and the music we like. Culture is passed down from generation to generation, and while cultural practices and beliefs change and evolve, many of the basic aspects remain the same.

Personal identity is shaped by our cultural experiences and makes us who we are as individuals.

Removal of, or damage to an element of culture almost always results in a negative impact upon the identity of an individual and/or society.

Find our more [here](#).

Learning outcomes

Students will begin to:

› develop an awareness of personal identity
› understand the structure of a cultural framework
› make connections between their own and others’ cultures
› understand what happens to a person when one or more cultural elements are removed or damaged

Inquiry questions

› What is my identity?
› What is culture? What is my culture?
› How is my own identity and culture similar to others?
› How might the removal of a cultural element impact an individual’s identity?
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Sequence of learning

1. Begin whole class discussion by asking what students already know about identity and culture. You might like to consider an activity such as a ‘bus-stop’ where students record their ideas (prior knowledge) of identity and culture.

2. Direct students to the ‘What is important to me?’ worksheet [Identity Worksheet]. Introduce each of the five elements (columns) one-by-one and have students brainstorm and record their responses on their worksheets along the way.

   **People:** Who are the most important people in your life? Who would you die for?

   **Places:** In what place do you feel you most belong?
   Where do you feel safe? Where do you feel a sense of peace or connection?

   **Events:** How do you celebrate special events in your family or community?
   What kinds of special events do you attend or celebrate?

   **Communication:** In what ways do you communicate with others most commonly?

   **Values/Rules:** What are the most important values and rules that you live by?
   What laws do we abide by in our communities?

3. Facilitate a whole class discussion eliciting and developing rich responses for each element.

4. Show students the ‘5 Stones Cultural Framework’ [Cultural Framework]. Discuss the significance and importance of each element of culture.

   **Kinship/Family:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups have strong family values that extend well beyond the loyalties within a nuclear family. For example, people often use kinship terms that give every member of a society a ‘skin’ name so that everyone can relate to others as their ‘mother’, ‘grandfather’, ‘sister’, ‘nephew’, and so on, regardless of whether people belong to their immediate family or not.

   **Land:** Traditional groups are strongly connected to particular lands and waters, which provide the foundations of identity. Within the boundaries of this traditional country there will also be particular sites that have been rendered sacred by events in the ancestral past. ‘Country’ in this particular Aboriginal sense includes the animals and plants, along with lands and waters, all of which must be cared for by their traditional owners.
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**Law:** Traditional law applies across every area of life, governing relationships, ceremony, seasons of the year, flora and fauna, as well as punishments when the law is breached. Caring for country and caring for family are all covered by the law, and everything flourishes when the law is properly kept.

**Language:** In traditional societies, languages were linked directly to their country, and there was no common language across the hundreds of the First Nations. People might have had some understanding of their neighbours’ languages, but generally it was a person’s own mother tongue that expressed identity within their own country. In particular, caring for country through ceremony required the maintenance of the local language.

**Ceremony:** There are many different kinds of ceremonies in traditional culture, relating for example to gender-specific initiations, caring for country through the performance of sacred songs and practices, communal celebration, protection of sacred things in secret rites, and reconciliation ceremonies. These activities bind people together in a range of different ways, reinforcing the networks of responsibility within the community. When ceremonies are not carefully maintained, the country suffers and its people become disorientated.” (Paulson & Brett, 2013).

5. Ask students to make connections between their own identity (refer back to the ‘What is Important to me?’ worksheet) and that of the ‘5 Stones Cultural Framework’. Students record the cultural framework elements in the ‘stones’ at the bottom of their ‘What is important to me?’ worksheets (e.g. people = kinship; places = land; events = ceremony; communication = language; values/rules = law). Students could compare their own identity with another student’s using a Venn diagram, highlighting similarities and differences.

**For older students:** view Losing Home - Iris’ story

**For younger students:** lead an appropriate conversation about the loss of something important to them (e.g. pet, friend or family member, a special toy etc.). Elicit and discuss students’ feeling and emotions. Alternatively, read ‘Tell Me Why’ and discuss concepts of identity, family, differences and belonging.

6. Facilitate whole class discussion/reflection about the significance of identity and what might happen if an element of identity (or in Iris’s case – all of them at once) was taken away. Direct a thoughtful discussion about how students might feel if part of their identity or culture was removed or damaged.
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Additional learning activities

‘Bus stop’ activity to compare prior knowledge before the lesson with new learnings after the lesson.

Students cut their completed ‘What is important to me?’ sheet into 5 individual column pieces. One student (or teacher) is nominated to go to each student and remove one or more elements. Students then reflect on their feelings (discussion/writing/drawing) about having those things taken away from them. Possible concepts for discussion: equality, inequality, fairness, power, privilege, empathy, choice, perspective.

Supporting resources including teacher notes

For younger students:
Tell Me Why, Robyn Templeton & Sarah Jackson
https://www.magabala.com/tell-me-why.html

For older students:
Stolen Girl, Trina Saffioti
https://www.magabala.com/media/wysiwyg/Teacher_Notes/Stolen_Girl_Teacher_Notes.pdf