

DEFINING CULTURE

Anthropologists define culture as a shared system of behaviors and customs passed from one generation to the next. These customs may include the type of language, religion, family systems, recreation, and education that a group of people share. Anthropologists have also described a set of universal components of culture, found in all cultures. For example, all cultures have customs and habits related to food and meals.



Culture is rooted in tradition, and is often associated with a particular place or location where, for example, a unique language is spoken. Cultures are complex and change over time. Some anthropologists estimate that thousands of languages have become extinct over the course of human history, and that as many as half of the 6,000 languages spoken today are in danger of becoming extinct. External forces can exert powerful influences on this type of cultural change, including economic and political forces related to increased globalization, and particularly trade with other groups and nations.

UNIVERSAL COMPONENTS OF CULTURE

1. MATERIAL CULTURE
 - housing, clothing, consumer goods, things a culture values
2. ARTS, PLAY, AND RECREATION
 - celebrations, leisure activities, the arts
3. LANGUAGE AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION
 - forms of communication unique to, or understood only by members of, the culture
4. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION
 - groups within the culture, including family, clans, clubs, organizations
5. SOCIAL CONTROL
 - methods used by culture or society maintain order, including social pressure, governments, laws, and enforcement agencies
6. CONFLICT AND WARFARE
 - within the culture (e.g., between generations) and outside the culture (e.g., wars with other cultures or societies)
7. ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION
 - firms, financial organizations, cooperatives, communes; in general terms, how a society allocates scarce resources
8. EDUCATION
 - how the culture passes on its customs and prepares youth for adult roles in the society
9. WORLD VIEWS/RELIGIOUS BELIEFS
 - views of individual and world purpose or faith that the culture holds

OUR SCHOOL CULTURE

On a small scale, our school represents a culture with its own customs and ways of behaving. In the chart below, identify at least one example of our school culture for each of the universal components of culture that are listed.

Universal Component of Culture	Example from Our School Culture
Material Culture	
Arts, Play, and Recreation	
Language and Non-Verbal Communication	
Social Organization	
Social Control	
Conflict and/or Warfare	
Economic Organization	
Education	
World Views/Religious Beliefs	