

The Cultural Iceberg

Edward T. Hall, 1976

Surface Culture

easy to see

Emotional level: relatively low

The external, or conscious, part of culture is what we can see and is the tip of the iceberg and includes behaviors and some beliefs.

Culture is like an iceberg because there are some visible aspects, but there is a larger portion hidden beneath the surface.

Deep Culture

unspoken rules

Emotional level: very high

unconscious rules

Emotional level: intense

The internal, or subconscious, part of culture is below the surface of a society and includes some beliefs and the values and thought patterns that underlie behavior.

The only way to learn the internal culture of others is to actively participate in their culture. When someone first enters a new culture, only the most overt behaviors are apparent. As one spends more time in that new culture, the underlying beliefs, values, and thought patterns that dictate that behavior will be uncovered. This model teaches us we cannot judge a new culture based only on what we see when we first enter it. We must take the time to get to know individuals from that culture and interact with them. Only by doing so can we uncover the values and beliefs that underlie the behavior of that society.

Surface Culture and Deep Culture

Where do these items belong on the iceberg, towards the top, bottom, or somewhere in between? Work with your group partners to write them on the iceberg.

1. Style of dress
2. Ways of greeting people
3. Beliefs about hospitality
4. Importance of time
5. Paintings
6. Values
7. Literature
8. Beliefs about child raising (children and teens)
9. Attitudes towards personal space and privacy
10. Beliefs about the responsibility of children and teens
11. Gestures to show you understand what has been told to you
12. Holiday customs
13. Music
14. Dancing
15. Celebrations
16. Concept of fairness
17. Nature of friendship
18. Ideas about clothing
19. Foods
20. Greetings
21. Facial expression and hand gestures
22. Concept of self
23. Work ethic
24. Religious beliefs
25. Religious rituals
26. Concept of beauty
27. Rules of polite behavior
28. Attitude towards age
29. The role of family
30. General worldview

Discussion Questions

1. What are some things you find most interesting about Japanese culture? What do you think people from other countries find most interesting?
2. Before tourists come to Japan, what are some things they need to know about Japanese culture to avoid problems?
3. If someone is going to live and work in Japan, what are some things they need to know about Japanese culture to avoid problems?
4. What do you think are some common misconceptions or misunderstandings about Japanese culture that people from other countries have? If you have spent time in another country, what misconceptions or misunderstandings about the country did you discover you had?
5. What are some ways that Japanese culture has changed since you were a child or teenager?

6. 文化の盗用(ぶんかのとうよう 英: Cultural appropriationとは、ある文化圏の要素を他の文化圏の者が流用する行為である。少数民族など社会的少数者の文化に対して行った場合、論争の的になりやすい。流用の対象となる文化的要素としては宗教および文化の伝統、ファッション、シンボル、言語、音楽が含まれる。

Cultural appropriation is the act of appropriation of elements of one culture by people from another culture. It is a controversial act when it is committed against the culture of social minorities such as ethnic minorities. Cultural elements subject to appropriation include religious and cultural traditions, fashion, symbols, language and music.

Can you think of some examples you've seen of foreigners appropriating Japanese culture? How did it make you feel?

7. What are some examples of things you admire about other countries' cultures?
8. If you've ever lived in another country, tell a story about a time when you experienced culture shock.
9. Can you think of anything that's rude in Japanese culture but not rude in other countries? What about the opposite?
10. What do you think are some of the biggest differences between American and Japanese culture? What do you think are some similarities?

Lesson Topics

Please choose 11.

1. Art
2. The Art of Conversation
3. Body Language
4. Change
5. Cities
6. Countries
7. Creativity
8. Culture
9. Education
10. Environment & Pollution
11. Favorites
12. Food & Eating
13. Free Time & Hobbies
14. Happiness
15. Hobbies
16. Learning a Foreign Language
17. Movies
18. Olympics
19. Travel
20. United States