



THE NEW AMERICANS



Of Cultural Riches

Grade Level: 8-12

Subjects: Social Studies (U.S. History, Behavioral Studies)

Summary: Immigrants bring with them vast cultural riches, many of which become embedded in American culture. This occurs over time, as immigrants assimilate and acculturate, and as Americans adopt and modify new cultural elements.

Standards: This lesson addresses the following national content standards established at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>

Objectives

Students will:

- Define culture and its elements
- Determine how immigrant cultures are adapted to American culture
- Determine how American culture adopts elements of other cultures
- Explore family/personal cultural riches, particularly their immigrant origins

Materials Needed

- Chalkboard and chalk
- Chart paper and markers
- Television and VCR
- Copy of *The New Americans* (To purchase: Home Vision Entertainment: 888-572-8918)
- Computers with Internet access, if available
- Print and Internet resources on culture

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Background

The following are varied definitions on culture to provide a framework for student discussion.

Cultures are systems of behaviors and customs passed from one generation to the next. The rules, language, religion, family systems, recreation and education that a group of people shares provide predictability and safety in their daily lives. When people are bound together by common beliefs and practices, they understand each other and the world around them has meaning.

...[A] culture is a complex and evolving pattern of life, rooted in tradition as well as place. Culture is indelibly a part of each person's identity, but individuals also influence culture. It defines how we see ourselves and how we perceive others. How can we, then, ever understand a culture other than our own? One way is to view differences through a neutral framework that organizes cultural traits around a set of common functions. Over the years anthropologists have developed lists of cultural universals, or functions, that are found in some form in every culture on earth.

Defining Culture

Culture: is a shared, learned, symbolic system of values, beliefs and attitudes that shapes and influences perception and behavior

Culture: The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning

Culture: all the things that make up a peoples entire way of life.

Source: [Peace Corps](http://www.peacecorps.gov)

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/looking/intro1.html>

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Procedure

1. Ask students to take five minutes to write down the definition of culture and/or what they understand to be its elements. On chalkboard or chart paper, create a CULTURE web (mapping or schematic web) to record student thoughts regarding culture. (Mapping samples can be found at <http://www.graphic.org/goindex.html>) Discuss with the class the map concepts and have the students come to consensus on what culture is and includes.
2. Provide students with additional background on culture, particularly the elements that make up culture. Invite students to read several synopses of segments from *The New Americans* on the Web at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/newamericans.html> to note some common cultural elements, such as music, religion, and food. Or, if they are viewing or have seen the series, ask them to jot down the various cultural riches it underscores.
3. Have students identify and list the ways immigrant cultures influence American culture by looking at popular elements, such as food music, film, art, and others students may name. For this, students can create a chart that identifies the elements and their accompanying influence. (Students can work in theme-based groups—listing examples for one cultural element.) Have students visit the Cultural Riches section of *The New Americans* Web site <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/culturalriches.html> and find information and interactive features. Features include the Latino Mural Tradition, Mexican Home Altars, Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos) and an international cookbook. {Handouts of select content included below.}
4. Have students share their lists and discuss with them the value of immigrant cultures to strengthening an existing culture base in America. Also, have students consider challenges immigrants might face as they try to retain their cultures while adapting to a new homeland (introduce students to the concept of acculturation—the process by which adults acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors that enable them to become functioning participants of a new host culture.) What must Americans and immigrants do to ensure that immigrant cultures are recognized and respected, but do not remain isolated and out of the mainstream?



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5. Students should understand that all who came to the United States (even before it was called such) were immigrants, and that immigrants continue to grow the nation. Those who are new to the nation now will be “Americans” of some type of descent over the next few generations. In that regard, students should recognize that their family history is also based in immigration; thus certain cultural practices and beliefs they entertain probably have interesting origins.
6. Instruct students to generate a list of interview questions that probe someone’s culture and cultural riches. These should include inquiries regarding the person’s family history in terms of culture, what original cultural practices and beliefs the person has retained and how they have evolved over time, any influence this culture has had on American culture, etc. Work with students to compile student questions to arrive at one class survey to be used by all. Instruct students to research their family culture.
7. Pair students and have them interview each other to learn about their respective cultural practices and beliefs, and to present their findings to the class, which can ask additional questions and also share how they have experienced a peer’s particular culture. Students may wish to compile these interviews to include in a collection focused on community cultural riches.

Assessment

Design a student-friendly questionnaire that measures student understanding of culture. Create a rubric that assesses student application of cultural concepts.

Extension

Students can identify and proactively explore a specific cultural group in their community. For example, they can interview people representing the culture, participate in cultural events, etc. They can report on this culture through a visual presentation, such as a picture book containing photos of their actual observations, a video, etc.



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Related Resources

Meet the New Americans

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/newamericans.html>

The New Americans: Cultural Riches

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/culturalriches.html>

The New Americans: Learn More | Cultural Riches

http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/learnmore_cultural_riches.html

Beyond the Border

<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/beyondtheborder/story.html>

The City/La Ciudad

<http://www.pbs.org/itvs/thecity/>

Defining Culture

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/looking/intro1.html>

Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/looking/lesson11.html>

Elements of Culture

http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/elements_of_culture.htm

United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage

http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php@URL_ID=1458&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Introduction to Culture

<http://www.lewiston.k12.id.us/KForsman/Social%20Studies/Elements%20of%20Culture.htm>



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**Correlation to National Standards**

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

United States History

31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States

Behavioral Studies

1. Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior

Author

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The Latin Mural Tradition

Murals have emerged as an important public art style in communities throughout the United States. Outdoor murals often bring beauty into decaying neighborhoods and provide a vehicle for social expression. The art form grew out of various Latino traditions, including the fresco work of Mexican artist Diego Rivera and the practice of urban graffiti tagging.

Considered the greatest Mexican painter of the 20th century, Rivera is often credited with bringing the craft of the fresco back into modern art and architecture. Frescoes (murals painted on fresh wet plaster with pigments dissolved in lime water) became his medium of choice when he discovered those of the Italian Renaissance while studying in Europe. A life-long Marxist, Rivera strongly believed that public art was a powerful form, a meaningful departure from the elite walls of galleries and museums.

While graffiti artists may not cite Rivera as an influence, their bold murals have grown into a distinctive brand of public art and shared community history. Their works often have a political message and appear in urban neighborhoods where violent death has become a part of everyday life. Unfortunately, graffiti artists who often use aerosol paint as their medium still face the stigma that their work is a defacement of public property.

View mural slide show at *The New Americans* companion Web site:

http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/culturalriches/art_murals.html



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Mexican Home Altars

...Home altars are personal manifestations of faith—a link between the physical and the spiritual and an expression of one's relationship to god. Altars can be onetime shrines built for a special occasion or they can be a living, active expression of ongoing spirituality. Some build elaborate, multi-layered home altars, while others, like the Flores family, build altars using only a few meaningful objects.

Altars create a sacred space in the home and are used as a place of prayer and worship, reflection and meditation or song. They can function as sites where family history is actively preserved, where loved ones are celebrated and remembered with pictures and artifacts.

The Mexican home altar tradition is centuries old, but it is not the only culture to embrace the art of the home altar—Buddhism, Hinduism and Santeria are a few examples of other faiths that have a home altar tradition.

Scholars say the practice in Mexico dates back to indigenous cultures such as the Maya and Toltec, who built altars to their deities. Home altars flourished in the 19th century when Mexicans living in territories annexed by the United States felt disconnected from the English-speaking Catholic Church. After World War II, as the Catholic Church tried to standardize ritual and worship, altar building in the U.S. was sanitized and the practice declined. Today, Latino activists, artists and religious leaders are reviving the tradition.

While many homes keep altars, it is generally the women of the house who build and maintain them. Many scholars say that the woman as altar builder (altarina) has traditionally been a way for women to assert their power and spirituality within a patriarchal society.

Learn what objects go on a home altar and why, with an interactive feature at The New American's companion Web site.

http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/culturalriches/art_altars.html



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EVERYONE BELONGS**Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos)**

One of the most popular occasions for altar building is the Mexican Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos). This is a time of great celebration when the spirits come back to earth for a visit and the living celebrate the lives of the departed. Special altars called ofrendas are built to honor loved ones who have passed.

The growing popularity of Day of the Dead celebrations in America is one reason that the home altar has begun to infiltrate mainstream culture. The rise of personal spirituality and ritual has also increased interest in home altar construction. Artists from many ethnic backgrounds are using the altar as an art form, bringing the practice into museums, galleries and books, exposing the tradition to even more Americans.

The new altar builders often mix different religious and sacred artifacts with secular effluvia like pop cultural icons and everyday items. A Buddha may sit next to a saint, all of which perches above a Mickey Mouse doll and a pair of running shoes—creating a personal collection that becomes a sacred space.



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Mexican Food

Some foods introduced by immigrants have not only become a regular part of the American diet, but have become Americanized. From Taco Bell on the go, to salsa in the supermarket, there's some version of Mexican cuisine available in almost every community across the country. While Americanized fast food versions of Mexican dishes abound, we've asked Ventura Flores for a few traditional recipes that bring back the authentic flavor of her native Mexico.

Three Mexican Dishes from Ventura's Kitchen

Calabacitas

A traditional dish of the Pueblo Indians of the Southwest.

Ingredients

2 lbs. diced zucchini
1 cup onion
Garlic to taste
Cumin to taste
Tomato
2 serrano chilies

Instructions

- 1) Fry 1/2 onion, chili and tomatoes until soft.
- 2) Add zucchini.
- 3) Add more onion.
- 4) Add a pinch of cumin.
- 5) Fry together until tender.

Can be served with warm corn tortillas or as a side dish.



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Nopales have been popular as a food source in Mexico for hundreds of years. Recently, they have gained increasing popularity in the United States as well. Thorny needles must be removed with a knife or vegetable peeler before cooking. Remove any nodules, the thick stem, and trim the edges off of the pads as well. Wear rubber gloves when handling nopales to avoid injury.

Ingredients

- 1 lb. nopales (cleaned)
- 1 small diced onion
- 2 tsp. cilantro
- 1 serrano chili

Instructions

- 1) Slice and dice the nopales.
- 2) Boil it in water until it becomes soft.
- 3) Strain water.
- 4) Add diced onion.
- 5) Add cilantro.
- 6) Add serrano chile to taste.
- 7) Mix together.



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FOR EVERYONE**Carne Adobada (Pork with Roasted Chili)****Ingredients**

2 lbs. pork chunks
5 serrano chilies
1 lb. tomatoes
1 red chili
1 tooth garlic
Salt (to taste)

Instructions

- 1) Fry pork chunks until they are brown. Set aside.
- 2) Roast serrano chilies.
- 3) Roast tomato with chilies.
- 4) Add red chili.
- 5) Add garlic.
- 6) Blend together and add a little water so it's not too thick and you've created a sauce.
- 7) Add mixture to browned meat continue and cook until you bring it to a boil.
- 8) Let it simmer for a few minutes.
- 9) Add salt to taste.