

Overview:

This lesson plan will challenge participants to recognize the importance of understanding cultural behaviors from an insider's perspective. They will read the essay "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight" and then discuss it in terms of the methods Geertz used to write the essay, how it portrays the Balinese society, and the differences between insider and outsider interpretations in anthropological writing.

Background and Information:

"Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight" is anthropologist Clifford Geertz's most famous essay (see citation below). Geertz and his wife stayed in a Balinese village and observed the controversial tradition of cockfighting. Geertz writes about this tradition and its significance in the Balinese society.

Note: The facilitator should assign the essay for pre-reading since it is a longer article. The duration of this activity does not include the time it takes to read the essay.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Grasp the dangers of misunderstanding unfamiliar cultural practices along with the value of understanding cultural behaviors from an emic or insider's perspective.
2. Articulate methods of coming to an emic interpretation.

Time:

45 minutes

Group Size:

Entire group

Materials:

PDF or printed copies of the article, discussion questions (in [Downloads](#)).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness:

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Openness:

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

Curiosity:

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.
- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

Discussion Questions:

- How did you feel as you were reading this article?
- Was there anything from the article that surprised you?
- What were your impressions of the Balinese and their practice of cockfighting?
- To write this article, Geertz employed a method called thick description, which means to not only describe the physical behaviors and surroundings but also the interpretations of the individuals who are immersed in the environment and perform the behaviors (the "insiders").
 - What are some specific examples of thick description in the reading?
 - What function do those descriptions serve?
 - What do you learn from those descriptions?
 - Why is it important to include insiders' perspectives? What would we have lost if we only had Geertz's interpretations?
- What is the significance of cockfighting in the Balinese culture? What does it reveal about the society?
- Geertz chooses to write about cockfighting because he believes that it helps to provide an interpretation of the Balinese society. What rituals or traditions from your own culture might serve a similar purpose? What would they represent or communicate about your culture?

Note: The facilitator might choose to structure this last question as a writing assignment so that students have time to brainstorm and fully form their ideas/thoughts.

Optional questions:

As readers, we rely on Geertz to choose what he describes, the people he interviews, the quotes he uses, how he translates what he hears, etc. As a result, we necessarily get a filtered perspective — Geertz's interpretation of Balinese cockfighting. Imagine that someone you consider to be an outsider observes and writes about a specific ritual or tradition from your culture that was just discussed:

- How would it feel trying to explain the ritual or tradition to the outsider?
- What aspects of that ritual or tradition might the outsider emphasize that would lead to a very different understanding of the ritual or tradition than you have? What might that understanding be?
- How would it feel to hear the outsider's understanding?
- What might you learn?
- What are some limits and advantages to "insider" and "outsider" perspectives?