

Cultural Reflections

Key Stage 3 > Year 8

> Framework Objective R16 Recognise how texts refer to and reflect the culture in which they were produced	> Framework Objective W3 Use writing for thinking and learning by recording ideas as they develop to aid reflection
> Framework Objective S&L4 Provide an explanation or commentary which links words with actions or images.	> Framework Objective S&L7 Listen for a specific purpose, paying sustained attention and selecting for comment or question that which is relevant to the agreed focus

Icon

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Overview



Introduction

This sequence of activities is designed to form a self-contained guided research project lasting several lessons. Its primary focus is on understanding how texts refer to and reflect culture, with work to develop an underpinning appreciation of what culture is. Its pedagogical method is to work in ways that value open-ended enquiry, creativity and critical thinking.

It encourages active use of ICT, with multimodal modelling by the teacher and hands-on practical experience by the students. It introduces students to the Poetry Archive website and gives structured activities to develop independent use of one of its tools.

Different kinds of reading are required, with exploration and comparison of media and literary texts. There is a lot of emphasis on speaking and listening both as a process for developing ideas and as one of the key outcomes: a presentation on contemporary British culture.

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Key concepts

Culture

The beliefs, attitudes and values of a group of people unified by race, ethnicity, language, nationality or religion, and the behaviours built on these beliefs, attitudes and values, including traditions, norms, customs, arts, history, folklore, work, institutions and organisations, languages and language varieties, social relationships, material goods such as food, clothing, buildings, tools and machines

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Activities

1. The Queen and Cream Teas

- Start with some pictures on screen or on paper of people/places/things that have traditionally been used to represent Britishness: the queen, a cream tea, morris dancers, punting on the Cam, a bowler hat, etc. As you show them, invite students to work out the connection. You could include video (a *Carry On* clip?) and audio (*Land of Hope and Glory? Jerusalem?*)
- Develop the idea that these are regarded as representative constituents of traditional British culture. Define culture in simple terms, as a particular society at a particular time. Invite discussion: what aspects of today's British culture do/don't they represent? List key ideas generated.
- Review the list and organise the ideas into provisional key concepts that define a culture

2. Exploring Contemporary British Culture

- Extend the definition of culture as in the Key Concepts section above. Explore in discussion how the concepts the students arrived at relate to this kind of definition.
- Working in groups, have students producing a visual representation of how they think contemporary British culture should now be represented in order to give other people an accurate view. You could do this in the time-honoured fashion involving large sheets of sugar paper, scissors and a pile of magazines. If you have computers, get them googling "British culture" in an image search and selecting images they find particularly meaningful for a powerpoint presentation, with whizz-kids free to add video clips, music, audio files, scans of texts, photos etc. Encourage students to think about how they can represent values, attitudes and beliefs as well as material artefacts.
- Have each group present their work to the rest of the class. To encourage better listening, have students filling in a chart to note the similarities and differences in ideas between their representation and each other version.
- Round off with a review of what each person has learned about British culture, perhaps with a short burst of personal writing about how they feel about it.

3. Representations of Caribbean culture

- Watch one or more of the "seriously easy going" Malibu ads (google "Malibu advert" - www.visit4info.com is a useful site) and brainstorm what these texts have to say about Caribbean culture. What aspects of Caribbean culture are represented and why? What aspects aren't represented and why not? How is Caribbean culture referred to? Extend and organise ideas drawing on the concepts about culture developed previously.
- Next, set up a student investigation of representations of Caribbean culture in poetry by Caribbean writers now living in Britain. In an ICT suite, or with a class set of laptops, model how to use the poet search in the Poetry Archive:
 - How to find the Poetry Archive website
 - Where to find the Poet Search on the homepage
 - How to find a poet by last name
 - How to open an individual poet page
 - How to open an individual poem to read the text and play the recording
- The task is to read and listen to these 5 poems: James Berry's *Childhood Tracks* and *Trick a Duppy*, Valerie Bloom's *Granny Is* and *Two Seasons*, and Jean Binta Breeze's *The arrival of Brighteye – an extract*. This could be done in groups of 5 with each student responsible for one

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poem. Students to make notes on how each one refers to and reflects Caribbean culture. They should be encouraged to read and listen to each poem several times, adding ideas as they develop. You could support this process visually by giving them target diagrams to fill in, with ideas added to each ring with each reading/listening.

- Discussion (or written work) to draw together and develop this thinking. This could be structured around these ideas: an overview of popular stereotypes of Caribbean culture; a description of the aspects of Caribbean culture referenced and reflected in the Malibu ads; a description of the aspects referenced and reflected in the poems; an explanation of the similarities and differences; some reasons for the differences taking into account the audiences and purposes of the different types of text.

4. Wrapping it up

- You could round off with a short debate on the question of whether the representation of the Caribbean in the texts we have looked at is the equivalent of the Queen and cream teas. Depending on the cultural make-up of your class, this will require more or less preparation.

Variations

- The work on culture could be developed by creative writing using the short essays in *British Greats* as style models, whether students prefer to write about British culture or another culture to which they are connected. The synopsis of this book is: “*What are the 100 things the British are most proud of and what defines Britishness? This volume nominates 100 British greats - ideas, inventions, accomplishments, monuments, artistic and cultural movements and figures - from the beginning of British history to the present day.*”

Other resources

- CDs with more extensive selections of poems by James Berry, Valerie Bloom and Jean Binta Breeze, available from the Poetry Archive
- For reference and source material about British culture, a copy of *British Greats* edited by John Mitchinson and/or any of the decade scrapbooks by Robert Opie, e.g. *The 1970s Scrapbook*