

ACTIVITY 25: CULTURAL APPROPRIATION DETECTIVE

Overview of the activity

Cultural appropriation is a frequently used term, but what does it really mean? This discussion activity encourages participants to explore the concept of cultural appropriation.

Objectives

- Develop an understanding of current debates on ‘cultural appropriation’
- Have a more precise definition of this concept
- Be able to differentiate cultural appropriation from other forms of discrimination

Duration (in minutes)	Min/max number of participants	Room/space requirements
75 minutes	• Recommended: 12 • Minimum: 4 • Maximum: 20	Participants should be able to sit down around tables in groups of 3–4

Minimum knowledge requirements of participants

The activity requires a good level of abstraction, which in turn requires a good knowledge of the language in which the activity is carried out.

Materials needed

- Chairs
- Tables
- Flipchart
- Paper for each small group and several markers

Preparation

1. The 'grid for detectives' should be printed for each small group (see below under 'Complementary materials').
2. Each small group will work on an example of 'cultural appropriation'. To make this possible, there are two options.
 - a. The facilitator makes a selection of more and less recent episodes of suspected cultural appropriation, and at the beginning of the activity participants can select the 'case' they are most interested in. The participants who select the same case form into groups.
 - b. If you are in contact with participants in advance, you can invite them to propose the cases they would like to work on. In this case, they do the research and make a proposal. You should still familiarize yourself with these cases before the activity.

Instructions

1. Create groups of 4–5 participants who will work on the same case of 'cultural appropriation'.

2. Distribute the grid for detectives (see below under 'Complementary materials') and read it together to make sure everybody understands each criteria.
3. Ask the groups to answer each question in the grid, each time collecting as much 'evidence' as they can. In the end, based on their answers, they must make a decision together, on whether or not we can really speak of cultural appropriation.
4. To close, each group presents their research and gives their 'verdict', explaining why they came to this conclusion.
5. An alternative form of plenary sharing could be done theatrically. Here, one group presents their verdict on their case and the other participants act as adversaries, trying to put counter arguments to change the verdict.

Learning outcomes evidence collected

Notes from participants answering the questions in the detective grid, showing the ability to think critically and distinguish between expressions of 'cultural appropriation'

Evaluation

At the end of the activity, ask participants about their experiences and whether they have a better understanding of the concept of 'cultural appropriation'.

Teaching tips, stories and experiences during piloting

You can also decide to mix ‘good’ and ‘bad’ examples of cultural appropriation, such as the example of Osklen’s ‘Asháninka’ collection mentioned in the Handbook.

Additional resources

Here, we present four examples of recent cases of cultural appropriation and an excerpt from a piece by Jenni Avins that describes a more personal, subjective perspective.

Excerpt from [Jenni Avins](#) and [Quartz](#), ‘The Dos and Don’ts of Cultural Appropriation’, *The Atlantic*, 20 October 2015

Here, we present four examples of recent cases of cultural appropriation and an excerpt from a piece by Jenni Avins that describes a more personal, subjective perspective.

Excerpt from [Jenni Avins](#) and [Quartz](#), ‘The Dos and Don’ts of Cultural Appropriation’, *The Atlantic*, 20 October 2015

‘At my house, getting dressed is a daily act of cultural appropriation, and I’m not the least bit sorry about it. I step out of the shower in the morning and pull on a vintage cotton kimono. After moisturising my face, I smear Lucas Papaw ointment—a tip from an Australian makeup artist—onto my lips before I make coffee with a Bialetti stovetop espresso maker a girlfriend brought back from Italy. Depending on the weather, I may pull on an embroidered floral blouse I bought at a roadside shop in Mexico or a striped marinière-style shirt—originally inspired by the French, but mine from the surplus store was a standard-issue Russian telnyashka—or my favourite purple pyjama pants, a souvenir from a friend’s trip to India. I may wear Spanish straw-soled espadrilles (though I’m not from Spain) or Babian leather sandals (I’m not Brazilian either) and top it off with a favourite piece of jewellery, perhaps a Navajo turquoise ring (also not my heritage).

As I dress in the morning, I deeply appreciate the craftsmanship and design behind these items, as well as the adventures and people they recall. And while I hope I don’t offend anyone, I find the alternative—the idea that I ought to stay in the cultural lane I was born into—outrageous. No matter how much I love cable-knit sweaters and Gruyere cheese, I don’t want to live in a world where the only cultural inspiration I’m entitled to comes from my roots in Ireland, Switzerland, and Eastern Europe.’

[Washington Redskins name controversy](#)



[Valentino Fashion show 2015](#)



'The real problem was the hair. Kylie Jenner, Miley Cyrus and Cara Delevingne are among the celebrities that have been berated for wearing cornrows (thereby appropriating African culture) in recent memory, and yet the models at Valentino were all given a braided bun hairstyle designed by Guido Palau.'

The Ankama Manga Publishing House



The Ankama publishing house specializes in the publication of Manga, a style of comic specific to Japan. The founders and the authors are French and are external to the community from which they take inspiration and commercialize the cultural heritage.

[Miley Cyrus twerking in her video](#)

'We can't stop' and at concerts



'Miley seems to delight in dancing much like these strippers do: twerking, popping the ass, bending at the waist and shaking her rump in the air. Fun. But basically, she, as a rich white woman, is "playing" at being a minority specifically from a lower socio-economic level. Along with the gold grill and some hand gestures, Miley straight-up appropriates the accoutrements associated with certain black people on the fringes of society.'

Questions for self-reflection in the teaching practice

To what extent have you incorporated elements of cultural heritage of groups to which you don't belong in your own life? To what extent do you feel your use of these elements would qualify as 'appropriation'? How would your life be without the possibility of incorporating heritage elements of other cultures? When trying to be inclusive of minority learners, to what extent might you be closer to cultural appropriation or to cultural appreciation?