

RGS-IBG KS3 Tutorial: Culture and Identity

Slide1: Introduction

Welcome to the RGS-IBG Key Stage three tutorial on 'Culture and Identity'.

The aim of this tutorial is to investigate ideas around 'culture and identity' and how such ideas might be incorporated into geographical teaching and learning at Key Stage Three. A range of teaching ideas is provided and the emphasis is on making learning relevant to the issues of today and the UK. Ideas around culture and identity can be incorporated into studies that cover the full range and content, and support the diverse curriculum opportunities and key processes of the revised geography programme of study.' Cultural understanding and diversity is one of the key geographical concepts that underpins the revised Geography Key Stage Three Programme of Study. It is an overarching concept that can be used as a starting point to study, or it can be drawn into studies once pupils have established knowledge and understanding of a place or issue. It can run as a thread through the curriculum as pupils explore and apply their understanding in new contexts. Studying culture, diversity and identity enables students to address a whole range of political, socio-economic and environmental issues. Despite its complexity it is a concept that can be incorporated into geographical studies of all of the scales identified in the range and content of the revised programme of study: personal, local, regional, national, international, continental and global. Questions of culture, diversity and identity are also becoming increasingly central to geo-political conflicts and debates about global warming and environmental change. Suggestions are included throughout this tutorial.

Slide 2: Overview

Literary critic Raymond Williams in *Key Words*, famously described 'culture' as one of the two or three most complex words in the English language, whilst 'identity' with its inherently subjective nature, is arguably no less complex.

Very broadly, culture (from the Latin *cultura* stemming from *colere*, meaning "to cultivate,") may be defined in terms of patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activity significance. Different definitions of "culture" reflect different theoretical bases for understanding this elusive concept: culture as 'a way of life' of a people; culture as a type of 'civilization' (the 'best of' the arts, science etc.); culture as a form of communication and symbolism. In all cases, it can be stressed to students that culture is meaningless without a corresponding 'geography'. Culture is always 'placed'

and situated in time and space and at a specific scale. Students should be encouraged to think about and explore how geographical location, ideas of place and space are inherently bound up with notions of culture, at local, regional, national and global scales.

Identity can be defined as the way that individuals label themselves as members of particular groups (e.g., nation, social class, subculture, ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc.). Similar to culture, identity is impossible to understand without specific reference to geography: places, spaces, nations etc, to which individuals feel they belong.

Questions of belonging, culture and identity are at the heart of many of the most pressing issues facing Britain and indeed the globe: multiculturalism and diversity, migration and diasporas, religion and the growing attraction of fundamentalism, the growth of global cultural industries, tourism, sports, even terrorism and wars based on ethnic or religious conflict, have at least some of their roots in struggles over the meanings of culture and identity. A useful exercise to gauge the breadth of these issues is to browse a daily newspaper or online news site (eg. CNN, Sky news, BBC) and split students up into small groups. Each group takes a headline and story and discusses the different ways that culture and identity are involved in the story. Students should be encouraged to note what difference geography and place make to the story: what would be the response in the UK to deadly hurricanes? How would immigration and multiculturalism be discussed in India? For each story, countries or regions could be swapped and exchanged to speculate on what 'difference' geography or locale would make to the story in terms of issues of culture or identity.

In the era of globalisation when the distinctiveness of local places and communities are perceived to be increasingly under threat, understanding culture and identity in a geographical context is a vital portal to understanding our complex world. Questions of belonging, religion, race and sexuality are also being recognised as central to teaching and learning about good citizenship and social cohesion. Good teaching about culture and identity in a geographical context can encourage pupils to identify bias and question what they read and hear, all essential processes of geographical enquiry identified in the revised programme of study.

Slide 3: Place

A strong way of teaching about culture and identity in relation to place is through the concept of 'sense of place': the way that individuals and groups tend to strongly identify with particular places or locales. This often emotional sense of belonging to a place is strongly linked to the individual or group's culture and identity. Sports teams (football in particular) or music bands are good examples from popular culture to use with students. They can research on the internet various teams or bands in different parts of the country (or Europe/World) and find out what kinds of attachments and loyalties arise: e.g. Barcelona and Catalan identity, Oasis (pop group) and Manchester, regional loyalties in hip hop and grime (East Coast rap vs West Coast in the US, London grime vs Northern jungle in the UK). Alternatively students can write personal journals or engage in creative writing (poetry, stories) about their own memories or experiences of the places they identify with in terms of birthplace, parent's country of origin, tourism experiences, school etc. They should be encouraged to exchange these narratives about place, culture and identity and give critical feedback and commentary among themselves.

Slide 4: Space

Compared to place, space is a more abstract concept that deals with the interactions between places and the networks created by flows of information, people and goods. Manuel Castell's notion of a 'space of flows'; the way that globalisation is linking up people, electronic bits, and commodities through global networks, is a good way of introducing ideas about how culture and identity are mediated by and through space. This is also a connection to globalisation, one of the other overarching themes linking to KS3 curriculum aims. Students could follow the 'career' and movement around the globe of specific cultural products and commodities such as sugar, tea or computer chips. Ask students to map these product's journeys and to discuss how perceptions of, for example tea or sugar, may differ in different cultural contexts: does tea have the same cultural meanings in India, where it is harvested, than it does in the UK? How are Indian and British national identities tied, in different ways, to tea as a 'cultural' product? Spaces of culture and identity can also be tied in with another KS3 curriculum theme: migration and populations. Mass migrations to the UK in the last 50 years have substantially changed the social and cultural geography of many cities in the UK, creating new 'diasporic spaces' of various cultures and identities. Students can explore the websites of many of these diasporic spaces ('Banglatown' and Green Street market in East London, Chinatown, Brixton etc). The websites of many local councils across the country often promote such areas as tourist attractions or themed 'cultural quarters'.

Slide 5: Scale

Questions of culture and identity are ideally suited to be studied at different geographical scales. The interconnections between the local and the global are indeed key to understanding many of the complex geographical and social issues we face today. Starting with personal geographies and experiences students can be encouraged to make links and connections with local, national and global scales of analysis. Personal diaries and personal maps detailing memories, descriptions or images (sketches, collages in Photoshop?) of places and spaces to which students strongly identify (football clubs, local landmarks, holidays, favourite buildings etc.) can be a good starting point to explore questions of scale. How are football clubs changing to accommodate new fan bases around the world? What new landmarks and buildings are being developed in your area and how do these reflect national and international priorities in terms of investment, regeneration, aesthetics etc? Explain why low cost air flights are leading more and more people to travel across the globe for holidays rather than trips to Butlins or the seaside. Where do the tourists you see in your town centre come from? How has this changed over the years? In particular students should be encouraged to examine the ways that the global impacts on the local and vice versa

Slide 6: Interdependence

An understanding of culture and identity involves an appreciation of the interconnections that exist between environment, economy and society, and also of the connections between scales and the past/future. A wide range of geographical topics can be explored here, some of which have already been hinted at. The main point is that globalisation, international migration and global communications mean that culture and identity are no longer about 'them' versus 'us' in separate local spheres. 'They' are already likely to be 'here', more often as a result of 'us' having been 'there'. For example, what happens to global environment if more of us, for cultural and economic reasons, are choosing long haul holidays? How will increasing numbers of non-European tourists to the UK from emerging nations such as China and India, affect the tourist trade and perceptions of our country? What impacts will new cultural and religious landmarks such as temples and mosques have on the landscapes of many British cities and towns? How has the growth of fundamentalism and religious extremism in places such as the Middle East and the US (Christian Right extremists) affected social relations and laws (such as anti-terrorism legislation) in the UK? Again the internet is probably the best place to research some of these questions. News sites and press agencies such as Reuters are good places to search for stories that can form the basis of discussion groups. Role playing is also a good way to 'act out' various scenarios and introduce humour and drama into what can be very political and emotional issues to many students e.g. Students can write a

comedic drama or role play about the impact of tourism and the cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes that often results from intercultural exchange.

Slide 7: Environmental Interaction and sustainable development

International organisations and some governments are beginning to understand that issues of culture and identity are vital in any fair and just understanding of the politics of sustainable development. Students could be encouraged to research this issue by exploring the differences in opinions of the various parties, and the provenance of the information, to the debate about sustainable development and climate change: environmental activists' websites are useful sources here e.g. Greenpeace; UN websites; UK government and NGOs such as Oxfam and War on Want. Students could be split into debating groups and re-enact imaginary 'parliaments' or 'trials' of certain key issues involving the cultural differences in climate change: rich vs poor countries; NGOs vs. governments; local tribes people defending their endangered habitats vs. commercial traders etc. Questions could be debated such as: what rights do western nations have to tell poor farmers in developing nations to stop cutting down rain forests?

Slide 8: Physical and Human Processes

There is increasing evidence that the impacts of global flows of culture and the cross border implications of conflicts involving issues of identity and religion are having greater impacts on the physical environment than previously thought. Studying culture and identity in a global context can enable students to think about the ways in which human (cultural) activity impacts on the environment and climate change. Tourism is a classic example. Students can research various forms of tourism (commercial vs eco-tourism) to assess which have the most damaging impacts on the global environment and what measures and codes of conduct can be mobilised to combat this problem. They can also research how saving the global environment may conflict with established local traditions and economies and reflect on the fact that when culture and identity are taken into account in this issue, trade offs and compromises are likely to result. Conflicts over scarce resources such as water and oil in areas such as the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia often involve underlying issues of culture and identity.

Slide 9: Cultural Understanding and Diversity

The issue of diversity is key to understanding contemporary debates about culture and identity in the UK and beyond. Students could be introduced to key concepts such as multiculturalism, fundamentalism, cultural diversity and citizenship. These concepts can be discussed in the context of fundamental geographical and spatial contexts such as cities and urbanization and globalization. Has multiculturalism made our cities more diverse and

interesting? Or has it lead to divisions and ethnic and racial conflict? The BBC, Guardian Newspaper and Channel 4 websites have excellent resources on immigration, multiculturalism and diversity that students can research. The cultural and ethnic diversity and identity in the countryside is much neglected issue that can be discussed by students. They can relate their own diverse experiences of life in the countryside and their own images and perceptions of what the countryside 'means' to them. These can then be compared to documented experiences of groups such the Black Environment Network, The Black Farmer or artists such as Ingrid Pollard whose work has dealt with issues of cultural identity and otherness in the English countryside. Obviously the issue of terrorism and religious fundamentalism is a live issue but this must be dealt with in an even handed way focusing on how religious intolerance is not the specific problem of any one community such as the Muslim community.

Slide 10: Pulling the threads together

Culture and Identity is a conceptual thread that can be identified in almost any place, issue, scale or case study within Key Stage Three Geography. Many of the major conflicts and cross border issues around the globe involve these issues in some way or another. The issue of culture and identity is also crucial to an understanding of modern day Britain in terms of understanding the past, present and future. It should be emphasised to students that as well as being the source of many conflicts and wars, culture and identity are also the source of many just causes and movements in environmental and cultural politics. Culture and identity can be a source of freedom and global human cooperation not just oppression and intolerance.