

4A – What Is Culture?

MCCC SS060401, SS060402, and part of SS060403

6th Grade Social Studies Network – 2015-6

Part A of Unit 4 – Cultural Geography

GLCEs: 6G221 and 223 human characteristics and cultural perceptions; 6G411-4 describe cultures, cultural change, roles of women, and cultural influence on daily life; 6G126 and 6G132 population pattern of Africa; 6G124 use images (review 6G311 climographs of Africa, 6G321 ecosystems of Africa, for context)

Note the definitions of culture on MCCC SS060401 Page 5, especially these two:

“Culture is a set of shared values that manifest themselves in the behavior and artifacts of a given group.”

“Culture is the thoughts, behaviors, customs, and things we produce and the methods we use to produce them.”

The wording may not be quite suitable for middle school, but the key ideas are there – culture is a shared set of mental “rules” about how to behave, including ideas about how to make a living in a given place. This kind of cultural geography is very different from the focus on exotic places and bizarre behavior in many geography texts and videos – “cooking around the world,” “isn’t that a strange dance costume?” and “those people wear bones in their noses – how do you think that would feel?” Focusing on shared rules and their appropriateness in a given place (and time) is a giant step toward a cultural-geography inquiry that is useful for citizenship.

1. Possible Setup Activity: A story that can help students clarify three key definitions:

culture (e.g., of the pioneer); *culture shock* (on the Great Plains); *cultural adaptation*

Have you ever been in a place where everything you knew how to do just didn’t seem to fit?

Relax – this has happened before, many times. Today we will look at a key time in American history, when thousands of people found themselves in a place where their cultural rules didn’t work well.

US5 Whats In Your Wagon

US5 Culture of the Pioneer presentation

6th 2C N America work map and keywords

BI2 N America big idea presentation

[and/or] US3 Lewis Clark Activity set & map set

US3 Lewis Clark Environments presentation

Search Keywords: Lewis Clark Supplies

BI10 United States clickable miniAtlas

2. Activity: Cultures and environments in Africa; a clickable pdf investigation of how people made different kinds of communities by using the resources available at different latitudes (rainforests, flooding rivers, grassland crops, grassland animals, gold, salt, etc.)

BI5 Africa Big Idea Presentation

6th 4A Africa Ecoregions and Cultures matrix

BI5 Chapter: Latitude in Africa

6th 4A Africa Ecoregions card set

BI5 Africa clickable miniAtlas

Photo essays and/or videos, e.g. about subsistence farming in Uganda or cattle herding in Namibia

3. Scaffolding Activity: A BIGJob is a Basic Income-Generating Job – it brings money into a local area.

6th 4Ax What Is a BIGJob

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/56754/every-countrys-highest-valued-export>

4. Extension Activities: various ways to explore how “advanced” topics such as language, religion, slave trade, colonial history, and modern trends in settlement, migration, and even terrorism can be related to the basic cultural differences that emerged out of the radically different ways of making a living in different regions of Africa. (File list under Lesson 2 above.)

Pages from MCCC

- **SuppMaterials.SS060401.** The definitions of culture (MCCC p. 5) are great – geographers define culture in this way in order to explore how cultural ideas fit the environment in different places. Pages 1-4 graphic organizer, big ideas, and word cards are OK but incomplete – they do not cover some key concepts included in the definitions. Likewise, the food activity on Page 6 is a good start, but it leaves out a key part of a geographic investigation of food: “What foods can be grown in a particular place?” The “Mystery Culture” clues on pages 10-17 are interesting, and the answer matrix can be used to contrast the Mystery Culture (Mongolia) with other cultures that are more likely to appear on assessments of Michigan GLCEs. (In Part A, we will focus on Africa.)

- **SuppMaterials.SS060402** and **SS060402.Powerpoint.** Some teachers find the iceberg and onion metaphors useful in promoting discussion. We will add a less abstract alternative metaphor that might fit the new GLCEs better (“the right tools for the job, and how to use them”).

Takehome: The culture of a group of people is the set of shared ideas about how to behave. Cultural ideas include how to make a living and get around, how to feed, clothe, and house yourself, how to trade for things, what to do for amusement, and how to treat parents, children, neighbors, leaders, the dead, etc.