

The Hidden Ways in Which Cultures Differ

Exploring the Concept of Culture

Recognizing the Hidden Ways in which Culture Differ

Goal:

- Using the iceberg analogy, teach students to look at the hidden dimensions when comparing different cultures.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Become aware of the hidden parts of our culture
- Learn to identify the connection between hidden and visible parts of a culture

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Iceberg handout (one for each student), Board or flipchart

Common Core Standards:

CCSS ELA-LITERACY 9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

AFS Educational Goals:

Cultural Realm:

- Understand the concepts of “Culture” and intercultural adaptation
- Cultural knowledge and awareness: To become more aware of their own culture and recognize its influence on their behavior

Activity:

- Pass the Iceberg handout to every student.

- Draw two icebergs on the board next to each other.
- Start with the questions at the bottom of the iceberg and ask students to answer those questions based on their experience as Americans.
- Write each answer on the board inside the first iceberg – if there are contrasting answers, at the end of class use them to show students the difference between the concept of culture and subculture.
- Next move to the questions at the top of the iceberg and write down the student's answers, always inside the same iceberg.
- Now identify another culture your class is familiar with (if you have an international student, ask them to answer the questions based on their experience with that culture).
- Start asking the same questions, following the same order as before
- Write the answers in the second iceberg.
- Now ask your students to describe how the answers they gave for the hidden part of the iceberg for the American culture manifest themselves. For example, in the American culture people tend to emphasize competition. This shows in school, where students are asked to excel.
- Now do the same for the other culture.
- Debrief with your class and remind your students how what is visible in a culture (food, traditions, and ways of living) is often the result of the hidden dimensions of their iceberg.
- Take away message: each student should walk away from this exercise having learned that what makes people's habits look different has much deeper roots than we can explain at a superficial level.
- EXTRA: ask your students to look for similarities in the two cultures and connect the dimensions they refer to so that one element of the first iceberg is connected to another one in the other iceberg.
- Use these similarities to help students see how often cultures have a lot in common.