

Join the national conversation!



Word Generation - Unit 1.03

Focus Words

complexity | culture | element | resourceful | tradition

Weekly Passage

Does America have its own culture? Many foods, customs, traditions, values, fashions, musical and artistic styles, and other aspects of everyday American life have origins in other cultures. Some people believe that the unique combination of elements from other cultures defines American culture. For example, celebrating Thanksgiving, playing jazz music, and wearing jeans are shared American traditions with roots in other cultures. Others argue that there is really no such thing as American culture. They observe that people from different cultural backgrounds often live in segregated communities in the U.S. with their own traditional meals, music, holidays, and other customs.

But do these separate groups have anything in common? Some say that Americans are typically materialistic. Are people in the U.S. more interested in spending money and buying things than in spending time with family and learning about their heritage? Is materialism – a desire to own more things – a shared American value? Other people view Americans as especially resourceful. Are people in the U.S.

better than others at making do, and improving their lives? Perhaps resourcefulness is why Americans are traditionally good at taking advantage of what different ethnic groups have to offer. Does the success of the American fast food industry indicate materialism or resourcefulness? Does Taco Bell represent American culture? What about baseball, hip-hop, Nintendo, or Hollywood? Is America a “melting pot” with its own unique flavor, or a “salad bowl” made up of lots of different tastes? Might it be the complexity of America’s cultural history that sets it apart from other nations? What do you think?

TEACHER

Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- ▶ What are some examples of traditions that are uniquely American?
- ▶ What are some elements of American culture that originate in other cultures?
- ▶ What are some values that might be considered typically American?
- ▶ Does culture divide people or bring them together?
- ▶ What makes American culture complex?

Unit 1.03

What is an American?

Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
complexity	(n.) - having many interrelated parts; of a complicated nature	complexities (pl.)	complex (adj.) complex (n.)	complicate	multiplex
culture	(n.) - way of life; group of people who share a particular way of life	cultures (pl.) cultured (adj.)		monocultural bicultural culturally cultural	cult cultivate occult
element	(n.) - piece; part; component	elements (pl.)		elemental elementary	
resourceful	(adj.) - inventive; capable		resource	resources (pl.) resourcefully resourcefulness	
tradition	(n.) - a regular practice; custom that is repeated over time	traditions (pl.)		untraditional traditionalism traditional traditionally	

Unit 1.03

What is an American?

Problem of the Week



Immigrants have built and shaped the United States. Through the years, these **resourceful** Americans endured many hardships, from discrimination to the Great Depression. They brought cultural **elements** like food, dress, and religious **traditions** from around the world. The **complexity** of our national **culture** reflects the great diversity of our people. Let's think about that diversity mathematically.

This table shows the top ancestries reported on the 2000 U.S. Census.

Option 1: According to the table, which of the following statements is true?

- A) Most Americans have German ancestry.
- B) More Americans reported having African-American ancestry than Irish ancestry.
- C) More Americans reported having Mexican ancestry than English ancestry.
- D) More Americans reported having German ancestry than any other ancestry.

Top Reported Ancestries, by Percentage of U.S. Population	
German	15.2%
Irish	10.8%
African-American	8.8%
English	8.7%
American	7.2%
Mexican	6.5%
Italian	5.6%
Polish	3.2%
French	3.0%
American Indian	2.8%

Option 2: According to the table, an American chosen at random is how much more likely to have German ancestry than Mexican ancestry? Round your answer to the nearest hundredth.

Answer: 2.34 times more likely

Math Discussion Question: Our national **culture** blends **elements** from many different cultural **traditions**, and yet Americans feel great pride in being American. The responses to the question about ancestry on the U.S. Census hint at the **complexity** of Americans' cultural identity. For example, 7% of Americans, or over 20 million **resourceful** citizens, said their ancestry is "American" although the question was worded to encourage a different answer. What does this mean? Is it possible to have American ancestry? Or do these people just have such strong feelings about the U.S. that they consider themselves "American," regardless of their real ancestry? What do you think?

What is an American?

Debating the Issue



GO!

I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A America has its own unique shared culture that is different from others. American culture includes traditions that originate in America (e.g., Thanksgiving) and are common among those who live in the U.S., regardless of their original heritage.

B America is a patchwork of different cultures. All elements of American culture can be traced to some other culture. There is nothing that is uniquely American, and there is no culture that is shared by all Americans.

C People have multiple cultures. Americans transform what is brought from other cultures into a unique American brand of values, customs, traditions, etc. that is shared across ethnic groups, while also practicing customs that are specific to certain social or ethnic subgroups.

D America does not have a single uniform culture. Each American develops an individual lifestyle that draws from many different cultures. There are American subcultures, such as hip-hop, that originate in America and can include people from different ethnic backgrounds.

E _____

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I believe that...

I agree with you because. . .

You make a good point, but have you considered...

Can you show me evidence in the text that supports what you said?

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

Unit 1.03

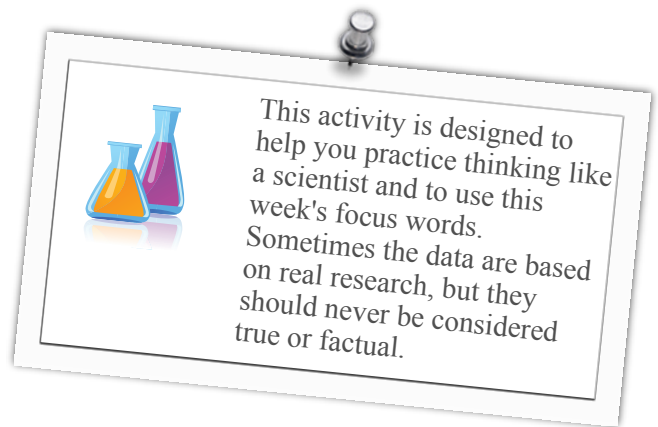
What is an American?

Science Activity

Professor Seemy's class is watching a video about chimpanzees. Scientists used to think that only humans had **culture**, or behaviors that make one social group different from another. After all, animals don't have language, clothes, or religious **traditions**, which are important **elements** of human culture. But chimps do pass on learned behaviors to their children, like using twigs to catch termites. These behaviors make one group of chimps different from another.

"Hey," Raquelle says. "If there's such a thing as chimp culture, is there such a thing as classroom culture?"

"Good question!" Professor Seemy says. Is there such a thing as classroom culture?



Question:

Will two classrooms have different cultures?

Hypothesis:

Students in the same classroom will develop and pass on unique behaviors – a classroom culture.

Materials:

- ▶ Two classrooms with the same rules
- ▶ Observers

TEACHER

Real Research

What is culture?

-The definition of culture changes with the context. Scientists who study animal culture believe it is a process by which learned behaviors are shared between members of a group and passed on to the next generation. They think they see evidence of culture when:

-a group of apes has a unique grooming technique

-a group of sperm whales has a unique singing style

-a group of macaques (monkeys) washes potatoes before eating them, while other macaque groups do not

-a group of macaques eats foods that other macaque groups will not eat

Small, M. (2001, April). Do animals have culture? Scientific American. Retrieved on November 10 from

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=do-animals-have-culture&page=2>

Procedure:

1. For one week, send observers to write down what happens in the two classrooms.
2. Analyze and interpret the observations.

Data:

Both rooms had the same rule for using the bathroom. Students were supposed to raise their hands. Sometimes, the teachers were so busy that a raised hand went unnoticed. In Classroom A, students waited until the teacher noticed them. However, the **resourceful** students in Classroom B had developed behavior with more **complexity**.

The Classroom B bathroom-going behavior had three separate **elements**. First, students waited with raised hands for about one minute. Second, they got up and told a friend where they were going. Third, they went quickly and quietly to the bathroom. A new student appeared one day. After watching the other students, she quickly adopted their bathroom-going procedure.

Situation	Classroom A	Classroom B
Going to the bathroom	Students raise hands	Students raise hands, tell a friend, and then leave quietly

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

Observers found that students in one classroom had developed and passed on a unique behavior.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



Writing Prompt:

What does it mean to be an American?

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

complexity | culture | element | resourceful | tradition

A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

[illegible]