

Lesson 1.1B

Cultures in Contact

Overview

Where do the boundaries between one culture begin and another end? What makes a culture? Examining these questions will lead to an appreciation of the level of complexity found in every culture. Students will gain an appreciation of how the experiences of individuals and communities are central to truly understanding culture at a deeper level.



Resource List

- *B.C. First Nations Studies*
- *B.C. First Nations Studies 12 Source File*
- *B.C. First Nations Studies 12: Perspectives*

What is Your Culture?

A culture is a people's whole way of life. When we think about culture, the aspects that tend to come to mind first are those that are on the surface and easy to recognize as unique such as clothing, food, language, songs, or dances. However, the majority of what constitutes culture goes a lot deeper than the surface.

The deeper aspects of culture include the stories that we tell ourselves and others, which help define our values, beliefs, social organization, the symbols and forms of creative expression that we use, and our methods of education. Culture also includes matters as profound as spirituality and world view. **Culture** includes all the activities and beliefs practised by a specific group of people that are systematically taught to subsequent generations.

Some elements of a culture adapt and change over time while others remain the same. For example, traditional coastal First Nations people in B.C. sent their dead out to the ocean in a canoe while interior First Nations people placed their dead in tree-top graves. Contemporary B.C. First Nations peoples either bury or cremate the deceased, and Christian practices may be combined with traditional First Nations funeral practices.

However, First Nations people's traditional world view regarding the passage of the dead from the world of the living remains very much the same as in the past. In death, ceremonies may be conducted to facilitate the passage of souls to another realm—though with Athapaskan cultures, death and reincarnation were not viewed as positive phenomena and therefore traditional practices did not exist to facilitate the process. First Nations people identify themselves as the descendants of other animal life forms that also possess souls. In many First Nations cultures, it is believed reincarnation occurs when a soul inhabits either an animal or human form in another life.

You are now ready to complete **Section Assignment 1.1 Part A: Cultural Perspectives**.

Ethnocentrism, Racism, and Stereotyping

Ethnocentrism

People may at times make wrong assumptions about others based on their own cultural values. This can cause misunderstandings. If we do not take into account other people's viewpoints, we end up acting in a biased or prejudiced way.

Problems occur when people hold the mistaken belief that their cultural values embody the only correct view, or that their view is better than others. This is called **ethnocentrism**.

Racism

Over time, a variety of attempts have been made to categorize humans into clearly delineated groups by different means including: skin colour or other physical attributes; ethnicity; and affiliation to a particular culture, religion, or nation. In many cases, assumptions about people categorized this way have led to *racial discrimination*—unfair treatment on the basis of these qualities.



View Roy Henry Vickers discuss “Discrimination.” Go to:

B.C. First Nations Studies 12: Perspectives > Discrimination

Historically, the British, Spanish, and explorers from other European nations held the view that they were superior to the races with which they came into contact during their numerous expeditions. This is **racism**.

Stereotyping

Ethnocentrism and racism often lead to cultural **stereotyping**, which occurs when we look at people from other cultures in superficial and simplistic ways. This can often develop into negative attitudes about people from other cultures.

Throughout history, ethnocentrism and cultural stereotyping have been at the root of many conflicts between individuals and groups. By becoming aware of our own world view and understanding the cultural context of people within other world views, we can learn to value the richness of cultural diversity.



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What Does Racism Look Like?

Acts of racism can cause emotional distress to individuals and occasionally to whole communities. Sometimes racism leads to violent conflicts. The first step to eliminating racism is to identify when, where, and how it occurs.

**Read This**

In your *B.C. First Nations Studies 12 Source File* read “Going to Town School,” excerpted from Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*.

1. List all the examples of prejudice and racism that you noticed in the excerpt.

2. Define the following terms in your own words by making use of examples within the reading excerpt: *bias*, *prejudice*, *discrimination*, and *racism*.

3. Write a brief synopsis of the excerpt.



Guided Practice 1.1B 2 **Responding to Racism**

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has been instrumental in dealing with obvious discrimination towards groups and individuals in a public setting. Though efforts have been made to help reduce racism, it is obvious that racism is still a destructive force in our society as we may see by watching the local news or reading a local newspaper. We can learn about racism by listening to people who have experienced it.



Read This

Read the following poems in your *B.C. First Nations Studies 12 Source File*.

- “I Want to Dance Wild Indian Black Face” by Anneharte, Anishnabe
- “Indian Woman” by Jeannette C. Armstrong

Write a reflective response to the two poems. Explain how each of the poems relates to stereotyping and racist attitudes.

You are now ready to complete **Section Assignment 1.1 Part B: Team Mascots—It’s All Just For Fun** and **Part C: Beyond Race and Racism**.

Summary

Completing this lesson has helped you to:

- define culture, ethnocentrism, racial discrimination, racism, and stereotyping
- distinguish between culture and world view and explain their relationship

Lesson 1.1C

Oral Tradition

Overview

Oral tradition is central to traditional and contemporary First Nations cultures. The oral tradition has been passed down from generation to generation for as long as First Nations cultures have existed. The tradition passes on family histories, teaches new skills and reinforces old skills, gives direction, explains why things occur the way they do, establishes ownership, and passes on numerous other important pieces of information. Many cultures make use of oral traditions to assist in maintaining knowledge of past generations so that future generations can benefit.



Resource List

- *B.C. First Nations Studies*

Recognizing Oral Tradition

“The truth about stories is that's all we are. The Okanagan storyteller Jeannette Armstrong tells us that “Through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I'm not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of the Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns.”

Thomas King. *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, p.2

In the beginning was the story. Before you could talk, you listened. You learned by listening. You were entertained by listening. You enjoyed the attention when someone was telling you a story. You enjoyed characters that amused you and you identified with some of them. You asked for stories about places and situations you were familiar with, about conflicts you experienced or observed.

Before there were books or electronic media, there were stories told by word of mouth from storyteller to audience. The reasons for telling and for listening to stories are the same today as they were generations ago—to teach and to learn physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual concepts; to teach about the past; and to teach and to learn the skills required to live.

Groups of people who transmit and receive their stories solely by word of mouth, teller to listener, are referred to as oral cultures. The oral traditions involve conventions that vary, of course, from group to group.

Conventions of Oral Traditions

The following is a list that summarizes some of the conventions of storytelling.

- The storyteller has fresh, vivid, personal use of language to keep listener attention.
- The storyteller repeats, from memory, a prescribed text.
- The storyteller may choose a story, or adjust a story, to meet specific needs and in response to audience feedback. A story may provide lessons for a listener concerning his or her role in life, or in a particular situation.
- The storyteller recognizes that within the audience there are many different levels of understanding, and that a story will inevitably have very different meanings for different listeners.
- The storyteller is aware of cultural protocols limiting which stories may be told where and when (usually seasonal).
- In many cultures, storytellers are aware of and adhere to the protocol against writing a story down, thus freezing or reducing it in some way.
- The storyteller, although expected to entertain, is often also responsible for maintaining the history of the tribe and for keeping alive important information about kinship, identity, and relationship (blood relatives and spiritual ancestors).

- The storyteller may incorporate the use of elements of performance such as drawing or performing—drumming, singing, imitating, improvising, wearing masks, dancing—to help tell the story.
- The storyteller may cite the authority from whom a story was given—“This is a story my grandfather told me and today I tell it to you.”
- The storyteller may tell a story exactly as it was told to him or her.
- The storyteller knows that culture is living and changing.
- In some cultures, the storyteller is the keeper of the story. In other words, certain individuals own the right to tell that story (a kind of oral copyright); only the individual who owns the right to the story can choose to whom he or she will tell it; and only the person who owns the story can give permission to someone else to re-tell it.



Guided Practice 1.1C 1

Form and Function in Oral Tradition



Read This

Read the following sections in your *B.C. First Nations Studies* textbook:

Chapter introduction and “Stories and Narratives” pp. 210–211

“Family Narratives” page 222

“Teaching Stories” pp. 222–224

“Oratory” page 224

“Chief Dan George's Confederation Lament” page 225

“Profile: Shirley Sterling” page 226

“Chapter Summary” page 227

Explain the meaning of each of the following terms so that the differences between them are clear:

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Oral tradition | |
| Story | |
| Oral narrative | |
| Oral literature | |
| Oratory | |
| Oral history | |
| Oral recorder | |
| Family narrative | |

Summary

Completing this lesson has helped you to:

- describe First Nations oral tradition
- define the following terms: oral tradition, story, oral narrative, oral literature, oratory, oral history, oral recorder, family narrative

Lesson 1.1D

Learning the Land

Overview

Over time, First Nations people developed ways of teaching and learning that make use of their unique world views and traditions. First Nations knowledge and histories are embedded in songs, stories, dances, crests, house posts, petroglyphs, basketry, blankets, and paintings, as well as other objects and symbols of the culture.



Resource List

- *B.C. First Nations Studies*

Traditional Education

For people of all ages, traditional teachings occur through modelling and demonstration: one learns through observation and explanation, and then through practice and reflection. Historically, traditional knowledge and wisdom were passed on from one generation to the next through interpersonal communication—conversation, storytelling, singing, and talking—while people were actively doing something. Living on the land, the traditional skills that First Nations people learned were the basis of their cultural and material survival and were therefore extremely important.

Today, traditional knowledge and wisdom are still used though these teachings may be passed on in more contemporary settings.

For First Nations teachers, sharing knowledge and wisdom entails a responsibility to bring dignity to the teacher-learner relationship. Learners are taught based on the concept of developing skills they already possess. What is taught or encouraged is dependent on the learner's life experience.

First Nations creative expression draws on the wealth of symbolism included in the myths and legends of Elders. Spirituality is especially present in First Nations symbols drawn from the influence of dreams, visions, and stories. In First Nations world view, the material world and the spiritual world are interrelated. Creative expression is a means by which First Nations spirituality can assume a physical form. Creative techniques used in wood sculpture and carving, argillite carving, drum making, printmaking, painting, weaving, and clothing design are passed down from generation to generation. First Nations creative disciplines also continue to evolve according to artists' understanding of how traditional form and function can be explored and adapted in new ways. You will learn more about First Nations creative expression in a later module.



Guided Practice 1.1D 1

Who were the Dunne-za?

“In our language there is no word for the environment because we have always been taught that it is part of our everyday living. Our everyday teachings from our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents show us how to look after the foods that we depend on and that's part of the environment, and that's also part of spirituality.”

Ruby Dunstan, Nlaka'pamux, Past Chief Councillor, Lytton Band, *B.C. First Nations Studies* textbook, p. 14.



Read This

Read “The Dunne-za: Hunters and Dreamers” on page 46 of your *B.C. First Nations Studies* textbook.

Create a list of the activities that the Dunne-za did and why they did them. What skills did they develop that allowed them to be successful in their activities—in other words, how did they adapt to their environment?

Summary

Completing this lesson has helped you to:

- analyze the relationship of First Nations peoples with the natural world
- explain the significance of traditional education with respect to land and relationships