

Culture vs. Community: One and the Same?

A FLORIDA GEOGRAPHY AWARENESS WEEK UNIT

Introduction

Many of us use the terms culture and community interchangeably. We think of them as one and the same, but are they?

If you think they are different, you are right. Anthropologists spend a lot of time thinking about culture and describing the cultures of people around the world. Culture is learned. It is all the patterns of behavior and belief that we absorb from the moment we are born as members of a human family. Food preferences, sleeping arrangements, language, dress style, art, and religious beliefs are all part of culture. We have little choice when it comes to culture. We have already absorbed much of our culture before we even enter school, but what about community?

A community is a group of people living in the same locality and under the same government. Everyone in a community has to be aware of and follow certain rules. For example in the United States, everyone has to drive on the right hand side of the road even if you or your family is from a Britain where people drive on the left hand side of the road.

As adults we often choose the community in which we live for a variety of reasons. Perhaps it's close to where we work or go to school. Maybe we have friends or family there. Perhaps the cost of housing is affordable or the community is near a place we enjoy such as a lake or the beach. The members of a community do not necessarily share the same culture. As a matter of fact today many communities are multicultural, that is they are composed of people who identify with different cultures or ethnic groups. People may speak different languages, belong to different religions, prefer different types of food, and enjoy different leisure activities.

Today we may all live in the same community but we all have roots elsewhere. Think about your own community:

1. Is it a "Melting Pot" in which people have assimilated to a general U.S. culture and forgotten their origins?

2. Is it a “Salad Bowl” in which people mix and complement one another but maintain their distinct identities?

3. Or is it more of a “Kaleidoscope” in which both immigrants and society change over time?

4. Would you consider food, music, religion, or decorative objects part of our community or your culture? Can you think of examples that are both?

Look around you house, list and describe 5 things that you think represent your culture. These items might be food, items of clothing, music, religious items, furniture, art, or decorative objects.

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Your newspaper is a good source of information on your community and the cultural backgrounds of its members.

1. What stories in today’s newspaper deal mainly with community issues? Pick one and briefly describe it here:

- Where did the story take place?

- Describe the key players in the story?

2. What stories in today's paper deal mainly with cultural issues? Pick one and briefly describe it here:

- Where did the story take place?

- Describe the key players in the story?

3. From looking through the newspaper, do you think your community is more of a "Melting Pot," a "Salad Bowl," or a "Kaleidoscope"? Support your answer:

