

## CURRICULUM GUIDE



# CULTURE

## African Pen Pals

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[www.woub.org/africanpenpals](http://www.woub.org/africanpenpals)

## ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

### OVERVIEW

Culture is the total way of life of a group of people, including their beliefs, institutions, and technology. Culture is developed and learned – we are not born with a particular cultural understanding. It is our learned culture that creates our strong sense of the physical and behavioral characteristics that reflect “us,” and those that signify “others.”

In this unit, students will be asked to investigate the concept of culture. They will do this first by identifying aspects of their school culture. Then they will view an African Pen Pals episode and identify features of culture observed in the episode. The overriding goals of this unit are to have students see the similarities between their culture and the African Pen Pal’s culture and to identify features of any given culture that have a positive impact on members of that culture.

The students will watch one or more of the ten episodes of the African Pen Pal series. They will learn about values, beliefs, norms, valid and invalid inferences and use critical thinking skills to examine their own culture and that of others. They will create valid inferences and identify elements of culture that are likely to improve the human condition. Students may find that there are elements of their own culture that are not desirable or positive.

### UNIT GOALS

At the conclusion of this unit, students will be able to:

- Identify some of the universal features of cultures.
- Complete a matrix to determine aspects of their local school’s culture.
- State the differences between values, beliefs, and norms.
- Write inferences and support the inferences with evidence.
- List the similarities between their own school and family cultures and that of one (or more) of the African Pen Pal hosts.
- Identify elements of culture that are likely to improve the human condition.

### GRADE LEVEL INDICATORS

#### LANGUAGE ARTS

- Demonstrate active listening strategies
- Draw logical inferences from presentations and visual media
- Distinguish between a speaker’s opinions and verifiable facts
- Deliver persuasive presentations
- Produce informal writings for various purposes

#### WORK AND FAMILY LIFE

- Compare family lifestyles
- Determine the value of the diversity of world cultures

## TIME FRAME:

**Preparing to Learn:** 15 to 45 minutes

### Activities

- **1**.....30 to 45 minutes (Identify Elements of Your Own Culture)
- **2 & 3**....20 to 30 minutes (Identify the Culture of a Pen Pal)
- **4**.....10 to 20 minutes (Analyze Observations)
- **5**.....15 to 20 minutes (Make Inferences Base on Observations)
- **6**.....15 to 30 minutes (Impacting the Human Condition)
- **7** .....1 week to all year (Service-Learning Project)

## MATERIALS

**African Pen Pal DVD** – one episode

**DVD player and TV** – or Computer with DVD player and presentation system

**Paper and pencil/pen**

**Handouts:**

- Culture Pre/Post Test
- Culture – Background Information
- Features of Cultures
- School Culture Matrix - Copy A or Copy B
- Culture Observations
- Developing Inferences

**Method of Sharing with the Class:**

- Chalkboard and chalk
- Computer with projector or large screen TV
- Chart paper and markers
- Dry erase board and markers

**Optional:**

- Internet Access

## PREPARE TO LEARN:

Distribute the handout “Culture Pre/Post Test” to check the students’ knowledge of the following terms and concepts:

culture, norms, values, beliefs, material, non-material, inference, levels of culture, features of culture, evidence, fact, and opinion.

See the Critical Thinking Glossary in the Appendix.

If the students need to learn about the terms and concepts, distribute the handouts, “Culture – Background Information” and “Features of Culture” prior to beginning the activities in this unit. Have the students read the information and discuss it.

## ACTIVITIES

### 1 Identifying Local Culture: School Culture

There are two options available for this activity. Choose either “School Culture Matrix” Copy A or Copy B. Both copies ask the students to note frequency of occurrence or observation of material objects and behaviors within the school environment. The goal is to discover their school’s culture.

- **Matrix Copy A:** All behaviors and materials have been pre-selected.
- **Matrix Copy B** has room for student input on the materials and behaviors for which they will look.

Distribute copies of the version you have chosen to the class and have them fill it out independently or in small groups.

#### Directions for the “School Culture Matrix, Copy B”:

- Fill in the blank rows below “gel pens” with other material objects seen at school.
- Fill in the blank rows below “turning in home/class work” with other behaviors observed at school.

#### Directions for both Matrix Copies A and B:

- For each row, check the box that is the best indicator of the frequency with which you observe the listed material objects and behaviors at school:
  - Everyone or most students at school have the material goods or demonstrate the behavior.
  - The majority of people have it/do it.
  - Less than half but still quite a few have it/do it.
  - Very few or none of the students have it/do it.

#### Discuss the results of the students’ observations

- Create a list of the material objects and behaviors that the class agrees are a significant part of the school’s culture. Display the list in some manner: Blackboard, chart paper, overhead projector, computer with large screen TV or projector attached. Preserve the list so it may be referred to later.
- Have the students check the Peace Corps’s “Features of Culture” list to see if the items they have listed fit into any of the culture categories.
- Ask them if checking their observations against the “Features of Culture” changed their opinions about what they chose to list. Discuss their opinions. Ask students to back up their opinions with facts/evidence. Modify the class list if necessary.
- Ask them to identify any beliefs or norms underlying items designated as part of the school’s culture.

Peace Corps  
“Features of Culture”  
web page:  
<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/bridges/lesson2/worksheet1.html>

### 2 Identifying Culture: An African Pen Pal

Pass out copies of the “African Pen Pal Cultural Observations” sheet. Remind students about active listening and visual observation skills. Tell them that they are to record their observations of both objects (“material culture”) and behaviors – what the Pen Pal does (“non-material culture”) while they view the episode. Spelling should not be a concern. Abbreviations and shortened words should be encouraged as long as the student can remember for what the abbreviations stand.

### 3 View one of the 10 African Pen Pal episodes

Select one of the ten African Pen Pals Episodes for your students to view. Use the African Pen Pal Synopses to help you make your selection. You may choose to watch an entire episode (about 25 minutes) including the “wrap-around” – the producer’s commentary section following the Pen Pal’s day . You may choose to view only the Pen Pal’s day (about 15 minutes). Preview the episode before using it with your students. Some episodes have more mature content.

Introduce the Pen Pal and the his/her country. Remind the students to record their observations while they watch. Note taking using abbreviations and short versions of words is acceptable as long as the student can interpret what s/he has written.

### 4 Analyze Observations:

After viewing the episode, have the students compare their observations in small groups. Each group will:

- Discuss which features of culture were observed. See the handout “Features of Cultures” at the end of this unit.
- Decide which observations might be significant in that they may be illustrative of the Pen Pal’s family, school, or other level of culture. The group may feel something is significant based on the number of lists on which it appears. Observations made by a single student can be designated as significant if all the group members agree it is illustrative of the Pen Pal’s culture.

### 5 Make Inferences and Support the Inferences with Evidence:

Use the handout, “Developing Inferences”. Read the information and discuss it. Return to the results of the “School Cultural Matrix” compiled during Activity 1 in this Unit. Ask the students to develop inferences about the values, beliefs, and norms evidenced in the class list.

#### Examples of valid inferences in many schools:

- Students at this school value blue jeans as an article of clothing.
- Raising one’s hand before asking questions is the expected norm in this school.

Have the students look at the list(s) of observations generated from watching and listening to the African Pen Pal episode. Ask the students to develop and record inferences about what beliefs, values or norms may underlie the observed materials and/or behavior they listed. Encourage them to work to make valid inferences. The students may want to watch the African Pen Pals episode a second time before completing this assignment.

Have the students orally share their inference(s) about the African Pen Pal’s values, beliefs, or norms with the rest of the class. Tell them that they are to deliver a brief persuasive presentation. The goal is to persuade the class that the shared inference(s) is/are correct (or good, or logical) and deserves to be accepted as such by others. They will need to establish a clear position and include relevant evidence to support their positions.

You may wish to have the students take the “Culture Pre/Post Test” as this time to evaluate their knowledge of the terms.

Students can review concepts and terms with the Unit 3 handouts “Culture – Background Information,” and “Features of Culture.” Also see the Critical Thinking Glossary in the index.

## 6 Impacting the Human Condition:

Ask the students to reflect upon the culture of their school and the culture of the African Pen Pal(s) that they have observed. Ask the students to think about the following questions.

- What behaviors make things better - or have the potential for making things better for the human beings who belong to that cultural group?
- Would any of the behaviors you identified also make life better for other culture groups?
- What behaviors might make a member of the group...
  - ...stronger?
  - ...healthier?
  - ...more able to help others now or in the future?
  - ...more able to make lasting friendships?
  - ...more likely to be self supporting as an adult?
  - ...more likely to enhance or contribute to family or community happiness?
- Add additional ideas – as desired.

Have the students write an expository essay on the aspects of culture each believes are likely to have a positive impact on the human condition. They should explain what the cultural element is, tell if the element is common to them and/or to the African Pen Pal, and explain how and/or why that cultural element is likely to make things better for human beings.

## 7 Extension Activity: Service Learning: Ubuntu

Moses Maesya, a 13-year-old boy from the Maasai ethnic group in Magadi, Kenya, explains to viewers that he wishes to be a doctor when he grows up. He says, “When I complete my studies, I [expect] to be a medical doctor so that I can serve my people who walk long distances looking for medical attention.”

Learn more about Ubuntu at: <http://www.free-definition.com/Ubuntu.html>

Moses’s selfless dedication to his community is called “ubuntu” [*oo-boon-too*] in Zulu. The term means “humanity or fellow feeling; kindness towards others.” It stems from the Zulu saying “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” i.e. “a person is a person through other persons.”

Commitment to one’s community is the absolute measure of values in Maasai society. Ubuntu is an element of culture that can improve the human condition. It is even mentioned in the Constitution of South Africa.

In the United States citizens often demonstrate some of what the South Africans call Ubuntu by volunteering time and/or resources to help others. You and your class may wish to extend this unit by developing a service project and/or a fundraiser to benefit some part of your community, your state, your country, or even the global community. A list of charities with connections to Africa are listed on the next page.

### **Charity Navigator <http://www.charitynavigator.org/>**

- Charity Navigator, bills itself as an independent charity evaluator that works to advance a more efficient and responsive philanthropic marketplace by evaluating the financial health of America’s largest charities.
- Charities listed below were found in the Charity Navigator search results for the category “International.”
- The list is provided solely for your convenience. You will need to make a personal evaluation of any charity you select.

### **Africare**

- <http://www.africare.org>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 5 stars

### **Americares**

- <http://www.americares.org/main.asp>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 5 stars

### **Books for Africa**

- <http://www.booksforafrica.org>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 5 stars

### **CARE**

- <http://www.careusa.org/campaigns/index.asp>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 3 Stars

### **Children’s Hunger Fund**

- <http://www.childrenshungerfund.org>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 5 stars

### **International Medical Equipment Collaborative**

- <http://www.imecamerica.org/index.cfm>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 5 stars

### **Project Hope**

- <http://www.projecthope.org>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 5 stars

### **UNICEF**

- <http://www.unicef.org/whatwedo/index.html>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 3 stars

### **World Education**

- <http://www.worlded.org/>
- Charity Navigator Rating – 5 stars

# CULTURE Pre/Post TEST

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Matching:** Place the letter for the best definition in the box to the left of each term.

<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>1</b>	Culture	<b>A</b>	A rule (written or unwritten) that defines what people should or should not do, think, or feel in any given social situation.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>2</b>	Norm	<b>B</b>	Those things that are thought to be true or false. Ideas or theories that are not supported by objective or factual evidence.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>3</b>	Value	<b>C</b>	An idea about what is good, right, wise, or beneficial and what is bad, wrong, unwise, or not helpful.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>4</b>	Belief	<b>D</b>	Well-grounded; sound; having a conclusion correctly derived from the premise.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>5</b>	Material culture	<b>E</b>	Subdivisions of a larger way of life. Examples include: family, school, and church.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>6</b>	Inference	<b>F</b>	The total way of life of a group of people, including their beliefs, institutions, and technology.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>7</b>	Levels of Culture	<b>G</b>	All the things that people make or build with natural or human-made resources; physical things.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>8</b>	Valid	<b>H</b>	A decision or conclusion based on facts.

**9** Define non-material culture and give an example.

**10** Write a fact about this sentence.

### Matching:

- 1 Culture – **F** – The total way of life of a group of people, including their beliefs, institutions, and technology.
- 2 Norm – **A** – A rule (written or unwritten) that defines what people should or should not do, think, or feel in any social situation.
- 3 Value – **C** – An idea about what is good, right, wise, or beneficial and what is bad, wrong, unwise, or not helpful.
- 4 Belief – **B** – Those things that are thought to be true or false. Ideas or theories that are not supported by objective or factual evidence.
- 5 Material Culture – **G** – All the things that people make or build with natural or human-made resources: physical things.
- 6 Inference – **H** – A decision or conclusion based on facts.
- 7 Levels of Culture – **E** – Subdivisions of a larger way of life. Examples include: family, school, and church.
- 8 Valid – **D** – Well-grounded; sound; having a conclusion correctly derived from the premise.

### Short Answer Questions

#### 9 Define non-material culture and give an example

**a Definition:** Not of a physically or worldly nature; relating to or concerned with spiritual or intellectual things rather than things of a physical or worldly nature. Accept all definitions that contain the essential nature of the definition. Specific examples of correct answers might include:

- The parts of a culture that you can't touch or see.
- Behaviors and thoughts that have to do with what a person from a particular culture believes.
- The ways that people in a culture act (or behave) and what they think.

**b Non-material culture:** Examples should include behaviors and thoughts.

Specific examples of correct answers might include:

- Beliefs about the responsibilities of children of teens - Older children taking care of younger siblings, working hard in school, completing chores, and so on.
- The Role of the Family – Females in the family always preparing the food, parents caring for their children.
- Ways of greeting others – shaking hands with new acquaintances, saying “Hi” to friends, hugging your uncle or kissing your mother on the cheek when you haven't seen them for awhile.
- Gestures to show one understands what one has been told – nodding the head up and down.
- See the handout “Features of Culture” for more ideas.

#### 10 Facts about the sentence “Write a fact about this sentence.”

**a** Accept any factual statement about the sentence.

**b** Specific examples of correct answers might include:

- The sentence is declarative.
- It ends with a period.
- It begins with a capital letter.
- The sentence has six words.
- The first word in the sentence is “Write.”

## CULTURE – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### What is Culture?

Culture is “a shared way of life that includes values [what is good/bad], beliefs [what is true/false], and norms [rules for behavior developed based on values and beliefs] transferred within a particular society from generation to generation” (Scupin, 38). Transmission of culture is a social activity: culture is learned—we aren’t born with a particular cultural understanding.

### Levels of Culture

We all live and “operate” within a variety of cultures. There is the unique culture of one’s home and family; communities have a culture as does one’s school or workplace; the church you attend and clubs and organizations you belong to have a culture, and there is a national culture that unites citizens of a particular country.

### Culture Observed Among the African Pen Pals

Even if you watch both of the segments from one African Pen Pal’s country, you do not have enough information to form a valid inference about the culture of the entire country from a sampling of two individuals. You may, however, be able to form inferences about the culture of each host’s family, school, or religion

### The Components of Culture (From Scupin, 44-45)

**1 Material culture:** the physical products of human society  
—ranging from tools to styles of clothing.

**2 Nonmaterial culture:** the intangible, “invisible” products of human society:

**a VALUES:** the standards by which members of a society define what is good and bad, worthy – less worthy – unworthy, beautiful and ugly. They are assumptions that are widely shared within the society (Scupin, 44).

**Example:** Predominant U.S. values include: individual achievement and success, efficiency, progress, material comfort, equality, freedom...(Scupin, 44).

**b BELIEFS:** “Cultural conventions that concern true or false assumptions, specific descriptions of the nature of the universe and humanity’s place in it.”

Example: U.S. value: “Education is good.”

U.S. belief: “Grading is the best way to evaluate students.”

“Most people in a given culture assume that their beliefs are firmly grounded in common sense” (Scupin, 44).

**c NORMS:** “A society’s rules of right and wrong behavior...shared rules or guidelines that define how people ‘ought’ to behave under certain circumstances” (Scupin, 45).

**Example:** U.S. value: individualism

Associated U.S. behavioral norm: Work for your own self-interest; do not become a burden to your family or community (Scupin, 45).

Scupin, Robert. (2000). *Cultural Anthropology: A Global Perspective*.  
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

## FEATURES OF CULTURE

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/bridges/lesson2/worksheet1.html>

- 1 Styles of dress
- 2 Ways of greeting people
- 3 Beliefs about hospitality
- 4 Importance of time
- 5 Paintings
- 6 Values
- 7 Literature
- 8 Beliefs about child raising (children and teens)
- 9 Attitudes about personal space/privacy
- 10 Beliefs about the responsibilities of children and teens
- 11 Gestures to show you understand what has been told to you
- 12 Holiday customs
- 13 Music
- 14 Dancing
- 15 Celebrations
- 16 Concept of fairness
- 17 Nature of friendship
- 18 Ideas about clothing
- 19 Foods
- 20 Greetings
- 21 Facial expressions and hand gestures
- 22 Concept of self
- 23 Work ethic
- 24 Religious beliefs
- 25 Religious rituals
- 26 Concept of beauty
- 27 Rules of polite behavior
- 28 Attitude toward age
- 29 The role of family
- 30 General worldview

While the cultures of all – or most – societies display these same features, few cultures address them all in the same way. To keep from misunderstanding the behavior of individuals from another culture, you have to try to see the world from their point of view, not yours.

## POINT OF VIEW

When visiting the house of someone you do not know, knock on the door of the house and, when someone comes to the door, ask politely if you may enter.

Does the statement above sound like good advice? Read about visiting a Zulu home.

If you visit a Zulu homestead or village, don't enter unless you have been invited. Wait outside until someone notices you and invites you in. Don't call out to anyone to tell them that you are there. Just wait patiently. Don't lose your temper even if it seems like everyone inside is ignoring you.

Try to put yourself in the place of a Zulu.

How or why might this greeting behavior have come to be a part of Zulu culture?

The custom in some Mongolian villages is markedly different from both of the above examples. In those villages, you should approach the home (called a ger) and call out loudly before you get near the entry, "Hold the dog!" – even if the owners have no dogs at all.

Now try to think like a Mongolian villager. How or why might this greeting behavior have come to be a part of this culture?

The Zulu reference was found on the About.com Africa for Visitors web page:

"How to Avoid Offending the Zulu." (2004) <http://goafrica.about.com/library/howto/htzulu.htm/> Accessed May 23, 2004.

The Mongolian reference was found on the Visit Mongolia 2003 Culture page: "Lifestyle." (2002) <http://www.visit2003.mn/culture/lifestyle.htm/> Accessed May 23, 2004.

## School Culture Matrix – Copy A

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**CULTURE:** The total way of life of a group of people, including their beliefs, institutions, and technology.

*If nearly everyone has the material or shows the same behavior, is that material or behavior valued in the culture?*

<b>Observed:</b>	All or Most	Over Half	Fewer than Half	None or Very Few	Is the observed object or behavior a part of your school's culture? Be prepared to support your opinion.
<b>MATERIAL OBJECTS:</b>					
Jeans					
School Uniforms					
Tennis Shoes					
Backpack					
Spiral Notebook					
Eyeglasses					
Gel Pen					
Cell Phones and/or Pagers					
Earrings					
Bandanas					
T-shirts w/company logos					
<b>BEHAVIORS:</b>					
Asking questions during class					
Turning in required homework/class work					
Imitating sports figures or other media stars					
Raising hand before asking questions in class					
Talking with friends					
Making rude gestures					
Bullying others					
Helping/Caring for peers— trying to help/care for					
Paying attention in class					
Putting people down, verbally					
Listening to music					
Using free time to complete classroom assignments					
Using “insult” humor with friends					
Playing any sports, organized or pick-up					
Playing instruments, singing, creating art, other “fine arts”.					



# African Pen Pals Cultural Observation Sheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of host: \_\_\_\_\_

Country and city: \_\_\_\_\_

*I observed the following during the episode. I think these things are part of the African Pen Pal's culture:*

Material Objects:	Behaviors:

Compare and discuss your observations with the others in your group.

On a fresh sheet of paper, make a new list of observations that the group feels are significant. (This may be based on the number of lists it appeared on. Even an observation made by just one person may be listed if the group agrees that it is part of the Pen Pal's culture.)

## Developing Inferences

**INFER:** to derive as a conclusion from facts or premises; to infer implies arriving at a conclusion by reasoning from evidence.

**Observation:** We see Ahmed in the video in his room biting his fingernails while he does his homework.

**Inference #1:** Nail biting is an acceptable behavior in Ahmed's family.

**Inference #2:** Ahmed is a nervous person.

**Observations:** Ahmed tells us that he bathes every morning before going to school.

We see Ahmed washing his face and brushing his teeth in the video.

**Inference #3:** Personal hygiene and cleanliness are important to Ahmed.

**Inference #4:** Personal hygiene and cleanliness are important to Ahmed's family.

**Inference #5:** All the citizens of Ahmed's country value personal hygiene and cleanliness.

**Observations:** Ahmed tells us he lives in a high-rise flat (apartment) in a large city.

We see both the inside and the outside of his apartment. The video also shows us many shots of other high-rise apartment buildings in Ahmed's city.

**Inference #6:** People in Ahmed's city tend to live in high-rise apartments.

**Inference #7:** People in Ahmed's city value apartments over single-family houses.

*Valid or Invalid?*

An inference may be valid – further investigation will support it – or invalidate it.

Which of the above inferences are valid?

Of the above inferences, only numbers 3 and 6 might stand up to further investigation.

### Invalid inferences:

- 1:** There is not enough information to support this inference. Further investigation may show that Ahmed only bites his nails while he is alone doing his homework. It may show that he must hide this behavior from his family.
- 2:** Nail biting might be a sign of nervousness in one culture but is it a worldwide symptom of nervousness? You need to be more familiar with Ahmed's culture before you can know if something that seems very much like your own culture actually is like your own culture. Perhaps in Ahmed's country nail scissors or clippers are scarce and biting the nails is an accepted method of trimming them.
- 4:** This might be true but there is not enough evidence. You would need to observe or have had Ahmed inform you that all or most of the member's of Ahmed's family bathe each morning in order to make this a valid inference.
- 5:** Not enough data. We would need to learn a lot more about Ahmed's country. Viewing information about one citizen will not provide enough data to know if an inference applies to his entire country. A single example can prove that something is not true, but a single example can never prove that something is true.
- 7:** Not enough information. One would need to have evidence from many parts of the city. The evidence would have to include the citizens' opinions on their dwelling preferences because the decision about the type of dwelling lived in could have been based on a number of variables including: Types of dwellings available, the cost of living in the dwelling, the location of the dwelling. Perhaps it was chosen because it was close to one's work or family, and so on.