

CULTURE WORKSHEET + I AM FROM POEM **[Due before class on Wednesday, June 10]**

Before you read any further, take a moment to consider how you would define the word “culture”.

Then, think about what does your culture consist of?

Finally, go ahead and read!

CULTURE DEFINITION #1: From Livenesscience.com (Zimmerman, 2017)

In a 2017 article on livescience.com, Kim Ann Zimmermann defines culture in this way:

Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts.

The [Center for Advance Research on Language Acquisition](#) goes a step further, defining culture as shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding that are learned by socialization. Thus, it can be seen as the growth of a group identity fostered by social patterns unique to the group.

CULTURE DEFINITION #2: Banks, J.A., Banks, & McGee, C. A. (1989). *Multicultural education*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

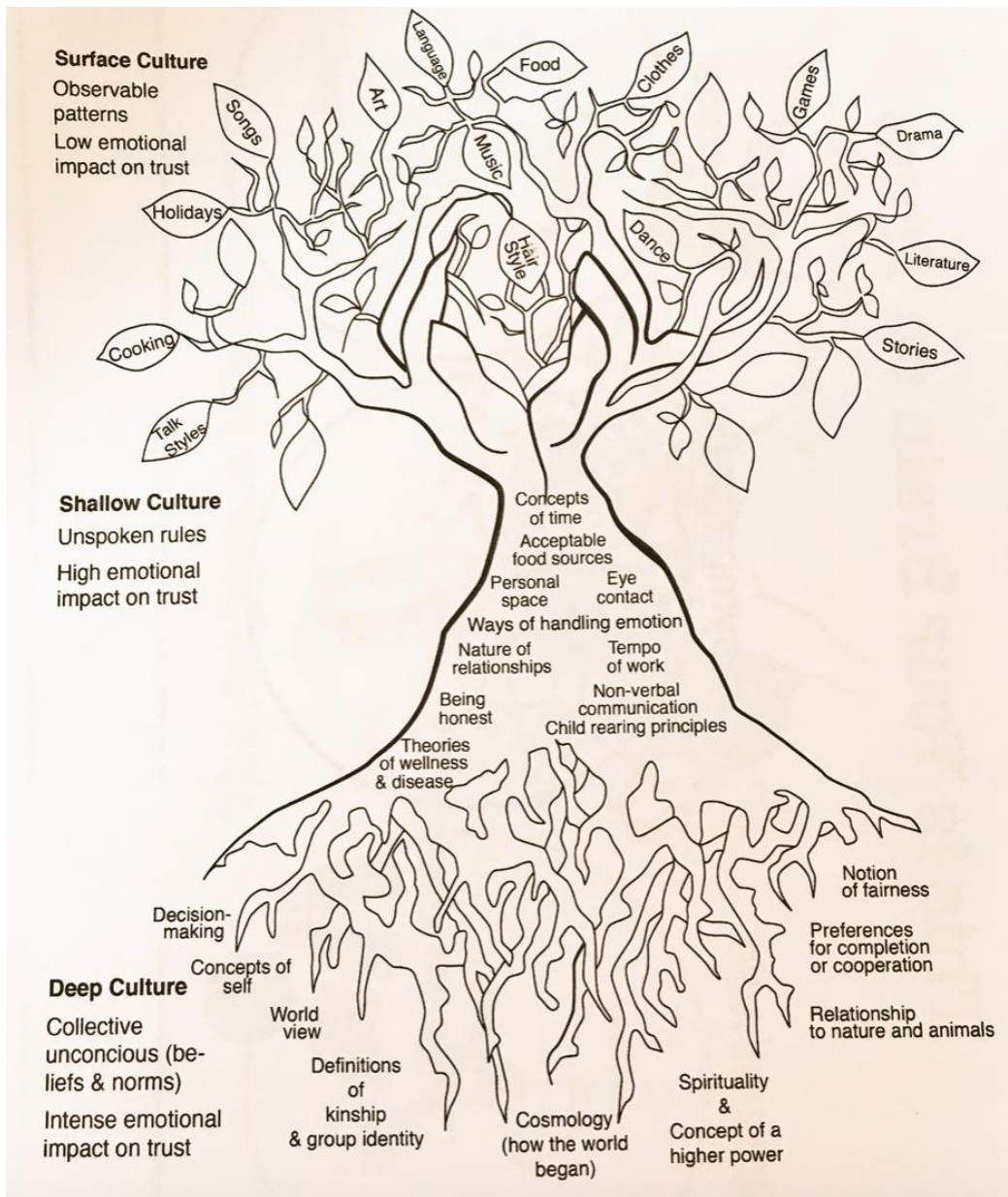
"Most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways."

DIGGING IN A BIT

When we think about culture in the U.S. today, those values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that are held by dominant social groups (i.e., White, male, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, English-speaking, able-bodied, etc.) tend to be so “normalized” that they become invisible and aren’t even seen as culture. One problem with this is

that it “otherizes” non-dominant ways of being and knowing. Another problem is that folks who come from the dominant groups do not recognize that they, too, have culture. What they do isn’t “normal” or “regular” or “right”; it’s simply one way of doing things.

Let’s take a look at this diagram from Zaretta Hammond’s influential book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. Much of what she calls “surface culture” is what gets addressed in schools (if culture is addressed at all). But it’s knowing, understanding, and working effectively with the shallow and deep culture that will support your work with students whose cultures are different from yours.



One place to start (or continue) with the work of understanding your own culture and considering your biases (which we will work together a bit with in class on Wednesday) is by taking some time to think about where you're from.

“I Am From. . .” Poem

An “I Am From. . .” poem is intended to help you reflect on and then share a bit about some of aspects of your family and community culture that have shaped you. Please refer to Zaretta Hammond’s Culture Tree (on the second page of this handout) for examples of the aspects of culture (surface-level, shallow, and deep). This type of poetry originated with George Allen Lyon’s “Where I’m From.”

Directions:

You will write 4 stanzas, where each sentence begins with “I Am From”

Stanza 1: Familiar sights, sounds, or smells of the neighborhood that feels like home.

Stanza 2: Familiar foods.

Stanza 3: *Family sayings* that indicate shallow or deep culture.

Stanza 4: *Activities* that indicate shallow or deep culture.

Example:

I am from the big tree for climbing in the neighbors’ side yard, Christmas lights, roly polys hiding under boulders, and wood-paneled station wagons. I am from the smell of lilacs and the wind wooshing and the clicking gears of my green 2-speeder.

I am from foldable pizza, matzah ball soup, Crock Pot dinners, and Chinese take-out.

I am from, “Rabbit rabbit!” and “Don’t wear the jeans with the holes in the knees” and “Grow hips, Judy!”

I am from homework and violin before tv, sleepaway camp all summer long, talking over each other, and lots of hugs.

By way of explanation, here are some aspects of deep culture that are indicated in my poem:

- We were allowed to have holey jeans, but we were expected to look “respectable” in public.
- “Real” women, my family believed, were voluptuous.
- My family had strong beliefs/practices about children learning to be independent.
- My family was a bit superstitious. “Rabbit rabbit” was the first thing we said each month “for good luck.”

We will share our poems in small groups during class on Wednesday. I hope it will be fun for you to explore your culture a bit, whether your family’s culture is something you have thought about a lot or whether this is a relatively new exploration.