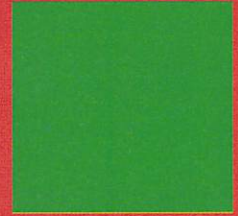


Asako Kajiura

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This is Culture



Developing Communication Skills for an Intercultural World



NAN'UN-DO

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This Is Culture is a textbook that deals with the wonderful world of culture. We wrote it while thinking about the needs and interests of Japanese students, like you. Each of its fourteen chapters includes a short informative essay that we know you will enjoy reading. Each chapter also features a variety of exercises and activities designed to help you express your thoughts, feelings and opinions on all kinds of cultural issues. As you work your way through this textbook, we promise that you will:

- ◆ speak, read and listen to English with greater confidence and skill
- ◆ develop a richer, more effective vocabulary
- ◆ come to understand the true meaning and importance of culture
- ◆ gain a better understanding of your own culture while learning about the cultures of others
- ◆ increase self-awareness through reflection and critical thinking
- ◆ develop greater tolerance towards other peoples and their cultures
- ◆ gain the intercultural communication skills you need to become truly “international”
- ◆ become the kind of well-informed, compassionate, sensitive person our increasingly interconnected, interdependent world needs.

These are promises we are sure we can keep. We have used the readings and activities in this textbook with students of many different levels and ages — and they really work! They will work for you, too.

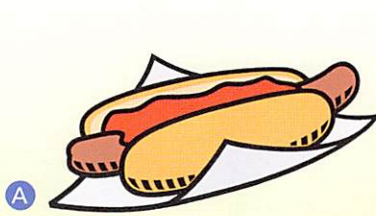
You may find *This Is Culture* a little challenging at first, but we believe you’ll also find it fascinating from cover to cover, and well worth the extra effort it requires.

Welcome to *This Is Culture*. We are confident you will get as much out of using it as we did out of writing it. That’s a promise!



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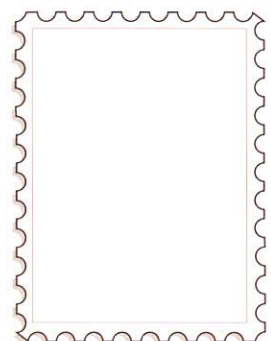
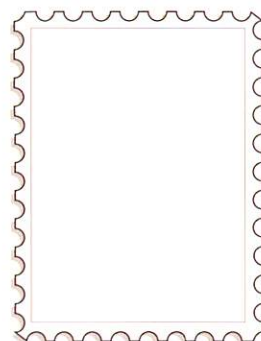
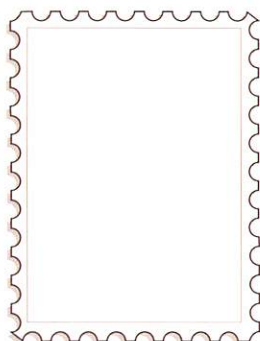
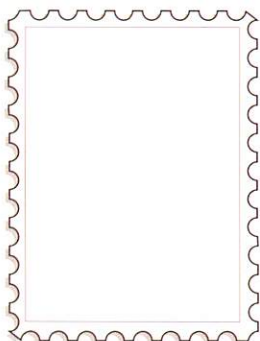
What Does "Culture" Mean?



Activity 1 What cultures do these pictures make you think of? Write the names of the cultures on the lines, as in the example.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| A. <u>American, Canadian, German</u> | B. _____ |
| C. _____ | D. _____ |
| E. _____ | F. _____ |

Activity 2 With your partner(s), design four new Japanese postage stamps. What pictures would you put on them? Discuss this, asking each other questions like those in "Useful Language" on the next page. Then, on the stamps below, draw pictures of things or actions that you think show Japanese culture.



Useful Language

1. What do you think represents the culture of our country?
2. I think Mt. Fuji shows the culture of our country, don't you?
3. How about a business card? Doesn't that show our culture, too?
4. Kendo is a unique part of Japanese culture, isn't it?
5. Almost all Japanese people eat rice, so isn't that an important part of our culture?

Activity 3 Read the definitions below. Then fill in the blanks in the sentences that follow with the correct underlined word or phrase.

- ◆ To observe something is to watch it carefully.
 - ◆ Culturally sensitive people try to understand other cultures.
 - ◆ Beliefs are strong ideas about politics, religion, or right and wrong behavior.
 - ◆ Perspectives are different ways that different people have of looking at or thinking about something.
 - ◆ Material objects are things that people have made with their hands or machines.
1. Most people have _____ that stop them from stealing and killing.
 2. If we carefully _____ people from other countries, we can learn about them.
 3. Baseballs and chopsticks are examples of _____ objects.
 4. Teachers and students view homework from quite different _____ .
 5. A person who is _____ is likely to have good relationships with foreigners.

A Little Knowledge Goes a Long Way

What is culture? Most experts would define it as: “learned and socially transmitted products shared by the members of a group.” To understand this definition, however, we must first know what “group,” “socially transmitted,” and “products” mean.

“Group” can refer to every person in a country — for example, everyone in Japan — or it can mean smaller communities of people within a country, such as sumo wrestlers. 5 Members of the “sumo wrestler group” do not have identical perspectives and beliefs, but they do have many similar ones. This means that sumo wrestlers have more in common with other sumo wrestlers than they do with other groups.

To say that culture is “socially transmitted” means that parents, friends, schools, and the media transmit, or pass on, culture to children. Children don’t have to study culture; they learn it naturally.

Cultural “products” are objects that are made and ideas that are shared by members of a group. Cultural products are divided into two types: material culture and non-material culture. Material culture refers to things people make with their hands or by machine: clothing, food, art, buildings, flags, and so on. It is generally quite easy to identify cultures by their material objects. For example, people around the world think of Japan when they see a kimono. What is not so easy is understanding the deeper meanings behind the objects. While most people recognize the Japanese flag, few know what it means.

Non-material culture consists of products not made by hand — languages, religious and other beliefs, customs and traditions. Non-material culture is further divided into two types, observable and non-observable. Observable non-material culture is called behavior. We can observe Egyptians speaking Arabic or Canadians shaking hands. Therefore, languages and greetings are observable. Non-observable products are a culture’s beliefs — things that can be stated but not seen. We can’t observe, for instance, the belief that blood type influences personality. We have to be told about it.

Two important intercultural communication skills are being able to recognize a culture’s material products and understanding the beliefs the products represent. Not showing the proper respect for the material culture of other groups can lead to serious intercultural problems. Several years ago, some culturally insensitive tourists were forced to leave Thailand after photographing themselves sitting on a Buddhist statue. This has many important beliefs connected to Buddhist statues. By sitting on the statue, the tourists insulted the Thai people.

Not knowing the non-material culture — the beliefs and customs — of another country can also lead to serious misunderstandings. At a school festival in China, three visiting Japanese students and their teacher performed a dance in women’s underwear. They thought everyone would enjoy the show, but dancing like that is just not done in China, and many people felt insulted. Later, thousands of Chinese students protested in front of the Japanese students’ apartments. In the end, the four Japanese had to apologize and leave the country. If they had been more culturally sensitive, none of this would have happened.

Activity 4 Read the sentences below. Based on the reading, circle T if the sentence is true, F if it is false.

1. **T F** Children are born knowing how to behave in their own culture.
2. **T F** Forks and knives are examples of material culture.
3. **T F** Eating with chopsticks is an example of observable non-material culture.
4. **T F** All French people share the same experiences and beliefs.
5. **T F** We can recognize the cultural objects of other countries without understanding their deeper cultural meanings.
6. **T F** The Japanese students in China had to leave because of language problems.
7. **T F** Material objects are often related to important ideas and beliefs.

Activity 5 Look at the postage stamps you drew for Activity 1. Which of the things you drew are material culture? Which are non-material culture? List them below.

Material Culture

Non-material Culture

Activity 6 With new partners, discuss the pictures you drew on your stamps. Ask each other questions like those in “Useful Language” to find out how much you know about your own culture.

Useful Language

1. You drew a cherry blossom on one stamp. Where did the custom of cherry blossom viewing come from?
2. That’s Mt. Fuji, right? Why is Mt. Fuji so important to Japanese people?
3. How long has sumo been Japan’s national sport?
4. What does the Torii in front of a Shinto shrine stand for?