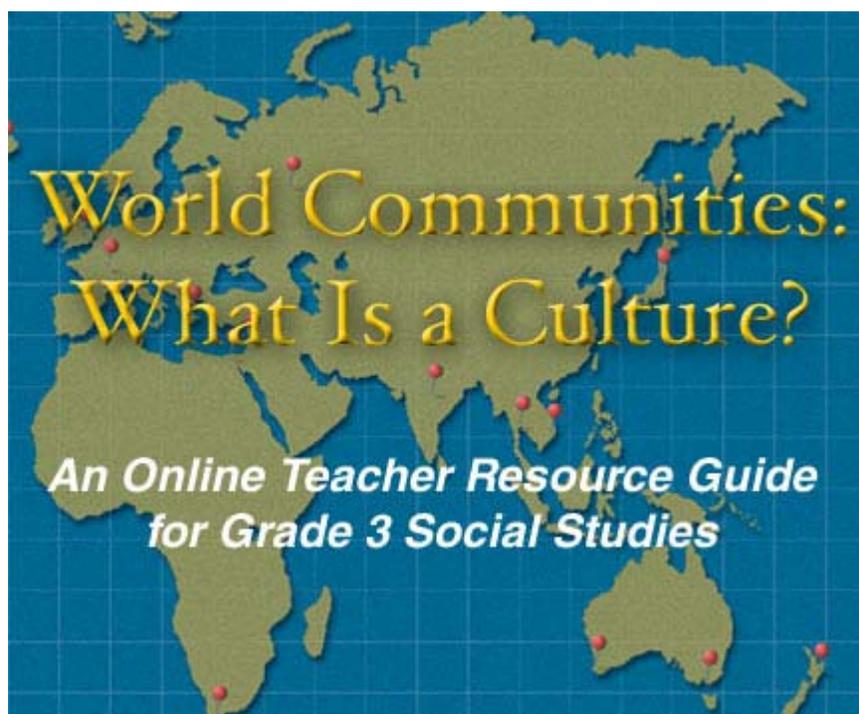




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Foreword

World Communities: What Is a Culture? is an online resource guide which primarily supports instruction of the material in the New York State grade 3 social studies core curriculum, *Communities Around the World - Learning About People and Places*. It can also provide content background and instructional strategies for teachers of the grade 6 and the global history and geography core curricula. This guide represents a new type of resource from the State Education Department, as it provides content background in social studies for elementary school teachers. The guide also provides curriculum planning tips and activities to help teachers select world communities for study in the grade 3 classroom. It is part of the New York State Education Department's social studies toolkit available online.

World Communities: What Is a Culture? is the result of the second Social Studies Summit, which was held at the State Education Department in Albany, New York, on April 29-30, 2004. The two-day summit, cosponsored by the New York State Council for the Social Studies (NYSCSS) and the New York State Supervisory Association (NYS4A), produced [13 specific recommendations](#) in the areas of curriculum, assessment, and professional development.

Recommendation #2 stated: "That a committee be established by SED and social studies professional organizations for the purpose of creating an online resource guide (accessible through [VLS](#)) clarifying how core content understandings, important concepts and social science skills should be emphasized in the third grade. This resource should include a template on how to study diverse world communities." This online resource is a direct result of that recommendation.





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About This Guide

World Communities: What Is a Culture? is an online resource guide designed for teachers, to expand their understanding of world communities and cultures from the perspective of two branches of social science: anthropology and geography. It also provides teachers of the New York State grade 3 social studies core curriculum with specific guidelines for selecting world communities for classroom study.

Two papers provide content background for teachers in understanding culture from multiple perspectives. As such, these papers are not intended for classroom use.

The first paper, [What Is a Culture?](#), is an anthropological approach to understanding culture and was written by Dr. Nancy Jervis, vice president and director of education at the China Institute, New York City.

The second paper, [Culture: A Geographical Perspective](#), is a geographical approach to understanding culture and was written by Dr. Charles Heatwole, professor of geography at Hunter College, New York City.

A "crosswalk" connects each paper to the applicable units and understandings of the grade 3 social studies core curriculum. These connected units and understandings provide the framework for planning instruction based on the information and suggestions found in the papers. The page numbers for the applicable units and understandings are from the SED online publication, [Social Studies Instructional Strategies & Resources: Prekindergarten Through Grade 6](#). The papers are also connected to specific key ideas in all five New York State learning standards for social studies.

[How to Select World Communities](#) lists specific factors to consider and includes a sample checklist to use when planning curriculum for world communities in the grade 3 classroom. These suggestions were gleaned from the papers' authors, as well as teachers and supervisors from across New York State. Also included in the publication are a template for planning units of study, graphic organizers on understanding geography and anthropology in relation to culture, and brief recommendations of print and online resources for teachers and students.

A [glossary](#) defines the major terms found throughout the two papers. These terms are linked directly from the papers to the glossary.

This guide will undergo periodic updates. A future section will feature lesson plans and instructional strategies developed by grade 3 teachers across New York State on the basis of their use of this resource. To submit learning experiences for this section, please visit our Call for Content ([html version](#) / [pdf version](#)). This guide is not intended for students, although some resources on books and Web sites for both teachers and students are included.

In the grade 3 social studies program, students study about communities throughout the world. The five social studies standards form the basis for this investigation as students learn about the

social, political, geographic, economic, and historic characteristics of different world communities. Students learn about communities that reflect the diversity of the world's peoples and cultures. They study Western and non-Western examples from a variety of geographic areas. Students also begin to learn about historic chronology by placing important events on timelines. Students locate world communities and learn how different communities meet their basic needs and wants. Students begin to compare the roles of citizenship and the kinds of governments found in various world communities. (Taken from [Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum](#) p.25.)



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What Is a Culture?

Nancy Jervis, Ph.D.
China Institute

[The Great Debate](#) | [Cultural Transmission](#) | [Cultural Formation](#)
[Culture vs. Civilization](#) | [Race and Culture](#) | [Religion, Ethnicity, and Culture](#)
[Definitions of Culture](#) | [The Multicultural Classroom](#)

THE GREAT DEBATE

There is a great debate in social science about what it is that shapes us both as individuals and as members of society. With regard to individuals, this debate is about "[nature versus nurture](#)," meaning whether it is our inherited genetic predisposition ("nature") or what we learn as we grow up ("nurture") that predominantly shapes us and our differences as individuals. Similarly, [anthropologists](#) ask how much of our behavior as a group is pre-determined by geography, culture, or history. Studies increasingly indicate what most of us know from common sense: these differences between us as individuals and those between groups of people can be explained by no single factor alone, but by the complex interaction between them.

Great differences, as well as startling similarities, can be seen when comparing world cultures. People around the globe are similar in their essential humanity: we communicate with each other, we sustain ourselves with food, and when we sleep we often dream. Yet we speak different languages, eat different foods, and dream different dreams. These are what we call cultural differences. What causes them is not always obvious to the ordinary person.

I remember being on a train many years ago, before many Westerners traveled in China, riding through Gansu Province in western China with an Australian Chinese friend who spoke no Chinese. I was often overheard translating for her. People on the train, mostly ethnic Han and Hui (Chinese Moslems), were as startled to see a Chinese face without the language that usually accompanies it, as they were to see my Caucasian face speaking Chinese. One man in particular kept insisting that there must be a Chinese relative on my father's side of the family (sic); otherwise, how could I have learned the language? The assumption was that one's ability to speak a particular language (like an individual's physical characteristics) is genetically and not culturally transmitted...and that genetics somehow mirrors social organization (i.e., everything is transmitted through the male's family line).

Similarly, as an English teacher that same year, in class with my students (all of whom were male teachers of English from outlying provinces), I was told authoritatively by one of my students that although he did not doubt my learning, I was a woman, and somewhere in America there must be a man who was more knowledgeable than I. "Everyone," he went on to say, "knows that, worldwide, men as a group are smarter than women." He pointed to the fact that men in every culture held more powerful positions than women as proof. What he was not aware of was how his Confucian ideas about gender and the superiority of males influenced the way he thought about men's and women's roles.

Each of these incidents illustrates the fact that, for many people, culture is so internalized that we take it as a given - as something we are born with. But both language and gender categories are elements of culture and, as such, are transmitted from generation to generation. As children, we are taught language, gender roles, how to behave, what to believe (religion), what foods taste good, and so on. If, as an infant, you or I had been transported to another culture to be raised in that culture, that culture would be ours today, rather than the American one we share.

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

What exactly does culture mean? Is it something material you can touch? Or is it something immaterial, such as values and beliefs? Or is it our customs and traditions, our festivals and celebrations? While anthropologists have vacillated between material and nonmaterial definitions of [culture](#), today most would agree with a more inclusive definition of culture: the thoughts, behaviors, languages, customs, the things we produce and the methods we use to produce them. It is this, the human ability to create and transmit culture, that differentiates us as humans from the rest of the animal world.

The essential feature of culture, that it is learned and transmitted from one generation to the next, rests on the human capacity to think [symbolically](#). Language, perhaps the most important feature, is a symbolic form of communication. The word table, for example, is nothing other than a symbol for the actual thing, a table. Language is a form of communication. Without language, culture could not be transmitted, people could not learn from one another across generations, and there would be no cultural continuity.

Simply because culture is transmitted through symbols whose meanings remain more or less constant doesn't mean that cultures are static and don't change. On the contrary, cultures are never truly static. Which of us does not remember a grandparent comparing life today with the one s/he grew up in? The changes that took place between his/her lifetime and ours represent subtle cultural shifts in values, the things we use, and the way we use language.

What causes [cultural change](#)? Outside influences, through a process known as [cultural diffusion](#), may stimulate cultural change. An example of this is commercial or [cross-cultural contacts](#) like the Silk Road, which brought silk to the West and Buddhism into China. Inventions and technological developments from within a society, such as the steam engine or the automobile, can also have an impact on culture. "Car culture," for example, is a term describing people's dependence on the automobile. This dependence gave birth to the concept of "fast-food restaurants" such as McDonald's, where people get inexpensive hot food delivered to eat on the go. "Fast-food restaurants" have spread through cultural diffusion to many parts of the world.

CULTURAL FORMATION

How do cultures form in the first place? Groups of people living in specific ecological niches interacted with their [environments](#) over long periods of time. Given a certain degree of isolation, they developed adaptations to their environment, methods of survival, and ways of [organizing themselves socially](#), and came to share beliefs and symbols that explained their world. They also developed a language they used to communicate with each other that enabled them to transmit learning to future generations.

Over time, increasing communication between early human groups broke down geographic isolation. Gradually, through cultural diffusion, linkages were formed and many different specific cultures evolved into larger groupings called culture areas - regions with shared cultural traits. An example of a [culture area](#) is sub-Saharan Africa. While there are many different tribal groups speaking many different languages, and today many nation-states, there are features such as social structures that most of the tribes share. Another example is East Asia: China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. While speaking different languages and having very differently organized societies, these four nation-states, each with its own specific culture, share such [features](#) as patriarchal social organization, Confucian values, the Buddhist religion, an emphasis on the family, and ancient Chinese as the classical language. Other culture areas include Latin America, northern Europe, southern Europe, South Asia, etc.

CULTURE VS. CIVILIZATION

Also, over time, a culture may evolve into what is termed a [civilization](#). A civilization is generally understood as a more advanced form of organized life: civilizations usually have more complex forms of social, political, military, and religious life. Writing and the use of metals are also features of some civilizations.

Examples of great civilizations are Egyptian, Mughal, and Shang Dynasty China. The last of these is often cited as the oldest continuous civilization in the world (Egyptian civilization is older, but it disappeared and is not continuous with Egyptian society today.) But there is no absolute threshold after which we can firmly state that a culture has evolved into a civilization. Nor do all cultures necessarily become civilizations. We need to be mindful of the fact that the term civilization is often a loaded one, used to contrast so-called civilized societies with so-called primitive ones. While these adjectives (civilized, primitive) may refer to the level of complexity of a society, they do not define the quality of life, the values, or the mores of the societies they describe.

RACE AND CULTURE

[Race](#) is an often misunderstood concept. Racial features are genetic and inherited. Features such as skin, hair, and eye color, susceptibility to specific diseases, and some other factors are aspects of race. But given the overall trend toward increasing globalization and the fact that peoples are no longer isolated from each other but increasingly intermarry and thereby share their gene pools, "races" that may have once been distinguishable are less so today. For these reasons, many social scientists now doubt whether race is a useful concept at all.

However, how we view race, how we categorize people, and whether we value or devalue specific racial features, are a part of culture. An example of how value is ascribed to race is the way people of different skin colors in Brazil or New Orleans were given different social standing in the community and until relatively recently were encouraged not to intermarry.

RELIGION, ETHNICITY, AND CULTURE

Religion, ethnicity, and culture are among the most difficult concepts to disentangle. The United States is home to many different [ethnic groups](#), perhaps more than are in any other nation. This is due in part to our history as a nation. We are a land of immigrants - a new country built upon immigration. Immigrants bring with them the special features of their cultures of origin and strive to maintain culture ties to their places of origin while at the same time becoming American. We speak of Italian-

American, Irish-American, and Jewish-American cultures, for example. These ethnic groups form sub-cultures within the (larger) American culture.

Religion, however, is not the same as culture or ethnicity; it can overlap either. Technically, religion is defined as a set of beliefs. But while some religions confine themselves to the realm of ideas or beliefs, other religions extend into the realm of behavior and prohibit or mandate certain actions as well. The Ten Commandments identify behaviors prohibited by the Judeo-Christian religions. For Orthodox Jews, kosher rules are an example of behavior that is required. For Moslems, eating during daylight during Ramadan is prohibited behavior.

All religions that accept or desire converts have had to adapt themselves to the cultures where they spread or they would not have been accepted. Catholicism's spread into South America was facilitated by its willingness to incorporate native religious practices into its canons there, as with the many feasts for saints that are particular to the region. Similarly, as Islam spread in Asia and Africa, it incorporated specific [cultural practices](#) peculiar to the areas it reached. For example, Moslem women in sub-Saharan Africa do not wear veils, while those in rural Afghanistan cover themselves with the burka. Female circumcision is practiced in Moslem sub-Saharan Africa, but not anywhere else in the Islamic world. This adaptability of religion to local cultures sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish culture from religion - but they are not the same.

DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE

Anthropologists have been discussing and debating definitions of culture since the origin of the discipline in the 19th century. In 1952 two prominent American anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, published an entire volume cataloging different definitions of culture. A useful summary of that discussion, grouping their 160 different definitions into eight categories, is provided by John Bodley in his *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States and the Global System* (1994). Bodley goes on to distill what is useful in these categories and to define culture in a useful way. Culture, he suggests, is made up of at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce. The problem with defining culture as shared values and beliefs, as some anthropologists do, is that there can be a vast difference between what people think they ought to do (value) and what they actually do (behavior). Moreover, we get much of our evidence for what people do from what people make - that is, from material things (what archaeologists study). So we really need to include all three components in a definition of culture.

Besides these components, culture has several properties: to quote Bodley, it is "shared, learned, symbolic, transmitted cross-generational - as discussed above - adaptive, and integrated." For example, there is common agreement in a culture on what things mean. Members of a culture share specific symbolic meanings, including (but not limited to) language. In America, for example, brides wear white as a symbol of purity. In China, red is worn by a bride as a celebratory or "happy" color, while white is the color of mourning. Thus colors take on symbolic meaning, as do religious symbols (icons), art, etc. All culture is learned; none is inherited. And it is passed on from one generation to the next, which is why schools and families are so important in cultural transmission.

Culture is furthermore adaptive, which harkens back to how cultures - and subcultures - are formed. Modes of behavior, social institutions, and technologies all foster our adaptation to the particular niche of the ecological world we inhabit. That is what is meant by adaptive: if you live in a cold climate, you will learn to make shelter and clothing that keep you warm. If you are part of an island culture, most likely your diet will consist of fish and the local technology will include boat making and the making

of fishing gear. Culture is also integrated; that is, each aspect of a culture is consonant with every other. If not, there is [cultural dissonance](#) that risks a tearing apart. We speak of, in Clifford Geertz's terms, a "web of culture." It is like a woven cloth, a fabric.

THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

In our modern world, however, there is much cultural dissonance. We have only to think of how complicated things become in a nation of immigrants such as ours. We are all Americans, and partake of American culture, yet in many ways we do not fit Bodley's description: we do not all speak the same language or eat the same foods. What we do have in common, on the other hand, besides our essential humanity, is our acknowledgment and acceptance of difference. In other words, we share our [diversity](#) and that has become a hallmark of our culture.

This diversity extends into today's classrooms. In teaching about culture, "other" cultures are not perhaps so far removed from our daily lives as perhaps before. Teachers will increasingly need to find ways of talking about culture that take into account the [multicultural](#) classroom or community in which they teach. This requires a different kind of sensitivity, different tools, and different approaches. The shrinking globe means that we have to find ways of discussing differences that include the "different" in the discussion. Talking about Chinese culture with children from China in the classroom is different from talking about it in the context of reading a popular children's story such as "The Five Chinese Brothers."

In *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World: Multicultural Education for Young Children*, Patricia Ramsey specifically addresses these issues. She points out how teachers can sometimes use the different cultural elements found in their classrooms as starting points to discuss the basic concepts of culture: language, intergenerational transmission, cultural artifacts, etc. She further draws attention to the discontinuities experienced by recent immigrants from other cultures, both linguistic and behavioral. The unconscious reactions of peers and teachers to unfamiliar behaviors of children in the classroom can also be stressful. Teachers and peers, she says, often misinterpret and underestimate immigrant children's behaviors at school.

Culture, here understood as the totality of what a group of people think, how they behave, and what they produce that is passed on to future generations, is what binds us together as human beings but also separates us into our different communities. In today's world, understanding both our similarities and our diversity becomes increasingly important. Through an understanding and appreciation of cultural difference, children will be better prepared to live in an ever-shrinking global community. And increasingly, our classrooms are becoming miniature models of the global community itself.





WHAT IS A CULTURE?

Nancy Jervis, Ph.D.

Crosswalk to NYS Social Studies Learning Standards

This crosswalk connects Dr. Jervis's paper to the social studies learning standards and key ideas. The paper is not tied directly to the performance indicators (PIs) of the learning standards because the performance indicators are written at either the elementary, intermediate, or commencement level. This paper is written as professional development content background for third-grade teachers and, as such, is written at a graduate level. All of the standards are addressed, not all of the key ideas are. Nor are the learning standards or key ideas addressed to the same degree or in the same order. (Note: page numbers are taken from [Learning Standards For Social Studies](#).)

NYS Social Studies Standard	Key Ideas
Standard 2 - World History	<p>Key Idea 1: The study of world history requires an understanding of world cultures and civilizations, including an analysis of important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. This study also examines the human condition and the connections and interactions of people across time and space and the ways different people view the same event or issue from a variety of perspectives. (p. 8)</p> <p>Key Idea 3: Study of the major social, political, cultural, and religious developments in world history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups. (p. 9)</p> <p>Key Idea 4: The skills of historical analysis include the ability to investigate differing and competing interpretations of the theories of history, hypothesize about why interpretations change over time, explain the importance of historical evidence, and understand the concepts of change and continuity over time. (p. 9)</p>
Standard 3 – Geography	<p>Key Idea 1: Geography can be divided into six essential elements which can be used to analyze important historic, geographic, economic, and environmental questions and issues. These six elements include: the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical settings (including natural</p>

<p>Standard 3 – Geography (continued)</p>	<p>resources), human systems, environment and society, and the use of geography. (p.24)</p> <p>Key Idea 2: Geography requires the development and application of the skills of asking and answering geographic questions; analyzing theories of geography; and acquiring, organizing, and analyzing geographic information. (p.14)</p>
<p>Standard 4 - Economics</p>	<p>Key Idea 1: The study of economics requires an understanding of major economic concepts and systems, the principles of economic decision making, and the interdependence of economies and economic systems throughout the world. (p.18)</p>
<p>Standard 5 - Civics, Citizenship, and Government</p>	<p>Key Ideas 1: The study of civics, citizenship, and government involves learning about political systems; the purposes of government and civic life; and the differing assumptions held by people across time and place regarding power, authority, governance, and law. (p. 24)</p> <p>Key Idea 4: The study of civics and citizenship requires the ability to probe ideas and assumptions, ask and answer analytical questions, take a skeptical attitude toward questionable arguments, evaluate evidence, formulate rational conclusions, and develop and refine participatory skills. (p. 25)</p>
<p>Standard 1- History of the United States and New York</p>	<p>Key idea 1: The study of New York State and United States history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices, and traditions. (p. 2)</p> <p>Key Idea 2: Important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from New York State and United States history illustrate the connections and interactions of people and events across time and from a variety of perspectives. (p. 2)</p>





WHAT IS A CULTURE?

Nancy Jervis, Ph.D.

Crosswalk to Grade 3 Content Understandings

This crosswalk identifies grade 3 content understandings that are addressed in Dr. Jervis's paper. The degree to which the content understandings are explored varies. Some are developed in considerable depth, while others are not addressed at all. Students must have access to instructional opportunities which address each of the grade 3 content understandings. [Social Studies Instructional Strategies & Resources: Prekindergarten Through Grade 6](#) is part of the social studies toolkit which provides teachers guidance in planning for these opportunities. (Note: page numbers are taken from this publication.)

Cultures and civilizations (pp. 130-131)

What is a culture? What is a civilization?

How and why do cultures change?

Where do people settle and live? Why?

People in world communities exchange elements of their cultures.

People in world communities use legends, folktales, oral histories, biographies, autobiographies, and historical narratives to transmit values, ideas, beliefs, and traditions.

Communities around the world (pp. 132-135)

People of similar and different cultural groups often live together in world communities.

World communities have social, political, economic, and cultural similarities and differences.

World communities change over time.

Beliefs, customs, and traditions in world communities are learned from others and may differ from place to place.

World communities are made up of different events, people, problems, and ideas.

Physical, human, and cultural characteristics of world communities (pp. 138-140)

The causes and effects of human migration vary in different world regions.

The physical, human, and cultural characteristics of different regions and people throughout the world are different.

Interactions between economic activities and geographic factors differ in world communities.

The factors that influence human settlements differ in world communities.

People depending on and modifying their physical environments (pp. 141-142)

Lifestyles in world communities are influenced by environmental and geographic factors.

Challenge of meeting wants and needs in world communities (pp. 143-144)

Human needs and wants differ from place to place.

People in world communities use human, capital, and natural resources.

Symbols of citizenship in world communities (pp. 147-148)

People in world communities celebrate various holidays and festivals.

People in world communities use monuments and memorials to represent symbols of their nations.

People making rules and changing laws (pp. 149-150)

People in world communities may have conflicts over rules, rights, and responsibilities.

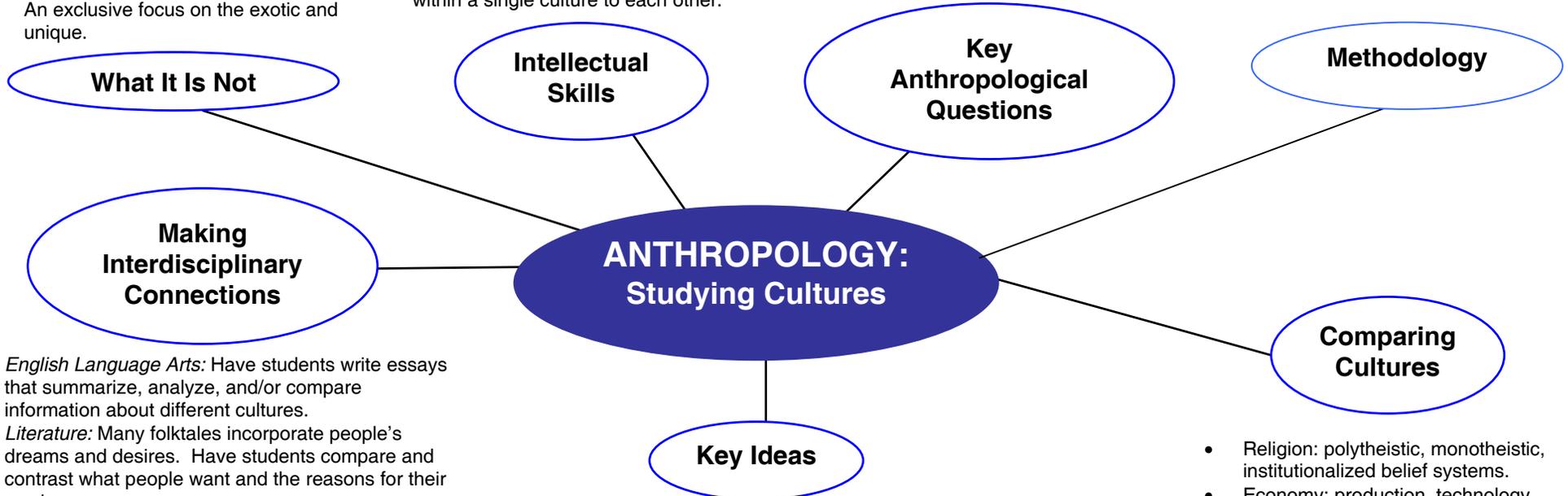


- An inventory of cultural traits.
- The study of isolated cultures.
- A focus on heroes, holidays, and celebrations.
- An exclusive focus on the exotic and unique.

- The ability to:
- Ask anthropological questions.
 - Gather information through participant observation.
 - Organize anthropological information.
 - Investigate differing and competing interpretations of trends and relationships.
 - Explain the importance of evidence.
 - Draw conclusions and make informed decisions on the basis of information gathered to relate different cultural traits within a single culture to each other.

- What is a culture?
- What are the key characteristics of a civilization?
- How are elements of a culture transmitted from generation to generation?
- Does nature or nurture shape who and what individuals are?
- What causes cultural change and continuity?

- Direct observation.
- Surveys.
- In-depth interviews.
- Participant observation.



- *English Language Arts*: Have students write essays that summarize, analyze, and/or compare information about different cultures.
- *Literature*: Many folktales incorporate people's dreams and desires. Have students compare and contrast what people want and the reasons for their wants.
- *LOTE*: Use some key cultural traits of the societies in which the target language is spoken.
- *Math*: What calendar does the culture use/did it once use? Why?
- *Music*: What kinds of musical traditions does the culture have (e.g., ceremonial, folk, classical)? In what kinds of contexts are these music forms performed?
- *Science*: How does the culture categorize the physical world, and what kinds of proof does it recognize?
- *Social Studies*: Have students create a time capsule representing a culture different from their own. Understand how historical events shape the culture.
- *Technology*: Have students discuss and illustrate the technologies, tools, and methods that are used by a culture they are studying.

- Culture: all aspects of human adaptation, including technology, traditions, language, and social roles.
- Civilization: a more advanced form of organized life; it usually has more complex forms of social, political, military, and religious life.
- Change: derives from basic alterations in things, events, and ideas.
- Continuity: the quality or state of continuing without essential change.
- Ethnic Group: a collection of people distinguished, by others or themselves, primarily on the basis of cultural or nationality characteristics.
- Race: features that are genetic and inherited (e.g., skin, hair, eye color).

- Religion: polytheistic, monotheistic, institutionalized belief systems.
- Economy: production, technology, distribution (market).
- Family: marriage customs, descent, residence.
- Relationship of individual to society/group.



Culture: A Geographical Perspective

Charles A. Heatwole, Ph.D.
Department of Geography, Hunter College

[Introduction](#) [Geography and Culture](#) [Concepts of Cultural Geography](#)
[Culture region](#) [Cultural diffusion](#) [Cultural landscape](#) [Cultural ecology](#)
[Cultural interaction](#) [Summation and Application](#)

INTRODUCTION

[Geography](#) literally means "earth description." It seeks to describe and explain the distribution of phenomena that characterize our planet's surface. In so doing, geography seeks answers to questions that include:

- Where are things located?
- Why are they there?
- What is their significance?
- What is a particular location or region like?
- How and why are some places on Earth alike or different from others?

All told, an amazing variety of attributes characterize our planet. They include [physical features](#) such as climates, landforms, and natural vegetation. They also include [human beings](#), their attributes, and their works—such as cities, towns, agriculture, transportation systems, and industries.

GEOGRAPHY AND CULTURE

[Culture](#), the total way of life that characterizes a group of people, is one of the most important things that geographers study. There are literally thousands of cultures on Earth today and each contributes to [global diversity](#). One reason for the existence of so many cultures is that there are so many ways that Earth's 6.3 billion people can be culturally different. Specifically, a culture consists of numerous [cultural components](#) (see chart below) that vary from one culture group to the next.

Cultural Components (a partial list)

Religion | Language | Architecture | Cuisine | Technology | Music
Dance | Sports | Medicine | Dress | Gender roles | Law
Education | Government | Agriculture | Economy | Sport | Grooming
Values | Work ethic | Etiquette | Courtship | Recreation | Gestures

For example, language is a cultural component. While some cultural communities use English, others speak Spanish, Japanese, Arabic, or another of the thousands of languages spoken today. Religion is another cultural component, and there are hundreds (if not thousands) of ways that different culture groups practice and are characterized by that trait. Likewise, there is a world of cultural differences with respect to technology and medicine, economic and agricultural activity, and modes of architecture and transportation. Moreover, [cultural communities](#) may differ in their dress, grooming, music, cuisine, dance, sport, etiquette, and other cultural components, all of which make for a culturally diverse world (see Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. How many cultural components from the list above can you identify in these four photos?

Cultural components are not limited to humans. Culture characterizes Earth as well; for it is primarily through the agency of their culture that people interact with and modify Earth's surface. Thus, areas may have different looks and feels that reflect differences in culture. For example, church

steeple domes dominate the skylines of numerous small towns in New York State. Minarets dominate similar settlements in the Middle East.

CONCEPTS OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Because of the innumerable cultural differences that characterize people and land the world over, there is an entire subfield of geography devoted to the study of culture—appropriately named [cultural geography](#). This subfield is vast; its key concepts, however, can be related to the needs of third-grade teachers. Those concepts are culture region, cultural landscape, cultural diffusion, cultural ecology, and cultural interaction.¹

¹ A much fuller treatment of these concepts is found in Jordan-Bychkov et al. *The Human Mosaic: A Thematic Introduction to Cultural Geography*. (10th ed., New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 2006).

Culture Region

A [culture region](#) is a portion of Earth's surface that has common cultural elements. Identifying and mapping culture regions are significant tasks because they show us where particular culture traits or cultural communities are located. Maps of culture regions provide answers to the most fundamental geographical question: Where?

The concept of culture region serves roughly the same educational purpose as that of historical period. When teaching world history, for example, the subject is commonly divided into time segments that might be labeled The Neolithic Revolution, The Cold War Era, and so forth. The purpose of these arbitrary divisions is to make world history more comprehensible by dividing it into periods that have common themes. Similarly, the purpose of regions (which also are arbitrary) is to make geography—or cultural geography, in this case—more comprehensible by dividing the world into areas that have something in common.

Culture regions, like cultures themselves, display considerable variety. For starters, any number of cultural components may be used to define culture regions. A map of world religions, for example, includes a shaded area in South Asia where Hinduism is dominant (see Fig. 2). That is a culture region based on a single cultural component, as are each of the other shaded areas on that map. Similarly, a language map of Europe would show a shaded area where Basque is dominant (see Fig. 3). That also would be a culture region based on a single cultural component. In contrast, if you were teaching about Japan, you might ask your students to go down the list of cultural components and characterize the Japanese culture region with respect to religion, language, architecture, cuisine, and so forth. For comparison's sake, you might then compare that list to the U.S. culture region, or to the Mexican culture region, or the culture region of some other country.

Culture regions differ greatly in size. Some are exceedingly large, like the Islamic culture region that encompasses millions of square miles of North Africa and Southwest Asia. Some are very small, like Spanish Harlem, which encompasses about two square miles of Manhattan. Many others are of intermediate size, like the Corn Belt, which occupies a portion of the midwestern United States.

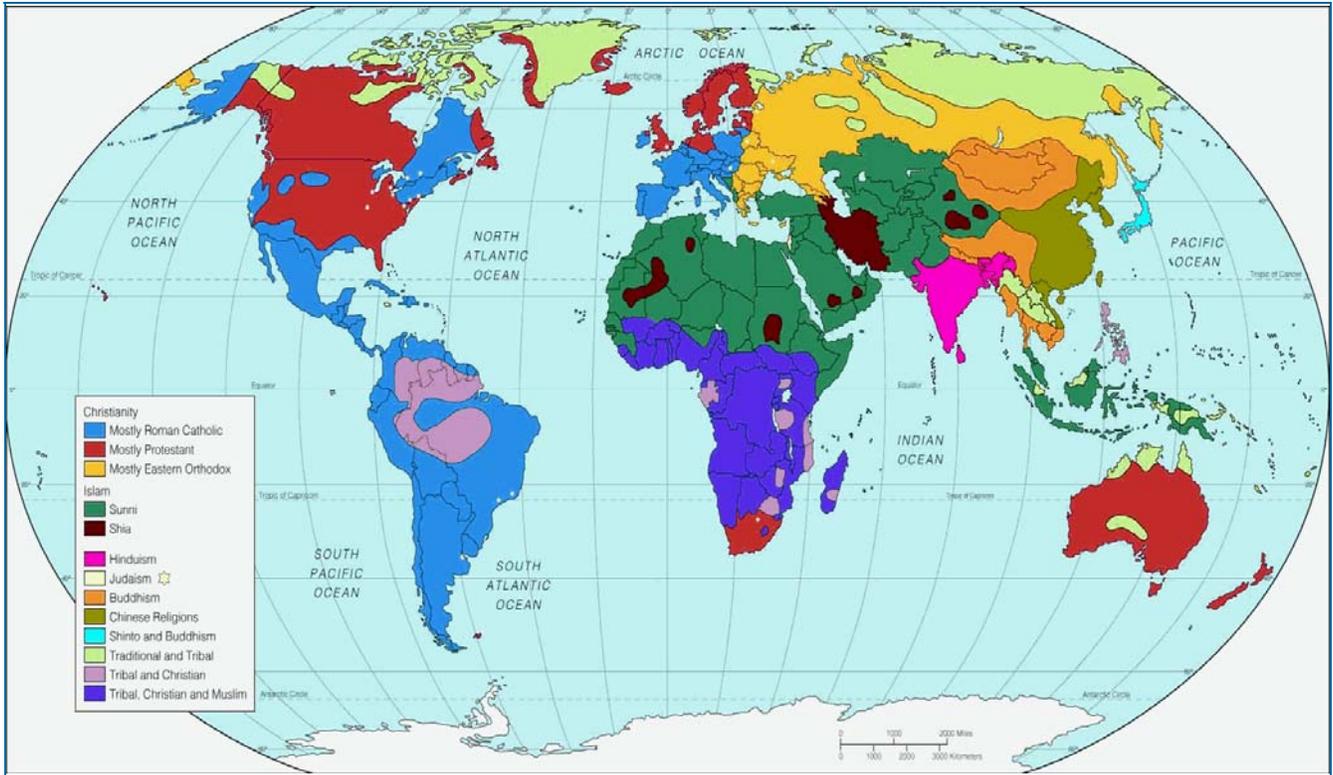


Fig. 2. This world map of religions shows several culture regions. The Hindu culture region in South Asia is an example. Click on the image for a larger scale map.

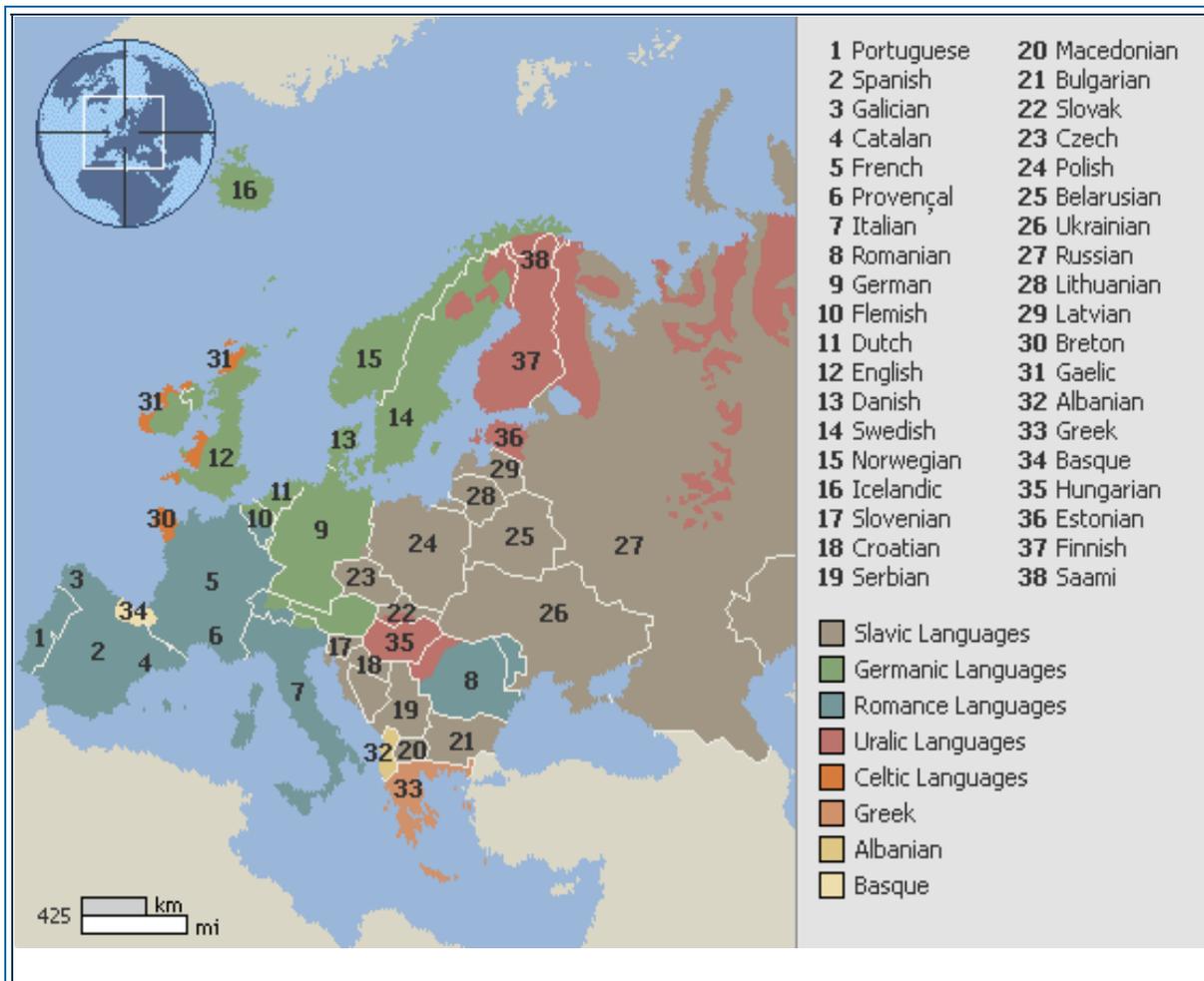


Fig. 3. This language map of Europe shows several culture regions, including the Basque-speaking region (#34 on the map's legend).

When students see the words *Hindu culture region*, they may logically infer that only Hindus live there. Not so. That region also is home to millions of Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, and other non-Hindus. Similarly, there are some people in Spanish Harlem who do not speak Spanish, and some farmers in the Corn Belt who do not grow corn. Culture regions tend to exhibit a certain diversity—their titles identify a dominant characteristic (Hinduism, Spanish, corn) but do not necessarily mean that everybody who lives there shares that characteristic. Students should understand that diversity typically exists within a culture region through the use of specific examples, to avoid making logical assumptions that are nevertheless wrong.



Fig. 4. Several distinctive attributes typify this suburban culture area somewhere in the United States.

Culture regions can be found in [urban](#), [suburban](#), or [rural](#) settings. Many cities contain ethnic neighborhoods. Basically, these are urban culture regions whose borders are defined by the locations of specific cultural communities. Different cities around the world have ethnic mixes, however. If you were teaching about France, for example, your students would discover that Arabs, sub-Saharan Africans, and West Indians comprise large ethnic communities in many cities. In Germany, in contrast, Turks and various Slavic peoples often are the major groups. Urban fringes the world over also exhibit cultural differences. The typical American suburb exhibits housing, land use, and lifestyles that differ significantly from what is observed on the periphery of cities in West Africa or Central America, for example (see Fig. 4). Rural parts of the world may differ on the basis of language, religion, or some other cultural component—most notably agriculture. Thus, dairy farming and apple growing characterize different sections of rural New York State. Both are visually distinctive and may be thought of as separate culture regions. In contrast, rural culture regions elsewhere in the world might be dominated by cattle ranches, rice fields, banana plantations, or some other form of agriculture.

Over time culture regions tend to appear and disappear, and expand and contract in between. Many millennia ago, for example, there were no human beings in North America. In the course of subsequent migrations, however, different peoples occupied different parts of the continent. As a

result, by 1492 North America was a mosaic of Native American culture regions. Many of them have since disappeared or have diminished in size. Similarly, an ancient Phoenician culture region gave way to a Roman culture region, which in turn disappeared. Much more immediately, there are lots of areas and neighborhoods in New York State and elsewhere that are experiencing "[ethnic change](#)"—a situation in which one cultural community is expanding or contracting in opposition to another.

The latter highlights the fact that culture unites and divides humanity: while it instills a sense of unity among some peoples, it creates differences (perhaps deep animosities) between others. Accordingly, maps of culture regions may provide important perspectives on contemporary problems that are rooted in cultural differences. For example, Americans have come to appreciate that all Iraqis are not the same. Rather, they are divided mainly into three cultural communities (Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds) who occupy culture regions that are more or less separate. To a large degree, the future of Iraq is likely to be determined by the extent to which the occupants of those culture regions work together for the common good.

Here are some activities to acquaint third graders with the concept of culture region.²

- Identify components of culture (see list above). Ask students to write a description of their own culture based on the components they identify.
- Identify clues that tell you when you have left one culture region and entered another.
- Identify local stores and restaurants associated with specific cultural communities.
- Use cultural components to describe how children live in different parts of the world.
- List five things a foreigner might do to assimilate into the culture of the United States.
- Using photos, describe how people earn a living in different parts of the world.
- Distinguish between the ways of life of people living in the same region at different times. (Examples include ancient versus modern Egyptians and traditional Native American life versus present-day Native Americans.)

² Several of these and subsequent examples are taken or adapted from *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 1994).

Cultural Diffusion

[Cultural diffusion](#) concerns the spread of culture and the factors that account for it, such as migration, communications, trade, and commerce. Because culture moves over space, the geography of culture is constantly changing. Generally, culture traits originate in a particular area and spread outward, ultimately to characterize a larger expanse of territory. *Culture region* describes the location of culture traits or cultural communities; *cultural diffusion* helps explain how they got there.

For example, New York State generally lies within the English-speaking culture region. Nevertheless there are significant cultural communities within New York State in which Spanish, Chinese, Hebrew, Arabic, or another language is dominant (see Fig. 5). Similarly, while most of New York State is part of the Christian culture region, there also are local cultural communities in which Judaism, Islam, or Buddhism is dominant. What all these languages and religions have in common is that none originated in New York State or even in North America. Rather, each has come to characterize segments of the Empire State as a result of cultural diffusion.



Fig. 5. New York City's Chinatown is a product of cultural diffusion.

Similar stories apply to other parts of the world. If you were to teach about Australia, for example, your students would learn that that continent was once the exclusive domain of an aboriginal cultural community. Because of cultural diffusion, however, most of the present-day Australian people and their homeland bear the unmistakable imprint of European culture—particularly, cultural characteristics that diffused from Great Britain.



Fig. 6. A McDonald's in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Businesses as well as people can exemplify cultural diffusion.

Cultural diffusion occurs in different ways. As suggested by the examples above, [migration](#) is an important example. When people move, they take their "cultural baggage" with them. Thus, there are uncountable instances, past and present, in which the arrival of migrants has resulted in the appearance of culture traits or entire cultural communities in areas where they were not previously present. An important modern variation involves businesses that establish facilities or outlets in foreign lands. Thus, the appearance of McDonald's, Burger King, and Starbucks outside the U.S. is a form of cultural diffusion—and so too the appearance of sushi bars in America (see Fig. 6).

People's tendency to copy one another characterizes another type of cultural diffusion. An example occurs when a farmer looks over the fence, sees a neighboring farmer using a new or different agricultural technique, and adopts it. Similarly, people sometimes adopt a new [cultural trait](#) in response to contact with an advertisement, or by seeing something on TV or in a movie, or by interacting directly with people who display a particular cultural trait.

Finally, there is an oft-observed tendency for culture traits to originate and take hold in large cities and then "trickle down" the settlement hierarchy to smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. Contemporary cultural fads in particular have a tendency to diffuse in this manner. Because diffusion occurs over time as well as over space, there may be a time lag between the origin of a trait in a large city and its appearance in small towns and rural areas.

Nowadays, the above phenomenon is particularly evident and important in developing countries, where modernization tends to take hold in major cities and then trickle down to the countryside. If your students were to study about China, for example, they would discover a land of rapidly modernizing cities—many with world-class industries, office towers, and port facilities. In contrast, portions of rural China are still dominated by traditional pre-modern agricultural tools and techniques.

In reality, therefore, China is not *a* cultural community, but is instead a mosaic of *many* cultural communities. The same is true of Mexico, India, Peru, and virtually every other country on Earth today. Cultural differences exist within countries as well as between them. Thus, when you choose a country to teach about "cultural community," your students should come away with an understanding that, say, all Chinese (or all Mexicans, Indians, Peruvians, etc.) are not the same. Rather, countries are composed of numerous cultural communities, just as in the United States.

When a cultural item diffuses, it typically does not keep spreading and spreading forever. Instead it tends to diffuse outward from its place of origin, encounter one or more [barrier effects](#)—things that inhibit cultural diffusion—and stop spreading. Barrier effects can assume physical or social forms. [Physical barrier effects](#) consist of characteristics of the natural (physical) environment that inhibit the spread of culture. The classic examples are oceans, deserts, mountain ranges, dense forests, and frigid climates. For example, the Atlantic Ocean was a physical barrier that prevented the westward spread of European culture for many centuries. The dense rain forest of the Amazon lowlands long served as a physical barrier, isolating numerous native peoples and their ancient ways of life. While some of these groups have recently experienced culture change wrought by roads and deforestation, others continue to lead traditional lives in remote regions of rainforest. Similarly, the rugged Andes Mountains have long served to inhibit diffusion of foreign culture throughout that region, thus helping to perpetuate indigenous cultural characteristics. One result is that Quechua (pronounced KAY-chew-ah), purportedly the language of the Incas, continues to be spoken by millions of Andean residents.

Social barrier effects consist of characteristics that differentiate human groups and potentially limit interaction between them, thus inhibiting the spread of culture. Examples include language, religion, race and ethnicity, and a history of conflict between specific cultural communities. Islam, for instance, nowadays acts as a social barrier in many Middle Eastern countries by discouraging adoption of certain styles of western dress and music.

For much of human history, therefore, barrier effects tended to isolate cultural communities from each other, inhibiting their ability to share cultural characteristics. Today, however, traditional barrier effects are being overwhelmed by modern means of communication. Isolation is on the decline. Cultural characteristics are diffusing as never before. Adoption of a new culture item is often accompanied by disuse of an old one. Hence, global decline in cultural diversity is a significant modern trend. Virtually hundreds of languages spoken by formerly isolated peoples will disappear during the next 50 years because, due to diffusion of "modern global languages" (such as English, Spanish, and French), they are not being passed on to the next generation. This does not portend a single global culture, but rather a trend toward cultural communities that come in fewer flavors (see Fig.7).



Fig. 7. Street scene in Indonesian New Guinea. As exemplified by the number of men in modern attire in the background compared to the man in the foreground, loss of isolation is encouraging disappearance of cultures.

In some parts of the world, for example, long-cherished cultural traditions are perceived by local practitioners to be threatened by intrusion (i.e., diffusion) of alternatives. Westernization is a term often associated with this process. Thus, while cultural diffusion encourages cultural sharing and interaction between peoples, it may also promote conflict.

Here are some activities to acquaint third graders with the concept of cultural diffusion.

- Identify in your household where your food, clothing, appliances, and furniture come from. Make a list and locate places on a map on the basis of the product labels.
- Identify and describe components of your culture that originated in another country.
- Study a local cultural community that developed as a result of immigration from a foreign land.
- Identify local stores and restaurants that typify cultural diffusion.
- Make use of the extensive children's literature that deals with migration to the United States (or to a different country).

Cultural Landscape

What do a high-rise apartment, silo, stop sign, golf course, shopping mall, railroad, pyramid, oil derrick, and banana plantation have in common? The answer is that each is a facet of the [*cultural landscape*](#). The cultural landscape consists of material aspects of culture that characterize Earth's surface. That includes buildings, shrines, signage, sports and recreational facilities, economic and agricultural structures, crops and agricultural fields, transportation systems, and other physical things. Some geographers would include humans as components of the cultural landscape if their clothing and grooming visually reflect cultural preferences. Because cultural landscape so often embodies humans' most basic needs—shelter, food, and clothing—many geographers consider it the most important aspect of cultural geography.

All cultures change over time (albeit at different rates). As a result, the cultural landscape of a given locale may look much different today than in the past. For example, the skyline of New York City is much taller today than it used to be, thanks to technological innovations that include electricity, elevators, construction materials, and machinery. Similarly, large areas of New York State have seen the transformation of farmland to suburbia, thanks to changes in economics, agriculture, and transportation (see Fig. 8).

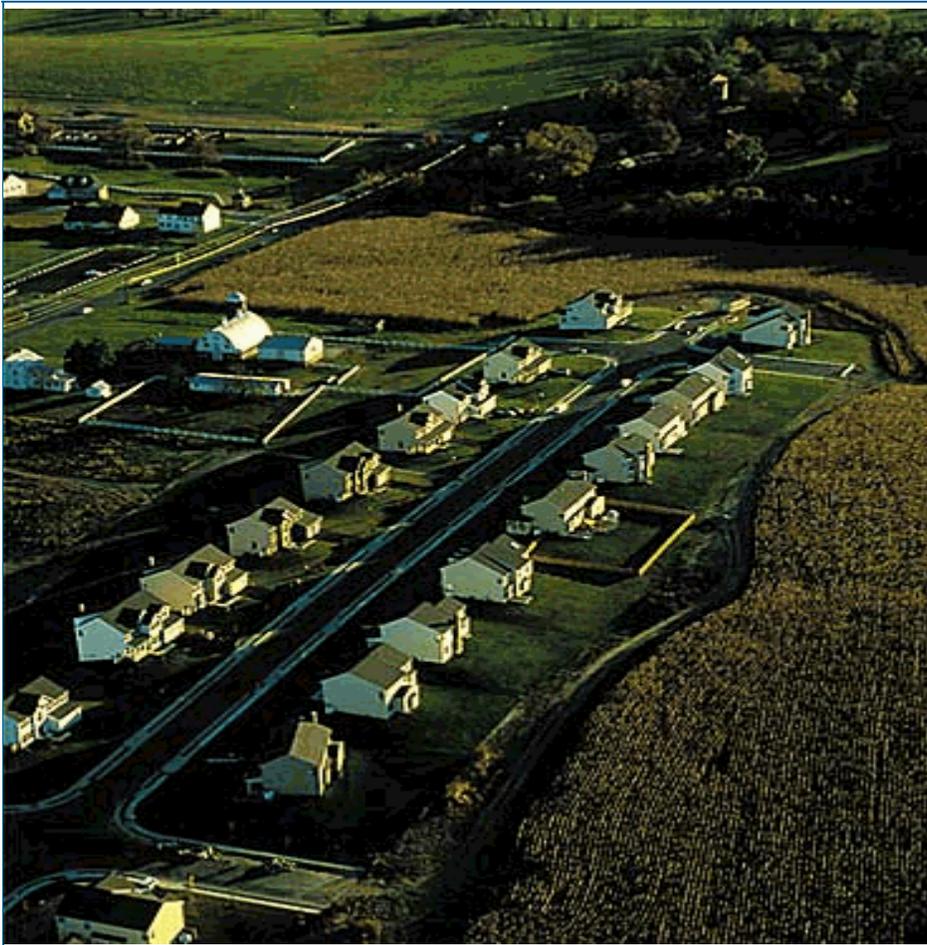


Fig. 8. Suburban encroachment on farmland alters the cultural landscape. In this scene a farmstead (center left) has been leapfrogged by a suburban development that abuts a cornfield (lower right).

Typically, cultural landscapes change in bits and pieces. Thus, most cultural landscapes are a mixture of new buildings and old ones (possibly including abandoned structures), modern superhighways and old narrow streets, gleaming office buildings and rusting manufacturing facilities, and so on. Thus, if you were to teach about Peru, students would learn that its cultural landscape consists of a variety of old and new elements. That would include architectural artifacts from the Inca period (e.g., agricultural terraces, roads, and ruins—like Machu Picchu), ornate cathedrals that date from Spanish colonial times, and a host of more modern structures. Similarly, if you were teaching about Egypt, students would learn of pyramids and temples that date from the time of the ancient pharaohs, grand mosques built in recent centuries, grand hotels built in recent years, and other elements of varying age (see Fig. 9). People of all regions and times have left their cultural imprints on Earth, and many of these endure. As a result, the cultural landscape may be a tool for understanding the history and status of a given area, as well as current trends.



Fig. 9. Cultural landscapes often combine the old and the new. Modern buildings and traditional transportation are juxtaposed in this scene from Cairo, Egypt.

Arrangement and placement of elements in the cultural landscape may be as noteworthy as the elements themselves. For example, American farmers tend to live on their farms, residing in individual, scattered farmsteads. In much of the rest of the world, however, farmers live in villages comprised of tightly clustered residences, from which they commute to their farmland. The visual difference between these contrasting cultural landscapes is unmistakable. Similarly, roads in American towns often adhere to a grid pattern that is predictable and facilitates flow. In contrast, there are older cities in other lands with road networks that are purposefully asymmetrical and include numerous dead ends—apparently to thwart would-be invaders. Finally, in some cultural contexts, the notion of favorable (or unfavorable) locations and sacred directions dictates the placement and orientation of landscape elements.

Here are some activities to acquaint third graders with the concept of cultural landscape.

- A foreign pen pal has asked you to send five photos that capture the cultural flavor of your local area. What would you photograph, and why?
- Make a poster that utilizes magazine and/or online photos that reflect the cultural landscapes of different parts of the world. (You might do this under the heading "Homes around the world," or "How food is produced around the world," or "How children live around the world.")
- Show students pictures of local buildings. Ask them to identify those buildings that appear similar to those found in your selected world community.
- Visit a local business or historical museum to view artifacts from your selected world community.
- Compare housing and land use in urban, suburban, and rural areas within your selected world community, noting similarities and differences.

Cultural Ecology

Cultural ecology addresses the relationships between culture and the physical environment. Culture has arisen and evolved in a great variety of physical settings that differ in climate, natural vegetation, soils, and landforms. In these diverse natural [environments](#), humans developed adaptive strategies to satisfy their needs for clothing, food, and shelter. The result is a literal world of difference in clothing styles and the materials from which they are made; the production, preparation, and consumption of foods; and the architectural styles and materials that define human shelter. The astonishing variety of physical settings that characterize our planet, and the amazing variety of human adaptive strategies to them, go a long way to explain why there are so many cultures on Earth today.

The concept of cultural ecology often helps us better understand the cultural landscape. Thus, while a cultural landscape study might identify and describe a building that typifies a specific area, cultural ecology may be employed to explain why that building looks the way it does. The Taos Pueblo, a large adobe structure that is a quintessential element of the cultural landscape of the American Southwest, provides a good example (see Fig. 10). In the pueblo's immediate physical setting, scant rainfall results in scant vegetation. Trees are few, except along permanent watercourses and in high mountains. Also, the low humidity contributes to uncomfortably warm daytime temperatures that contrast with uncomfortably cold nights during much of the year.

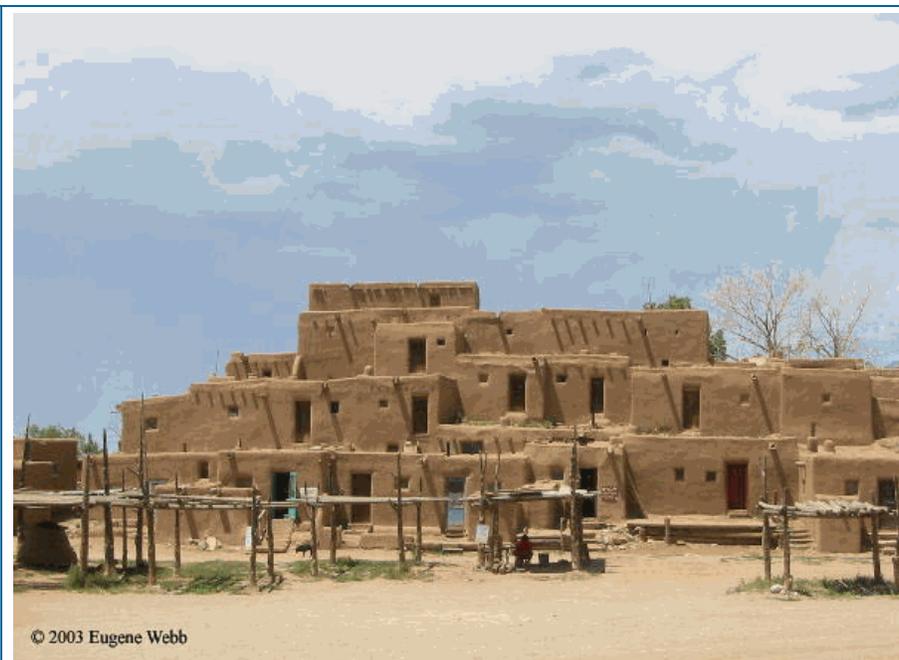


Fig. 10. The Taos Pueblo exemplifies the concept of cultural ecology through its use of locally available materials and adaptation to climatic conditions.

The pueblo embodies several adaptations to these conditions. It consists of finished mud brick (for which the raw material is locally abundant) over a skimpy lattice of timber. The design produces an amalgam of box-like attached residences, a feature that limits the walls that are exposed to the hot sun and leaves flat rooftops, which may act as catchments for scarce rainfall. Also, the largely windowless thick walls help regulate temperature within by heating up slowly during the day, keeping rooms cool in the face of afternoon heat. In contrast, when the sun goes down and the air turns cold, the heat that built up in the adobe during the day keeps the interior significantly warmer than the nighttime air.

Other physical settings offer other examples of cultural ecology. The terraced rice paddies of Bali, Indonesia, embody cultural adaptation to a rainy equatorial climate and to what would otherwise be useless (at least with respect to paddy farming) slopes (see Fig. 11). Meanwhile in snowy alpine Europe, the inverted-V roofs of chalets facilitate snow removal, lessening the chance for structural damage.

Evidence of cultural ecology may be local as well as global, as four examples from New York State attest. The location of Rochester has much to do with the presence therein of the falls of the Genesee River, an early source of industrial power. The distinctive and attractive Finger Lakes wine country is partly the result of a local microclimate, soils, and slopes that are favorable to grape growing. Manhattan's tallest buildings have historically been located in midtown and downtown, where bedrock is closest to the surface. Finally, parts of the Long Island Railroad's main line coincide with a glacially deposited ridge, which helps keep water off the tracks. These are all examples of cultural adaptation to physical environment.



Fig. 11. Terraced rice fields in Bali reflect cultural adaptation to a mountainous tropical environment.

Cultural ecology focuses on culture-environment interaction in the past as well as the present. Regarding the past, identification and analysis of *culture hearths*, regions that in ancient times gave rise to significant cultural complexes, are of particular importance. These include the Nile Valley, the Fertile Crescent (including Mesopotamia), Indus Valley, Huang Ho Valley, and Mesoamerica. Each provides examples of how ancient peoples built impressive civilizations thanks to interaction between humans and fertile river valleys—which gave rise to agricultural surpluses, which in turn freed some people from daily food production and allowed them to develop other pursuits.

Finally, avoiding cultural stereotypes (and correcting cultural stereotypes that students already have in their heads) is one of the most important things to do when teaching the geography of culture. Cultural stereotyping often involves particular peoples' clothing, food, and/or shelter, which are prominent aspects of cultural ecology. Thus, unless otherwise informed, a student might look at Fig. 10

(see previous page) and conclude that all Native Americans in the southwestern U.S. reside in something that looks like the Taos Pueblo. In reality, the Taos Pueblo is merely a remnant traditional structure. Most of the local people live in more modern-looking homes made of modern construction materials.

Sadly, there is an abundance of literature available to students that reinforces or creates cultural stereotypes. I recently came across a picture book for U.S. elementary school students claiming to show how children live in other lands. It was a collection of stereotypes. For example, "Eskimos" (nowadays more properly called "Inuits") were dressed in animal skins, carried spears, lived in igloos, had dog sleds parked outside, and entertained themselves by using walrus skins to toss each other around. In reality, contemporary Inuits are just as likely (perhaps more so) to order outerwear from L.L. Bean, use a snowmobile, hunt with a modern high-power rifle (if, indeed, they are inclined to go hunting), live in housing made of modern construction materials rather than ice blocks, and spend their leisure time watching TV.

Most cultural stereotyping rests on the notion that certain people live pretty much as did their distant ancestors. Your students should learn that indeed there are many people alive today—especially in some developing countries—who continue to exhibit cultural characteristics little changed from those of distant ancestors. But they should also learn that the majority of the world's cultural communities are now experiencing significant modernization (as described in the section on cultural diffusion). As a result, people who live in distant cultural communities do not all look the same. Instead, different people display old and new cultural characteristics. Most importantly, perhaps, your students should learn that children who live in cultural communities in foreign lands generally are tending to live less and less as their ancient ancestors did, but to increasingly exhibit cultural characteristics that are similar to their own.

As cultures modernize, does geography matter less? The answer is a resounding no! Geography matters more than ever. Physical geography still affects cultural communities in a host of ways. But so does a different kind of geography—a geography of labor pools and free-market capitalism; a geography of manufacturing and deep-water port facilities; a geography of transportation systems and bilateral relationships; a geography of global linkages as opposed to isolated cultural communities in particular physical settings.

Here are some activities to acquaint third graders with the concept of cultural ecology.

- List ways in which people adapt to the physical environment (e.g., housing styles, clothing, agricultural practices, recreational activities, food, daily and seasonal activities).
- Identify environmental factors that attracted settlers to the area inhabited by your selected world community.
- Identify the environmental factors that explain the kinds of agriculture practiced in your immediate area, and in other parts of the world.
- Identify environmental factors that encourage development of cities in particular locations. Give examples.
- Describe the characteristics of climates in different world communities and explain how they affect the lives of people who live there.
- Describe how natural resources were used by the early settlers of your selected world community, and compare to their use by today's people.

- Make posters that depict traditional foods, clothing, and housing in different parts of the world. Identify ways in which these items reflect human interaction with the natural environment.
- Define and give examples of natural hazards that affect different parts of the world including your own.

Cultural Interaction

Cultural interaction focuses on the relationships that often exist between cultural components that characterize a given community. When geographers seek to explain why a particular culture trait is found in a particular area, they often discover that the answer lies in another trait possessed by that same cultural community. This demonstrates that cultural components may be interrelated.

Here is a collage of examples. Concepts of personal privacy in Islamic and Iberian culture regions often explain why residences lack street-level windows. Buddhists regard golden colors as a symbol of enlightenment. That explains why gold-domed temples figure so prominently in cultural landscapes in various parts of Southeast Asia. If the residents of a particular neighborhood were conservative Jews, then that would explain the presence of kosher grocery stores, signs in Hebrew, synagogues, and particular styles of clothing. Because north was a sacred direction to the ancient Mayans, the boulevard-facing facades of their temples were always aligned in a north-south manner (see Fig. 12).



Fig. 12. The orientation of Mayan temples reflected their belief that north is a sacred direction.

Bars and liquor stores are not likely to be found in Muslim neighborhoods because Islam forbids consumption of alcoholic beverages. Cultural interaction may explain the presence—as well as the absence—of particular traits in particular areas.

These examples attest to the explanatory power of cultural interaction. But they also demonstrate that religious beliefs often underlie relationships between cultural components. That presents educators with a quandary. Few culture traits have the power and importance of religion. Indeed, religion is often the key to understanding the way of life of a particular cultural community. One needs to tread carefully.

Here are some activities to acquaint third graders with the concept of cultural interaction.

- List and explain symbols, shrines, and colors that may be associated with different religions.
- Collect photographs of houses of worship and symbols associated with different religions.
- List ways that religious beliefs may influence other cultural components.
- Describe the nature and celebration of holidays, festivals, and events that are associated with various cultural communities.

SUMMATION AND APPLICATION

In summary, geography seeks to describe and explain the distribution of phenomena that characterize Earth's surface. Because culture differentiates human beings and the lands they occupy, it is one of the most important things that geographers study. Accordingly, there is an entire subfield of academic geography devoted to the study of culture: cultural geography.

The key concepts of cultural geography are culture region, cultural diffusion, cultural landscape, cultural ecology, and cultural interaction. Each offers insights and activities that an educator might use to teach culture from a geographical point of view. Specifically, that perspective involves the following:

- Delineating and describing parts of Earth that have common cultural elements, as well as comparing and contrasting areas that are culturally different (i.e., studying the concept of culture region);
- Describing how cultural components spread over space and come to characterize different parts of our planet (i.e., studying the concept of cultural diffusion);
- Appreciating how culture contributes to the visual distinctiveness of different areas (i.e., studying the concept of cultural landscape);
- Understanding how cultural communities have adapted to—and, in turn, impacted—the natural environment (i.e., studying the concept of cultural ecology); and
- Noting how one particular culture trait might lead to the appearance of others in a specific cultural community (i.e., studying the concept of cultural interaction).

These concepts, though distinct, may overlap in ways that help to describe and explain the nature of cultural communities. Here is a closing example.

There is a *culture region* in southeastern Pennsylvania associated with a large Amish population. The sect originated in Europe centuries ago. Their presence in Pennsylvania is the result of *cultural diffusion*—migration to America. The *cultural landscape* of the Pennsylvania Amish is dominated by dairy farms, so big barns and silos are much in evidence. The fact that they are dairy

farms, as opposed to, say, wheat farms, is explained by a local climate favorable to raising dairy cows, and to lucrative and nearby urban markets for their products. These relationships between Amish culture and both the natural and human environments provide examples of *cultural ecology*. Amish religious beliefs stress separation from "the world." (Indeed, persecution of Amish due to their religious beliefs explains why they left Europe for Pennsylvania in the first place.) The interrelationship between religion and other aspects of Amish culture exemplifies *cultural interaction*.

Figure Sources

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Fig. 8: Sarah Leen, *National Geographic* magazine, July 2001, "Urban Sprawl." Reproduced by permission, http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/07/01/html/zm_20010701.3.2.html

Fig. 9: Microsoft. Clip Art. Microsoft Office 97 Small Business Edition CD, "Transportation" collection.

Fig. 10: Photograph by Eugene Webb, "Cities and Buildings Database." Reproduced by permission, <http://content.lib.washington.edu/buildingsweb/index.html>

Fig. 11: Photograph courtesy of SnapshotAsia.com, http://www.snapshotasia.com/Bali_06.htm

Fig. 12. Microsoft. Clip Art. Microsoft Office 97 Small Business Edition CD, "Places" collection.



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CULTURE: A GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE
 Charles Heatwole, Ph.D.

Crosswalk to NYS Social Studies Learning Standards

This crosswalk connects Dr. Heatwole’s paper to the social studies learning standards and key ideas. The paper is not tied directly to the performance indicators (PIs) of the learning standards because the performance indicators are written at either the elementary, intermediate, or commencement level. This paper is written as professional development content background for third-grade teachers and, as such, is written at a graduate level. All of the standards are addressed; not all of the key ideas are. Nor are the learning standards or key ideas addressed to the same degree or in the same order. (Note: Page numbers are taken from [Learning Standards For Social Studies](#).)

NYS Social Studies Standard	Key Ideas
Standard 2 – World History	<p>Key Idea 1: The study of world history requires an understanding of world cultures and civilizations, including an analysis of important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. This study also examines the human condition and the connections and interactions of people across time and space and the ways different people view the same event or issue from a variety of perspectives. (p. 8)</p> <p>Key Idea 2: Establishing timeframes, exploring different periodizations, examining themes across time and within cultures, and focusing on important turning points in world history help organize the study of world cultures and civilizations. (p. 8)</p> <p>Key Idea 3: Study of the major social, political, cultural, and religious developments in world history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups. (p. 9)</p> <p>Key Idea 4: The skills of historical analysis include the ability to investigate differing and competing interpretations of the theories of history, hypothesize about why interpretations change over time, explain the importance of historical evidence, and understand the concepts of change and continuity over time. (p. 9)</p>

Standard 3 – Geography	<p>Key Idea 1: Geography can be divided into six essential elements which can be used to analyze important historic, geographic, economic, and environmental questions and issues. These six elements include: the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical settings (including natural resources), human systems, environment and society, and the use of geography. (p. 14)</p> <p>Key Idea 2: Geography requires the development and application of the skills of asking and answering geographic questions; analyzing theories of geography; and acquiring, organizing, and analyzing geographic information. (p. 14)</p>
Standard 4 – Economics	<p>Key Idea 1: The study of economics requires an understanding of major economic concepts and systems, the principles of economic decision making, and the interdependence of economies and economic systems throughout the world. (p. 18)</p>
Standard 5 – Civics, Citizenship, and Government	<p>Key Idea 1: The study of civics, citizenship, and government involves learning about political systems; the purposes of government and civic life; and the differing assumptions held by people across time and place regarding power, authority, governance, and law. (p. 24)</p>
Standard 1 – History of the United States and New York	<p>Key Idea 1: The study of New York State and United States history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices, and traditions. (p. 2)</p> <p>Key Idea 2: Important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from New York State and United States history illustrate the connections and interactions of people and events across time and from a variety of perspectives. (p. 2)</p> <p>Key Idea 4: The skills of historical analysis include the ability to: explain the significance of historical evidence; weigh the importance, reliability, and validity of evidence; understand the concept of multiple causation; understand the importance of changing and competing interpretations of different historical developments. (p. 3)</p>





CULTURE: A GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Charles Heatwole, Ph.D.

Crosswalk to Grade 3 Content Understandings

This crosswalk identifies those grade 3 content understandings that are addressed in Dr. Heatwole's paper. The degree to which the content understandings are explored varies. Some are developed in considerable depth, while others are not addressed at all. Students must have access to instructional opportunities that address each of the grade 3 content understandings. [Social Studies Instructional Strategies & Resources: Prekindergarten Through Grade 6](#) is part of the social studies toolkit which provides teachers with guidance in planning for these opportunities. (Note: page numbers are taken from this publication.)

Cultures and civilizations (pp. 130-131)

How and why do cultures change?

Where do people settle and live? Why?

People in world communities exchange elements of their cultures.

Communities around the world (pp. 132-135)

People of similar and different cultural groups often live together in world communities.

World communities have social, political, economic, and cultural similarities and differences.

World communities change over time.

All people in world communities need to learn and they learn in different ways.

Beliefs, customs, and traditions in world communities are learned from others and may differ from place to place.

World communities are made up of different events, people, problems, and ideas.

The location of world communities (pp. 136-137)

World communities can be located on maps and globes (by latitude and longitude).

The spatial relationships of world communities can be described by direction, location, distance, and scale.

Regions represent areas of Earth's surface with unifying geographic characteristics.

World communities can be located in relation to each other and to principal parallels and meridians.

Physical, human, and cultural characteristics of world communities (pp. 138-140)

The causes and effects of human migration vary in different world religions.

The physical, human, and cultural characteristics of different regions and people throughout the world are different.

Interactions between economic activities and geographic factors differ in world communities.

The factors that influence human settlements differ in world communities.

People depending on and modifying their physical environments (pp. 141-142)

People living in world communities depend on and modify their physical environments in different ways.

Lifestyles in world communities are influenced by environmental and geographic factors.

The development of world communities is influenced by environmental and geographic factors.

Challenge of meeting needs and wants in world communities (pp. 143-144)

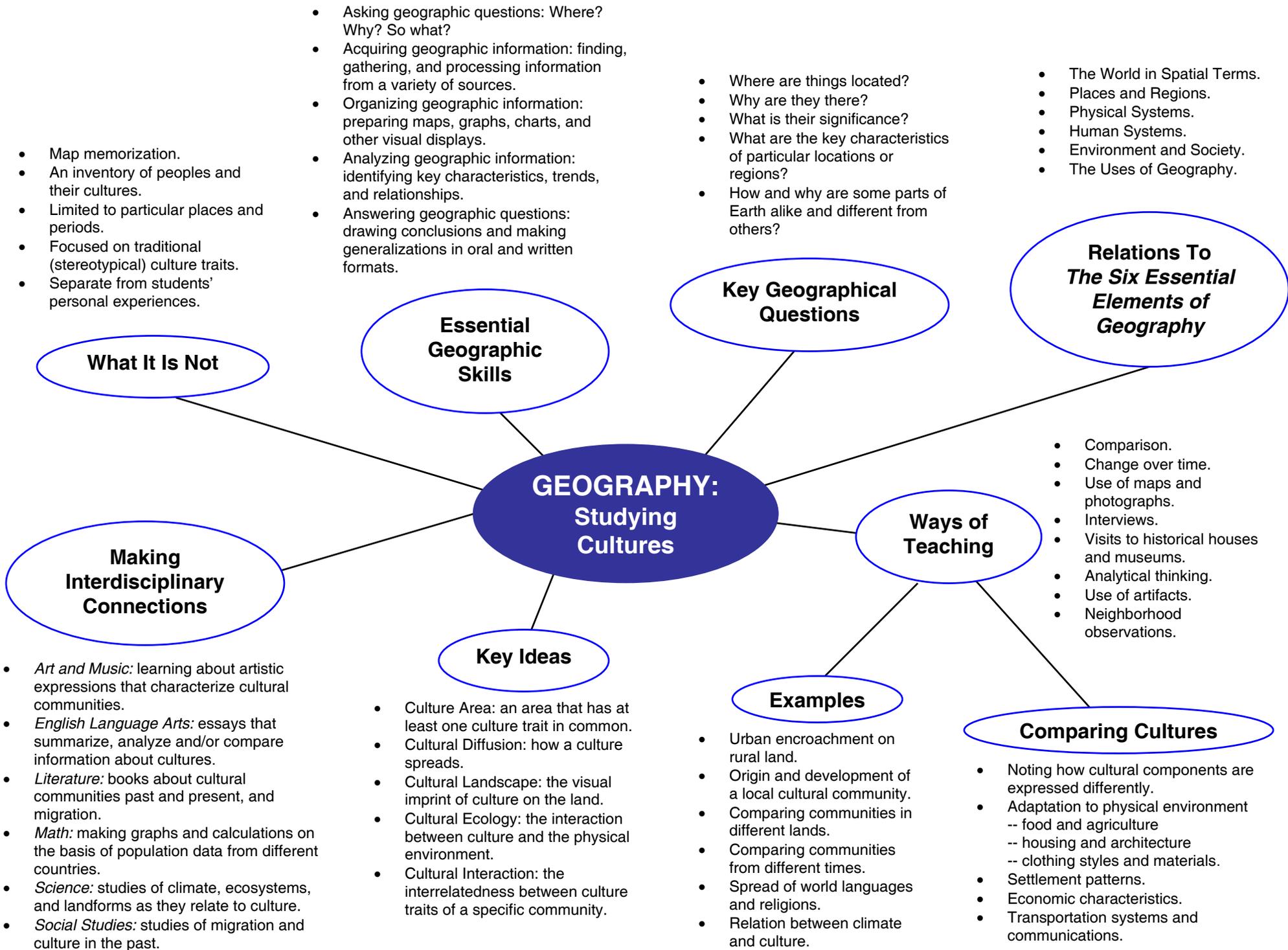
People in world communities must depend on others to meet their needs and wants.

People in world communities locate, develop, and make use of natural resources.

Resources are important to economic growth in world communities.

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CULTURE: A GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Charles Heatwole, Ph.D.

How to Select World Communities

The following is a list of factors to consider and questions to ask when determining specific world communities to study in the grade 3 classroom. This is not a definitive list, but a representative sample of factors contributed by Dr. Jervis, and teachers and supervisors from across the State.

INITIAL PLANNING

Look at the student population in your classroom, school, and district.

- What cultures are represented?

Look around your city, town, or village.

- What cultures are present?
- What groups influenced your community at different times?

Look at local restaurants: their types of foods and represented cultures.

- What cultures do they represent?

Look at the news.

- What cultures/nations are economically and politically important to the United States?

Look at the United States, New York State, and/or local community census data.

- What ethnic groups do people identify themselves with?

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Ensure that the representation of world communities is diverse.

1. Select a community from each continent.

- About three to six communities for the entire year provide enough balance to encompass diverse world regions.
- Two or fewer communities do not provide enough variety.
- Find a balance between depth and breadth.

2. Within each world community selected, look at urban, suburban, and rural areas for geographic diversity.
 - Pick from major and smaller metropolitan areas, residential towns and villages, and remote settlements.
3. Select communities from a variety of physical regions.
 - Examples are mountainous areas, deserts, forests, jungles.
4. Select communities from a variety of climate types.
 - Examples are tropical, Mediterranean, arctic.
5. Select communities with different types of government.
 - Examples are democracies, dictatorships, monarchies.
6. Consider selecting communities that are not represented in other courses in the New York State prekindergarten - grade 12 social studies program.
 - Australia, for example, is a country whose history, culture, and geography are not focused on in other courses in any depth.
 - Examine the core curricula for other social studies courses and list those areas that are not significantly taught; make a connection to them in grade 3.
7. Emphasize examples across time.
 - Read newspapers and watch news programs.
 - Identify those countries and regions that are focused on.
 - Avoid studying world communities from a historic perspective; place the emphasis on contemporary versus historic events.
8. Select communities on the basis of students' interests.
 - Build upon prior knowledge/draw from their experiences.

Research the resources available.

1. What previous knowledge do you and/or your colleagues have about the selected world communities?
 - Find textbooks, guides, travel brochures, and other materials based on courses you have taken, or filmed programs you or other people you know attended or watched.
 - Think about languages you have studied and places you have visited or would like to visit.
 - Inquire about the language and travel experiences of colleagues.
 - Borrow photographs, books, histories, and other materials your colleagues might have pertaining to your selected world communities.

2. What instructional materials are available to you?

- Read through a catalog of textbooks and resources available from publishers.
- Attend a local, state, or national social studies conference to get catalogs, material samples, and instructional strategies directly from publishers and exhibitors.
- Check your school or local library, teacher center, and regional BOCES.
- Find activities, programs, and organizations that exist in your school's city, town, or village that focus on a world community (e.g., cultural museums, educational programs, historic sites).
- Identify which multimedia, computer software, and video/audio programming exist in your school and which can be purchased or borrowed.

3. Are there sufficient professional development opportunities to help you develop content expertise in your selected world communities?

- Look for teacher center or local college credit-bearing courses, education programs, summer teacher institutes, study seminars, and programs abroad.
- See the *New York State Education Department Social Studies Leaders' Guide: Prekindergarten - Grade 12* for assistance in planning and professional development (coming soon to the social studies website).

Pace your curriculum.

1. How much time can be devoted to social studies each week?

2. How long will it take to study each world community selected?

- Will you study one community, continent, or region per month? Per marking period? Per quarter?

3. How can interdisciplinary connections be made to foster the study of world communities in other curricula?

- Develop strategies to incorporate other subject areas in the world community units.

4. What are strategies to avoid a narrow focus in the classroom study of world communities?

- World communities should be explored from multiple perspectives-not simply from the perspectives of holidays, food, and stereotypes.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT:

Social Studies Instructional Strategies & Resources: Prekindergarten Through Grade 6

- Online at www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/pub/pubss.html .
- Grade 3: pages 127-156.
- Sections: Focus Questions; Content Understandings; Classroom Activities; Teacher Notes; Interdisciplinary Connections; Suggested Documents and Other Resources Selected by New York State Teachers; Using the Internet.

Sample Constructed-Response Questions (CRQs) and Document-Based Questions (DBQs)

- Online at www.emsc.nysed.gov/osa/elintsocst.html .
- Research previous versions of the *Grade 5 Elementary-Level Social Studies Test* to find CRQs and DBQs that address world communities.

Sample Grade 3 Lesson Plans

- "Call for Content: Grade 3 Communities Around the World" coming soon to the social studies Web site at www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/social.html .
- Sample lesson plans based on this publication and on *Social Studies Instructional Strategies & Resources: Prekindergarten Through Grade 6*.

The following [worksheet](#) can be duplicated. It summarizes the major factors to consider when selecting world communities for study in the grade 3 classroom and provides a space for you to plan how each factor relates to the needs of your school and class.



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Selected Resources

The following resources have been provided by Dr. Jervis and others to provide further background information for teachers. This list contains hypertext links or pointers to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. These links and pointers are provided for the user's convenience. The New York State Education Department does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. Further, the inclusion of links or pointers to particular items in hypertext is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered, on these outside sites, or the organizations sponsoring the sites.

Books for teachers:

Bodley, John H. (1999). *Cultural Anthropology: Tribes, States and the Global System*. 3rd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Kottak, Conrad Phillip. (2003). *Cultural Anthropology*. 5th edition. New York: McGraw Hill.

Ramsey, Patricia. (1998). *Teaching and Learning in a Diverse World: Multicultural Education for Young Children*. 2nd edition. New York: Teachers College Press.

Takaki, R. (1993). *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Websites for teachers:

1. General information on world cultures

<http://www.un.org/pubs/cyberschoolbus/index.asp>

The Cyber Schoolbus: a United Nations website with interactive maps leading to information on U.N. member states.

<http://cp.settlement.org/>

Cultural Profiles Project: a Canadian website (bilingual French and English) with links to country information.

<http://www.sil.si.edu/SILPublications/Anthropology-K12/anth-k12.htm>

Anthropology on the Internet for K-12 from the Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/>

History and Culture: a section of the National Geographic Society's website.

<http://www.folklife.si.edu/index.html>

Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/ndl.html>

Online Collections and Special Presentations from the American Folklife Center.

<http://www.globalschoolnet.org/GSH/index.html>

The Global Schoolhouse: teacher opportunities to connect their class with people in other countries; global learning opportunities.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

CIA World Factbook contains a page with flags, maps, and profiles of countries.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/>

Background Notes: this site is managed by the U.S Department of State, containing information on countries from around the world.

2. Arts

<http://www.amnh.org>

American Museum of Natural History.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah> The Metropolitan Museum's Timeline of Art History: the index feature is useful for accessing specific objects and themes.

http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/Artweb_frames.html

Non-Western Art Links on the World Wide Web from Boston College.

<http://www.artsmia.org/world-myths/>

World Myths & Legends in Art from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

3. Folklore and Mythology

<http://www.windows.ucar.edu/>

Windows to the Universe-Mythology covers mythology from all over the world, particularly myths relating to the cosmos.

www.bulfinch.org

Bulfinch's Mythology: a classic collection of European myth and legend online.

<http://www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/>

Tales of Wonder-Folk and Fairy Tales from Around the World.

<http://www.nyfolklore.org/>

Website of the New York Folklore Society.

4. Geography

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/lessons/grade3.html>

World Wise Schools from the Peace Corps: lessons in five separate learning standard areas, folk tales, streaming video on countries, letters from Peace Corps volunteers, opportunities to partner with a Peace Corps volunteer.

<http://www.missiongeography.org/k4master.htm>

Mission Geography: managed by NASA with lesson for teachers and online materials to use

with students. Lessons related to scale, perspective, and water; lessons that use satellite images from the U.S. and other countries.

<http://alliance.la.asu.edu/azga>

Arizona Geographic Alliance: outline maps of Mexico and regions of the world, maps that show different perspectives (e.g., the Pacific Ocean in the center of the map).

<http://www.worldclimate.com>

WorldClimate: information, precipitation, temperature.

<http://visibleearth.nasa.gov>

Visible Earth: satellite images from areas across the globe

<http://nysgis.state.ny.us/>

New York State GIS Clearinghouse.

<http://www.gisday.com/>

GIS Day website.

5. New York State Education Department

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/ssscore1.pdf>

Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum - pages 7-9 of the PDF version (pages 25-27 of the print version) contain the content understandings for *Grade 3: Communities Around the World-Learning About People and Places*.

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/ssisr3.pdf>

Social Studies Instructional Strategies & Resources: Prekindergarten Through Grade 6 - grade 3 section (pages 127-156).

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/pub/pubss.html>

Social Studies Publications webpage, including the complete versions of the *Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum* and *Social Studies Instructional Strategies & Resources: Prekindergarten Through Grade 6*.

<http://eservices.nysed.gov/vls>

The New York State Education Department's Virtual Learning System (VLS) offers the full text of New York State's learning standards with their key ideas and performance indicators, as well as alternate performance indicators for students with severe disabilities. It provides resources that classroom teachers can use to support preK-12 standards-based instruction, such as sample tasks, learning experiences and lesson plans.

Books for children:

Ajmera, Maya and Anna Rhesa Versola. (1998). *Children From Australia to Zimbabwe: A Photographic Journey Around the World*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.

Angell, Carole S. (1996). *Celebrations Around the World: A Multicultural Handbook*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.

Hollyer, Beatrice (in association with Oxfam). (2004). *Let's Eat! What Children Eat Around the World*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.

Kindersley, Barnabas and Anabel (in association with UNICEF). (1995). *Children Just Like Me*. New York: Dorling Kindersley.

Morris, Ann et al. (1992). *Houses and Homes* (Around the World series). New York: HarperCollins.

Stephanchuck, Carol. (2002). *Exploring Chinatown: A Children's Guide to Chinese Culture*. Berkeley, CA: Pacific View Press.



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Glossary

COLOR CODED KEY:

Terms that appear in Dr. Heatwole's article are written in plain text.

Terms that appear in Dr. Jervis's article are bolded red.

Terms that appear in both articles are in italics green.

anthropology - The study of the similarities and differences of the world's people.

barrier effects - Physical, economic, cultural, and political obstacles that inhibit the spread of culture (e.g., language, religion, race/ethnicity, or even historic events). See also physical barrier effects and social barrier effects.

civilization - Generally understood as a more advanced form of organized life; civilizations usually have more complex forms of social, political, military, and religious life. Writing and the use of metals are also features of many civilizations.

cross-cultural contacts - Outside influences that stimulate cultural change. The Silk Road brought silk to the West and Buddhism to China in the East.

cultural change - A shift that may occur within a culture, usually as a result of outside influences.

cultural communities - Groups that have a number of cultural traits in common. Most countries include a mosaic of many cultural communities.

cultural components - Attributes that vary from culture to culture, including religion, language, architecture, cuisine, technology, music, dance, sports, medicine, dress, gender roles, laws, education, government, agriculture, economy, grooming, values, work ethic, etiquette, courtship, recreation, and gestures.

cultural diffusion - The spread of a culture and/or an individual trait, and the factors that account for such a spread.

cultural dissonance - Elements of discord or lack of agreement within a culture.

cultural ecology - The interactions between a culture and its physical environment.

cultural geography - A branch of geography that focuses on cultural traits, the impact of material and nonmaterial human culture on the environment, and the human organization of space.

cultural interaction - The interconnectedness of various cultural components.

cultural landscape - The natural landscape as modified by human activities and bearing the imprint of a culture group or society including buildings, shrines, signage, sports and recreational facilities, economic and agricultural structures, transportation systems, etc.

cultural practices - Ways of life that are unique to the inhabitants of a particular area.

cultural stereotype - The misrepresentation of a culture that often involves a particular people's clothing, food, and/or shelter, and most often rests on the notion that certain people live pretty much as did their distant ancestors (e.g., the Inuits are portrayed dressed in animal skins, carrying spears, and living in igloos with dog sleds parked outside; in reality, modern Inuits live much like other North Americans).

cultural traits - Distinguishing features of a culture such as language, dress, religion, values, and an emphasis on family; these traits are shared throughout that culture.

culture - The total way of life held in common by a group of people, including technology, traditions, language, and social roles. It is learned and handed-down from one generation to the next by non biological means. It includes the patterns of human behavior (i.e. ideas, beliefs, values, artifacts, and ways of making a living) which any society transmits to succeeding generations to meet its fundamental needs.

culture areas - Regions with shared cultural traits (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa).

culture hearth - An area where a distinctive set of cultural traits develops, such as the Fertile Crescent and the Nile River Valley.

culture region - A portion of the Earth's surface that has one or more common cultural elements.

diversity - Understanding and respecting others and oneself including the similarities and differences in language, gender, socioeconomic class, religion, and other human characteristics and traits.

environment - The overall setting, including natural elements and elements created by humans, in which a world community exists.

ethnic change - A situation in which one cultural community is expanding or contracting in opposition to another, often leading to an atmosphere of tension and conflict between communities.

ethnic groups - A collection of people distinguished, by others or themselves, primarily on the basis of cultural or nationality characteristics.

geography - The academic subject that describes and explains the distribution of phenomena that characterize our planet's surface in terms of both physical and human features or dimensions.

global diversity - The existence of thousands of cultures having similarities and differences in language, socioeconomic class, religion, and other human traits.

human geography - The study of the distribution of human populations, their cultures, their activities and behaviors, and their relationship with and impact on the physical landscapes they occupy.

language - A symbolic form of communication-perhaps the most important feature of a culture.

migration - The permanent (or relatively permanent) relocation of an individual or group to a new, usually distant, place of residence and employment.

multicultural - Many cultures coexisting in a similar time and place.

"nature or nurture" - Whether it is our inherited genetic predisposition ("nature") or what we learn as we grow up ("nurture") that predominantly shapes us and our differences as individuals.

physical barrier effects - Characteristics of the natural (physical) environment that inhibit the spread of culture.

physical geography - The study of the structures, processes, distributions, and changes through time of the natural phenomena of the Earth's surface that are significant to human life (e.g., oceans, deserts, mountain ranges, dense forests, and climates).

race - Features (e.g., skin, hair, and eye color) that are genetic (inherited) and shared by a large group of people. Social scientists now doubt whether race is a useful concept.

rural - Having to do with the countryside; rustic; away from cities and suburbs.

shrinking global communities - As communication and transportation technology has improved, the ability of groups of people to interact quickly across time and space has made distance across the globe and between communities seem shorter.

social barrier effects - Characteristics that differentiate human groups and potentially limit interaction between them, thus inhibiting the spread of culture (e.g., language, religion, race and ethnicity, and a history of conflict between specific cultural communities).

social institutions - A set of organized beliefs, rules, and practices that establishes how a society will attempt to meet basic needs.

suburban - Having to do with a district, town, village, etc. on the outskirts of a city.

symbolic meanings - Words or other communicative things such as gestures or pictures that stand for something else.

urban - Having to do with cities, or characteristic of cities.

westernization - The process in which non-Western societies acquire Western culture traits, which are adopted in varying degrees of thoroughness.

