

# A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY

## Lesson Element

### Culture, Norms and Values

#### Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'Culture, Norms and Values' activity which supports OCR A Level Sociology.

**A LEVEL  
SOCIOLOGY**

**Lesson Element**

**Culture, Norms and Values**

**Task 1 – What is culture?**  
In small groups discuss the following questions and make notes.

1. What is culture?

2. Using your own words, define culture.

3. How does someone acquire culture?

4. How might a person express their particular culture?  
The word 'culture' comes from the Latin culture, meaning 'cultivation'. Through the Middle Ages it was used as an agricultural term. In the seventeenth century the term 'culture' began to be used in relation to the betterment of individuals through education. It was later used to refer to peoples or nations. Today, the concept has become broader still and is now used widely in everyday life to refer to a way of life.

One possible sociological definition might be:  
**The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.**

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#### The Activity:



*This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.*

#### Associated materials:

'Culture, Norms and Values' Lesson Element learner activity sheet

'Culture, Norms and Values' PowerPoint that can be used alongside the worksheet.

#### Suggested timings:

**Task 1:** 20 minutes

**Task 2:** 1 hour

**Task 3:** 1 hour 30 minutes



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This section is important for students to begin to understand the distinction between lay and sociological language and to begin to recognise the centrality of sociological concepts. Students will be given the opportunity to begin to challenge their own view of the world, and develop their own sociological imagination. The difference between norms and values is important to draw out and discuss. Students need to begin to understand how norms and values shape culture and how these are not fixed, but produced by the individual and society.

Students may well understand culture as 'being cultured' or assume that it is linked to high culture. Students should begin to think about how culture is acquired, in their own society and beyond. When looking at cross-cultural examples it is worth encouraging students not to exoticise other cultures. By learning about cross-cultural examples of alternative cultural groups, students should be able to begin to develop ideas about cultural universals. As well as this, students need to begin to appreciate the cultural diversity within societies, not simply between them.

The cross cultural examples also provide the opportunity for students to begin to understand what sociologists do in trying to understand other cultures, so the final activity could result in a discussion about how sociologists might try to understand other social groups and how their own culture may affect the way that they see other cultures.

## Guidance for teachers

### Aims and objectives

- To explore sociological ideas about culture
- To be able to define culture
- To understand what is meant by values and norms and understand how these shape culture
- To understand some of the ways that cultures can vary

### Suggestions for delivery

1. Begin by asking students to write their own definition of culture, including a discussion of the difference between sociological interpretations and other non sociological uses of the term. Students should also consider how culture is acquired, introducing the idea of the importance of the socialisation process.
2. Introduce the concepts of norms and values. Using examples, ask students to explain the difference between the two concepts and provide examples of each.
3. Consider how culture is universal yet different, using cross cultural examples.
4. Consider valuing cultural difference and discuss the challenges faced by sociologists in understanding other cultures.

You may wish to use the accompanying presentation when delivering this lesson element.



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## Formative assessment

It is a good idea to engage students in becoming aware that they are challenging their own non-sociological ideas about culture. Throughout this lesson element, students should begin to consider sociologically specific understandings of culture and begin to appreciate the relative value of different cultures. It is also important to understand different uses of the term as used within sociology. This will be assessed through the various formative activities including questions and small group work.

## Summative assessment

Explain what is meant by 'culture'. Identify three ways in which culture might be expressed.

Explain the difference between norms and values, using examples to illustrate.

## Suggested answers for teachers

### Task 1 – What is culture?

#### 1. What is culture?

Students may discuss ideas about what it means to 'be' cultured. They may talk about the theatre, classical music and so on. They may also be aware that culture is to do with the way that a person lives, their language and dress for example.

#### 2. Using your own words, define culture.

Students may need support here in limiting such a broad concept. It may be useful to help them with the idea that culture is a way of life.

#### 3. How does someone acquire culture?

Students may talk about being taught by parents and family members and should be encouraged to think further afield to consider external influences in socialisation. It may be worth discussing which aspects of culture are ascribed and which are achieved.

#### 4. How might a person express their particular culture?

Students might mention some of the following: dress, language, food preferences, the type of products that people buy, the music that they listen to, the activities that they do in their spare time, their religion, their beliefs and what they see as important.



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## Task 2 – Norms and values

Sort the following statements into norms, values or both.

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| 1. Waiting in a queue rather than simply pushing to the front.  | Norm           |
| 2. Holding the door open for someone.                           | Norm           |
| 3. The idea that it is wrong to kill another person.            | Value          |
| 4. Boys wearing trousers and not skirts.                        | Norm           |
| 5. The belief that it is wrong to take other people's property. | Value          |
| 6. Good manners, for example, saying thank you for something.   | Norm and value |
| 7. Using a knife and fork to eat with.                          | Norm           |

Next, take three examples from the list above and explain what happens if these norms or values are ignored by individuals. What are the consequences?

1. **Waiting in a queue rather than simply pushing to the front**  
The person may be considered very rude and be ignored or reprimanded by others for not waiting for their turn. Social disapproval.

**Boys wearing trousers and not skirts**

In some contexts, this would be highly disapproved of and even seen as being deviant. Being seen as a girl is seen as wrong in many people's eyes. Discuss the idea that attitudes may be changing in society. Allude to the complex and far reaching set of norms and values that surround gender.



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2.

1. What does this activity tell us about the importance of norms and values in society?

Norms and values ensure that people behave in socially acceptable ways. These norms and values can vary from place to place and over time. If we don't have norms or values, behaviour may become unmanageable and society could fall apart.

2. Does everyone in your own society agree on shared norms and values?

No, and this can result in many kinds of problems for example, crime, antisocial behaviour, groups who are not perceived to be full members of society.

3. What are some of the possible consequences of there not being agreement over shared norms and values?

Conflict in society between groups and individuals. Concerns, for example, about growing numbers of antisocial behaviour. Conflict can occur on a small-scale and a large scale, eg war.

4. What might shape a person's beliefs and values?

The way that they are socialized, religious ideas for example, their gender, their age, their nationality, where they live, their ethnic origin. People may also be influenced by their peers, the media, music and so on.

5. What is the relationship between norms, values and culture?

Norms and values shape the culture of any given society.



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## Task 3 – Cultural universals, cultural differences

Consider your own culture and make notes on the following table. Then using the summary information below, complete the table for the cross-cultural examples. See how many you can fill in and carry out research into any missing boxes. Then answer the questions beneath.

Cultural characteristic	Your culture	The Na	The San	Papua New Guinea
<b>Norms</b>		Men and women pay secret visits to each other at night.	To understand the natural world and closely relate to it.	Violence is a norm for many.
<b>Values</b>		More equal relationships between men and women.	Sharing is important.	Warrior identity is important.
<b>Dress</b>		Traditional dress is brightly coloured and specific in style.	Traditional animal skins and products used to make simple clothes.	Mainly westernised today. Traditional dress used for special ceremonies.
<b>Relationships</b>		No formal marriage. Multiple relationships. Households comprise of siblings and the woman's children.	Generally nuclear families but people also continue relationships with their (deceased) ancestors.	High levels of violence/sexual violence in relationships.
<b>Economic system</b>		Farming, subsistence, some cash being used.	Largely subsistence, individual wealth frowned upon.	Subsistence, with exchange and now cash being used in some societies.

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Cultural characteristic	Your culture	The Na	The San	Papua New Guinea
Language		Naxi.	Khoisan Clicking used in language.	Over 850 languages used in the different societies.
Diet		Mainly vegetarian, some dried/salted meat.	Huge range of foods taken from the surrounding natural environment.	Mainly vegetarian diet, pork is the meat most widely eaten.

## Questions

1. Are there any norms or values that appear to exist in all cultures?

Incest taboos exist in almost every single culture. Generally killing people is considered wrong. Exchange of objects as a norm. Shared ideas about gender roles being different. Adults generally have greater power than children.

2. What are the key similarities and differences between the cross-cultural examples and your own culture?

Different ideas about relationships and family relationships, diet, work, dress, gender roles.

3. What is your reaction to the values expressed in each cross-cultural example?

Reactions may range from surprise to shock. Encourage students to consider their own culture in exploring others.

4. What problems do you think a sociologist might have in trying to understand another culture?

Introduce the idea of cultural relativism here – the idea that it is difficult to judge another culture without being biased from your own cultural perspective.



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5. 'Culture can vary within and between societies.' Explain what is meant by this quote.

There are multiple cultures within a society. For example, there are many cultural groups living within the UK, each who share a specific cultural world view yet also form part of British culture. The differences within a social group can be greater than the differences between societies.

## **OCR Resources: *the small print***

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OCR acknowledges the use of the following content:

- English icon: AirOne/Shutterstock.com
- Text: *Society without Fathers or Husbands*: The Na of China, Hua Cai (2008) MIT Press

