

CULTURAL ICEBERG



OVERVIEW

The activity is designed to help students understand the concept of culture using the iceberg metaphor. The visible aspects of culture, such as food, language, and clothing, represent only a small portion of a much larger and deeper cultural context. Through this group activity, students increase their cultural and social awareness. The debriefing session helps students reflect on what they have learned and why understanding the cultural iceberg is essential for respecting diverse cultural backgrounds.



GLOBAL COMPETENCE

Understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

Social awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.



TIME

20-30 minutes depending on discussion and number of students



ACTIVITY TYPE

Group Work, Reflection, Creativity



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to distinguish between the visible and invisible aspects of culture.
- Students will be able to recognize that we all have similarities and differences and respect other points of view.



MATERIALS NEEDED

- Large sheets of white paper or white sticky easel pads, 25" x 30"/63.5 cm x 76.2 cm (1 sheet for each group)
- Colored markers/pencils/pens

Preparation

- Read through the directions.
- Preassigned groups of 3-4 students
- Cultural Iceberg PDF displayed for all to see

Set-Up

A room is set up for students to work in groups at tables, and there is space for the teacher to move about the room.



DIRECTIONS

Introduction

Explain to the students that they will engage in an activity that requires trust and respect within their groups. Using the iceberg as a metaphor, this exercise will help them understand cultural differences and similarities.

Preparation

- Arrange the room to accommodate multiple groups of 3-4 students at a table.
- Each group should have a large sheet of white paper and markers/pens/pencils.
- Ensure the room setup allows you to move freely among the groups to offer help.
- You can print a copy of the Cultural Iceberg PDF for each student or display it on a screen for all students.

Activity

- Say, "Today, we will use the iceberg metaphorically to understand culture. Don't worry if this is a new concept; we'll start by discussing icebergs and then move on to the cultural iceberg."
- Ask the following:
 - a. How do icebergs form?
 - b. What percent of an iceberg is visible above water? Answer: "10% above; the remainder, 90%, is below the waterline."
 - c. Have you heard the saying "Tip of the Iceberg"? What do you think it means? Answer: "It means that something is part of a much bigger situation. This idiom comes from the fact that only the tip of an iceberg can be seen, and the rest of the iceberg, which is much larger, is underneath the water and cannot be seen."
- Ask, "Now, let's discuss culture. What is culture? Answer: "A simple definition is the communication styles, ideas, customs, beliefs, dress, values, manners, interactions, behaviors, and more of a particular people, group, or society."
- Ask, "What different types of culture can you think of? For example, is there a work culture? Student Responses: ethnic culture, country culture, regional culture, local culture, family culture, work culture, team culture, friend culture, school culture."
- Say, "Now we will combine these two words into Culture Iceberg. What do you think that means? Raise your hand if you've heard of a Culture Iceberg." Answer: Call on a few students to answer and describe it in their own words. Or ask them to brainstorm what it might mean.
- Common Student Questions with Answers;
 - Q: Can a person belong to more than one culture?
 - A: Absolutely, and many of us do. How is that possible? Where might there be overlaps?
 - Q: If something is below the surface, then how can we see or understand it?
 - A: Through communication, active listening, and taking an interest in another person's perspective.

For example, if it is someone's birthday, you might ask them how their family celebrates birthdays. Are there different birthday celebrations for children versus adults? The answers to these questions will help you get below the surface.

- Q: Do cultures change over time?
- A: Yes, they do! There are many reasons, such as technology, education, migration, etc. Can you think of other things that may cause culture to change or adapt?
- Q: Does speaking more than one language change your culture?
- A: Not necessarily. It often enriches communication and appreciation of both and can complement customs, viewpoints, traditions, values, and practices.

Iceberg Group Work

- If not already, ask students to form into their groups.
- Display the iceberg graphic on the screen, which includes the paragraph below, and ask a volunteer to read it.

"In 1976, anthropologist Edward T. Hall created the cultural iceberg. He compared culture to an iceberg, suggesting that only about 10% is visible, while the rest remains hidden below the surface. This means that what we see on the surface, like food, language, and clothing, is a small part of a much larger and deeper cultural context. Understanding this 'deep culture' is crucial for respecting and appreciating the diversity of cultures worldwide."

- Using yourself as an example, share the examples below with students.
 - "Above the water line, the 10%, an example for me would be food served at a special meal: [mention a specific food that has cultural meaning to you]."
 - "Below the water line, the 90%, an example for me would work culture expectations: [something expected of you as part of school work culture that students may not know/realize, e.g., writing lesson plans over the summer]."
- Say, "Now I want you to work together to create a cultural iceberg representing everyone in your group. Nominate a member to draw the iceberg; it must not be perfect—icebergs are naturally formed!"

Step One: Draw Iceberg

- Draw a horizontal line across the large white paper to represent the waterline.
- Above the waterline, draw a "tip of the iceberg" about twice the size of a hand.
- Below the waterline, draw a more significant chunk of the iceberg, about five times the size of a hand.

Step Two: Prompts

- Each person in the group needs something to write with.
- The teacher will call out a prompt.
- Students discuss whether the prompt is above or below the waterline.
- Each student writes something related to the prompt on (or near) the iceberg above or below the waterline. For example, if the prompt was Religious Beliefs, one student may write Catholic—the name of their religion. In contrast, others may write they 'must' attend Temple with their grandma. Another may write that their family does not practice religion. There are no wrong answers. All are correct as each student internalizes the prompt for their cultural context.
- Read another prompt for students to use. Teachers can adjust the number of prompts for class size and time. Prompts:
 - Food served at special events [above]
 - Festivals [above]
 - Language [above]
 - Treatment of elders [below]
 - Personal space [above]
 - Child-raising beliefs [below]
 - Greetings [above]
 - Dance [above]
 - Family values [below]
 - Concepts of Fairness [below]
 - Managing Emotions [below]

Teacher Tip: If space and time allow, ask students to do a gallery walk to see the different icebergs created.

Step Three: Debrief

Use the following questions in class, in groups, or as a journaling activity.

1. What did you learn about your group mates you did not know or realize before?
2. Why is it important to remember that we all have visible and invisible aspects to who we are?
3. How does understanding the Cultural Iceberg help us show respect towards those from different cultural backgrounds?