

# Culture, Tradition, and Appropriation

## Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 1 Workshop 1.2

### Dear Facilitator(s),

This workshop series was carefully crafted, reviewed (by a multiracial team), and revised with several important issues in mind.

The series is intended to...

1. **Offer an 11 part, sequential process that corresponds to the reading of the book, *Witnessing Whiteness, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*.** Understandably, facilitators, for various reasons, might want to use one or more of the workshops as stand alone events without sufficient time for participants to a) read the corresponding book chapters or b) move through the entire series. Yet, please understand that **moving through these workshops without having read the corresponding book chapter will markedly reduce its effectiveness. It will make moving through the workshop more challenging and is NOT recommended.** Understandings gained from one workshop are also important for subsequent workshops.
2. **Respond to particular group needs.** Recognizing that some groups may not be able to implement each workshop for the entire time suggested, some approved modifications can be found at the end of each workshop agenda. Only modify these workshops when absolutely required.
3. **Create a welcoming, inviting space where participants feel free to speak the truth of their experience without fear of shaming or reprisal.** It is essential for facilitators to understand that even when participants hold views that are counter to the themes in the book/series, a hallmark of both the book and the series is that people should be gently led into a new way of seeing.
4. **Follow logical threads of understanding related to each theme.** The language provided in the “scripts” that both precede and follow each section of the workshops are very important. Deviating from the essential themes and tone in those statements may create confusion and undercut the building nature of each individual workshop.
5. **Enhance leadership capacity within the community.** Detailed facilitator notes are provided for each activity so that one or more members of the group can practice their facilitation while leading this workshop series. A few notes of caution: a) the same facilitation team should run the entire series, b) the team should read the entire book in advance of leading any of the workshops, and c) sufficient debrief opportunities should be created to discuss how each workshop went so that facilitators’ skills can be developed.
6. **Provide community building opportunities for either racially caucused white groups OR multiracial groups.** Although still focused on whiteness in general, the series seeks to frame activities and questions in ways that allow people of color to benefit from the experience.

Best wishes,  
Shelly Tochluk

# Culture, Tradition, and Appropriation

## Witnessing Whiteness Chapter 1 Workshop 1.2

### Goals:

- Examine the cultural experiences and traditions that are meaningful in our lives
- Discuss the origins of our valued cultural traditions and our personal/family's relationships to them
- Investigate issues related to cultural appropriation and how they might affect cross-race interactions

### Materials:

- Communication guidelines
- Markers and pens
- Blank 8 x 11 sheets of paper
- Butcher paper
- "And I Still Question Myself" Narrative (Handout 1.2.1)
- List of Terms/Context Resource Page (Handout 1.2.2)
- Resource Page (Handout 1.2.3)

### Book Anchor Quote:

I benefit when feeling connected to something ancient, like when I read old Germanic fairytales and feel somehow related to them. I will continue exploring my ethnicity as I move forward, searching for fragments of a culture long lost to my family— For the truth is that my cultural connection is lost; I am not German. That culture is too disconnected. My Germanness was traded in long ago for the benefits available in this country for European immigrants able to fit into the white group. Feeling connected with my ancestry is essential, but I cannot kid myself into believing that I share the same culture as contemporary Germans. I do not....

White people who cannot fully recapture a lost cultural heritage, like myself, often experience a real sense of loss. Sure, there might be subcultures of whites that feel attached to what they see as a particularly American culture, like those who would claim a "Southern" culture. However, many of us find ourselves looking at other groups and longing for the connection we imagine they feel with their roots, their homeland, their culture. Many white people can be heard saying, "We don't have culture. They have culture."...

The more we understand ourselves, the reasons for our actions, and how our cultural explorations might be perceived in relationship to an oppressive history, the more we are able to navigate our way through challenging conversations, build authentic relationships and break down the wounds built up over years of injury. Perhaps even more important, we might be able to avoid enacting a disrespectful form of appropriation.

## Session 2 - Culture, Tradition, and Appropriation

3 hrs

### Section I

(15 min)

#### OPENING

**Materials:** Goals for day written out and communication guidelines posted ([download with discussion guide](#)).

#### *Purpose of piece:*

To discuss communication guidelines and review goals for the workshop

**Instructions:** *Facilitators introduce themselves, ask participants to say their name and one sentence to describe why they decided to come to the workshop. Ask participants to read the discussion guidelines posted on the wall aloud, one after the other.*

- *Ask participants what questions they have.*
- *Invite participants to add to the list any additional discussion guidelines they think would be helpful. Write them on the piece of butcher paper. Use this modified list for all future workshops.*
- *Invite participants to choose one of the guidelines to work on throughout the workshop.*

### Section II

(50 min)

#### Drawing on our influences

**Materials:** Butcher paper with guiding question and categories, markers, 8 x 11 sheets of paper

#### *Purpose of piece:*

To explore participants' cultural influences and their origination

**Say to group:** To begin, we are going to explore the various ways we value culture in our lives. To do this, we are going to spend some time creating a representation through pictures, symbols, and/or words that reflect all the different cultural influences we value.

- These cultural influences may have been passed down from our families, or they might be aspects we've picked up along the way.
- To get started, please take a look at each of the categories written on the butcher paper.
- Think about which words or images symbolize the cultural influences that are important to you.
- You'll have about 10 minutes to create your symbolic representation.
- We will have time to share them later, but at this time this activity should be done silently.

Guiding question/categories written on butcher paper and posted:

- Guiding question: What cultural influences make you feel connected to a valued tradition?
- Categories: Faith, philosophy of life, values, holiday/ceremonial traditions, home décor, dress, music, food, art, style, etc.

#### INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION/DRAWING (10 MINUTES)

*Now that you've completed as much as time will allow, find a partner and explain what you've drawn and why - Each of you will have about 5 minutes to share.*

#### PAIR SHARE (10 MINUTES)

**Say to group:** We'd now like to have you count off from 1-? (*however many groups you'd need to make 4-5 persons per group. For example, if there are 10 participants you count 1,2,1,2 to get 5 in each group*) We're now going to form small groups to discuss some additional questions.

Small groups should be given a piece of butcher paper and markers so a group member can take notes.

Small Group Questions: (20 MINUTES)

1. Where do your cultural influences come from?
2. For those influences that have not come from your family traditions, how did they become incorporated into your life and what makes them meaningful to you?

Large Group Share Out: (10 MINUTES)

1. What cultural influences were most important to people in your small group, where did they come from, and why are they meaningful?

**Wrap Up:** Each of us has been influenced by a host of experiences and cultural backgrounds. Knowing how important and personal these things are to each of us is really important so that we can continue exploring what the experience of "culture" means for our lives.

*Section III*

*(55 minutes)*

## **Cultural Orientations**

**Materials:** Butcher paper posters with statements, Butcher paper with small group questions written and posted

*Purpose of piece:*

To consider our individual relationship to culture

**Instructions:** *To prepare for this exercise, create four posters to display at the four corners of the room. Post prior to the workshop but keep them covered (flipped up and secured) so they aren't visible.*

1. "I don't really have a culture"
2. "I'm a world citizen that draws from any culture that inspires me."
3. "My culture has been passed down to me from my family and/or community."
4. "My culture is American culture."

**Say to group:** Now that we've spent some time looking at how specific cultural influences have become meaningful in our lives, we'd like you to think about how you see your relationship to culture in general.

- Around the room are four posters. On each is a statement that reflects how a lot of people feel about their relationship to culture.
- **Facilitator reads each of the posters aloud.**
- As you think about these four statements, which one seems to capture your experience best?
- This is a forced choice exercise, so you have to choose one, even though we acknowledge that any one particular statement may not represent you fully. But, for the sake of this exercise, please think about which one of the four best represents how you feel right now.
- **Give about 20 seconds for thinking**
- Now please move to stand near the poster that you've chosen.

**Facilitator's Note:** *If there are not at least two people at each location, facilitators can engage in dialogue with those who are alone at one position OR a single can join another small group for the discussion. Ideally, there would be one facilitator working with each small group.*

**Say to group:** Take a look around the room and notice how many people are at each corner. At this time, we'd like you to talk with those who have chosen the same statement as you did. Please sit together (as location groups) and answer the questions posted. Please choose someone to take notes, as we'll ask you to share your answers with the large group in about 20 minutes.

Location group discussion questions: (20 minutes)

1. Why did you choose this statement?
2. How does it feel to experience culture this way?
3. What are some ways your experience of culture could complicate and/or enhance your interactions across race?

Large group discussion: (30 MINUTES)

1. Each group shares their thoughts – 5 minutes each, 20 minutes total
2. Continued discussion of important ideas raised - 10 minutes

**FACILITATOR'S NOTES:** Some ideas you might draw out of participants during the small (location) and large group dialogues could include the following:

- **“I don't really have a culture”**
  - *Complicate* --- if you don't feel connected to a culture, you might...
    - Not easily appreciate how meaningful certain aspects are for others
    - Be more likely to want to take on someone else's culture in a way that offends people
    - Feel less able to share of yourself, like there's less to offer of value
  - *Enhance* --- if you don't feel connected to a culture, you might...
    - Be more open to learning about someone else's traditions
- **“I'm a world citizen that draws from any culture that inspires me.”**
  - *Complicate* ---- if you feel that you can draw from any culture that inspires you, you might...
    - Take on other people's cultural traditions in ways that are offensive
      - Ex. wearing symbols that are considered sacred
    - Benefit from traveling and accumulating artifacts for personal enjoyment while the culture as a whole fights for its survival (an offensive practice to many people from cultures around the world)
    - Ignore how ancient cultural practices have regularly been co-opted for profit by white Americans while the originators of the tradition receive no benefit
  - *Enhance* --- if you feel that you can draw from any culture that inspires you, you might...
    - Know some of the ins and outs of some cultural traditions in ways that open doors for you, increase trust
    - Develop greater respect for other cultures
- **“My culture has been passed down to me from my family and/or community.”**
  - *Complicate* ---- When your culture reflects your heritage, you might...
    - Assume everyone has received the benefits of cultural transmission as you have
    - Feel less empathetic for those who feel a lack of cultural grounding
  - *Enhance* --- When your culture reflects your heritage, you might...
    - Operate from a solid and rooted sense of self and cultural identity that supports interest and appreciation for other cultures.
- **“My culture is American culture.”**
  - *Complicate* --- when you see your culture as American culture, you might...
    - Assume that everyone in the U.S. has or should experience similar cultural traditions

- Have left your home (ethnic) culture behind through assimilation and expect that all others should do the same thing
- Ignore how American culture is a product of many different cultures, and the people of color who contributed their traditions were often not the beneficiaries of the profits earned as those traditions became widespread
- *Enhance* --- when you see your culture as American culture, you might
  - Feel a sense of belonging and therefore feel secure and rooted

**Wrap Up:** The intent with this exercise was to highlight that our understanding of culture and what it means to us affects our interactions with people across race.

- If we don't take the time to explore how people's approaches to culture have historically been used in ways that injure others, we run the risk of falling into or continuing problematic patterns ourselves.
- When we return from break we'll begin a deeper exploration of how what we might think of as *cultural exchange*, which can be a valuable thing, can go awry and become something called *cultural appropriation*, a problematic pattern.

**BREAK 10 MINUTES**

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*Section IV*

*(40 minutes)*

### **Cultural Appropriation**

**Materials:** "And I Still Question Myself" Narrative (Handout 1.2.1), small and large group questions written on butcher paper and posted

*Purpose of piece:*

To explore the negative effects of cultural appropriation and its complexity

**Say to Group:** A really challenging issue we need to talk about involves what is called "cultural appropriation" and how it can damage cross race relationships.

- Essentially, **cultural appropriation** is a term that refers to one group taking a particular cultural form from another group and using it for their own advantage.
- Often, this includes economic exploitation.
- It also can include using a cultural form in ways that do not honor the original intent or spiritual tradition of the culture.
- Cultural appropriation has a long history in the U.S. with many people participating and benefiting, both knowingly and unknowingly.
- This has created significant injury for many people of color, whose traditions have been more often exploited and cultures' decimated.
- White people who respond to charges of cultural appropriation by saying they "aren't hurting anyone" and mean "no offense" often only exacerbates the injury.
- Important to note is that cultural appropriation, usually seen as highly negative, is not the same thing as cultural exchange.
- Questions of 1) control and 2) profit lie at the heart of cultural appropriation and so that is what we want to keep in the back of our minds as we listen to a narrative written by a white woman who has struggled to understand these issues and how her life does or does not include cultural appropriation.

**Ask participants to sit comfortably and close their eyes in preparation to hear the narrative about a white woman questioning issues of cultural appropriation and how she might play a role in it.**

**Read Narrative** (distribute copies after completion of section)

**Say to Group:** Important to note as we move into small group discussion is that these are really challenging issues and our task today is not about assigning blame to anyone or creating a sense of guilt.

- The effort here is to try to get our heads wrapped around this issue so that we can better evaluate how our lives might be either affected by, or contributing to, continuing cultural appropriation.
- Once we are able to recognize the patterns, then we can further explore the nuances and do our own self-examination about how we might need to learn more and/or make some personal changes.

Small group questions: (20 minutes)

1. What feelings arose as you listened to the narrative?
2. What experiences in your own life does this narrative prompt you to think about?
3. What questions does the example in this narrative raise for you?

Large group share (10 minutes)

1. In what ways can cultural appropriation complicate interactions and relationship building across race?
2. What are the questions you are sitting with as we prepare to finish this workshop?

**Wrap Up:** As we move toward our close, it's important to acknowledge that we only scratched the surface of issues surrounding cultural appropriation.

- For many situations, there will be disagreement among people in terms of what is offensive behavior or not, as everyone has different sensitivities.
- However, now that we have some awareness of the issue, it is important for us to really listen to what people say and try to avoid becoming defensive.
- Ultimately, even if we are leaving with some confusion – the questions we have can help lead us into important conversations that will help us as we move forward.

*Section V*

*(10 min)*

## **Closing**

Materials: List of Terms/Context Page (Handout 1.2.2), Resource Page (Handout 1.2.3)

*Purpose of piece:*

To acknowledge what we did today, bridge to next workshop, and allow people to check out of the space

**Wrap Up:** Thank you for your participation today. If you are interested in learning more about cultural appropriation, we are handing out a resource sheet that offers easily accessed, short videos that are available for viewing on the internet.

- You might also want to consider watching the videos with others from the workshop and discussing the questions that follow each video link on the resource page.
- Now, as we close today's workshop, let's go around the circle and name one thing you found valuable about the time we spent together here today.

## *WORKSHOP 1.2 MODIFICATIONS*

### **Suggested**

If you are unable to complete the entire 3-hr workshop, here is an alteration that could satisfy some goals:

- **2 hour option**
  - Opening without adding to discussion guidelines or choosing a focus (reduces by 5 minutes)
  - Eliminate section III (reduces by 55 minutes)
  - Eliminate break, and retain those minutes for a more thorough discussion of section IV.