

Popular vs. Folk Culture

A culture is the set of customs, languages, and other artifacts/ideas that a group has in common. What makes culture difficult to determine or define is that within any group there are some that want to hold on to the old ways (usually elders in the group), and the outliers (usually younger) that want change. Each group's ways are constantly being evaluated by the group to determine maybe the most important aspect of culture: what should we keep versus what should we change?

As you can see this is tricky. The line between these two groups is not stable, as culture tends to adapt to the environmental and social conditions. So geographers developed the concepts of folk (local) culture, and popular culture. Again these concepts aren't completely stable or separate, but aid in the understanding of phenomenon. What makes it even more confusing is that popular culture, if kept over a long period of time, becomes folk culture. Instead of the murkiness by defining culture, let's view the table below.

Folk (local) culture	Popular culture
homogeneous, tends to be more stable, resistance to change	heterogeneous, constantly changing
often linked to specific locations	not as tied to location
often no origin or originator, lasts a long time	known creator, lasts for short periods of time
usually supports/suppresses ideas within the culture	generates money and/or power, commercial
usually range from rural to isolated, slow to migrate	urban, quickly migrates place to place
Contagious diffusion, if it migrates it's by relocation diffusion and then spreads causing pockets (splotches) on map	Hierarchical diffusion, moves rapidly city to city

Have students think of phrases/sentences that reflect each type of culture. (In my day vs. NEW! Improved!)

- students give out phrase, other students determine if popular or folk
 - this can lead to disagreements and discussion, let it
- have one student record who is most likely saying each phrase/sentence
 - are there any correlations to age?

So why music?

Music is not only an excellent way to show the differences between the types of culture, it shows some of the murkiness in defining customs within a group.

Ask students:

How would you define the type of music you listen to and would it fall into which of the following categories?

- folk (gospel, alma mater, anthems)
- popular (rock, rap, hip-hop)

Many would call country a type of folk music.

How does that fit into our characteristics?

Some questions to check comprehension:

Name a song with no known origin/originator. (**Ring Around a Rosy**)

Mozart or Beethoven would be considered which category (folk or popular) of music?

The top 40 (best selling) songs would be considered which category (folk or popular) of music?

Would the Beatles (rock), Hank Williams (country), or (rap) be considered folk music today?
explain why or why not

What of your music will last the “test of time,” in other words become part of folk music/culture.

What groups/songs that were popular for you and your friends has already disappeared, you baby sharks (hopefully you’re over that)?

Follow this link:

<https://www.floridamemory.com/discover/audio/playlists/playlist5.php>
or go to Florida Memory to find some music to play for the students

You can use this music for students when they are working on various aspects of this lesson.



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