

THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

Culture has been defined in many ways; **1)** the distinct ways that people living in different parts of the world classify and represent their experiences, and act creatively. **2)** The basic ways in which people live and **3)** the ideas, practices and beliefs that make up who you are. Culture is important to individuals as a definition of who they are and a way to connect to their communities. The world consists of many different cultures and each culture has its own unique essence. While defining the term 'culture', there are several elements that together, contribute to the culture of a particular region or the culture of particular people.

Language

Language is a set of symbols used to assign and communicate meaning. It enables us to name or label the things in our world so we can think and communicate about them. Humans use language as a way of signaling identity with one cultural group and difference from others. Even among speakers of one language several different ways of using the language exist, and each is used to signal affiliation with particular subgroups within a larger culture.

Religion / Beliefs

The religion and the beliefs of the people in a civilization play an important role in shaping up of the culture as well. Beliefs are the things members of a culture hold to be true. They are the "facts" accepted by all or most members. Beliefs include, but are not limited to religious statements, and include all the things a people accept as true, including common sense everyday knowledge. Like all other cultural elements, beliefs are humanly created and produced. Beliefs can and do change, especially in modern industrial societies. Today we laugh at things our grandparents used to believe and chances are that our grandchildren will laugh at many of our beliefs as well.

Status and Roles

Status, although related, is more than a measure of a person's wealth, education, power, and prestige. Status is a slot or position within a group or society. It tells us *who* people are and *how* they "fit" into the group. Roles define *what* a person in a given status can and should do, as well as what they can and should expect from others. Roles provide a degree of stability and predictability, telling how we should respond to others and giving us an idea of how others should respond to us. Roles are negotiated and produced during interaction, and often change over time. This can also include traditional gender-based or age-based roles.

Customs / Traditions/Ritual

A *custom* is defined as the repeated practice common to many or to a particular place or class, or habit for an individual. Long established practice considered as unwritten law that regulate social life. A *tradition* is the handing down of information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction. Rituals are established form for a ceremony.

In every society, there are sets of values and goals that differentiate it from any other. Society passes principles and values to future generations through Customs, Traditions and Rituals that mold this lens through which we view our lives and shape our opinions.

The Arts

The Arts is a wide subdivision of culture. It is composed of many creative endeavors and disciplines. It is a broader term than "art," which is a description of a field usually means only the visual arts. The arts encompasses visual arts, literary arts and the performing arts such as music, theatre, dance and film among others. It includes architecture as well. The arts can teach us what a culture values most. It usually promotes pride and unity. Aesthetics refer to the ideas in a culture concerning beauty and good taste as expressed in the arts - African music is different in form to Western music. Aesthetic differences affect design, colors, packaging, brand names and media messages. For example, unless explained, the "chopped and screwed" music would mean nothing to Eastern entertainers, but in Houston, Texas most people would instantly recognize "screwed" music as the brand of the infamous artist, DJ Screw.