



# Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?

## Cultural Diversity



Susan McHale, Kristen Sublett, Gage Jeter  
 Published by K20 Center

*This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)*

<b>Grade Level</b>	7th – 10th Grade	<b>Time Frame</b>	2–3 class periods
<b>Subject</b>	Social Studies	<b>Duration</b>	80–100 minutes
<b>Course</b>	World Human Geography		

### Essential Question

How does culture shape our identity? In what ways can cultural diversity enhance or complicate our lives?

### Summary

In this lesson, students will identify aspects of their own cultural identity and how they contribute to cultural diversity within society. Students use their knowledge of geographical concepts including acculturation, assimilation, and cultural diffusion to determine how culture impacts human life. Students will evaluate the extent to which cultural diversity contributes to or divides communities.

### Snapshot

#### Engage

Students watch brief videos to make observations and inferences about different cultures.

#### Explore

Students discuss how different indicators such as religion, language, gender, and ethnicity impact one's culture.

#### Explain

Students expand their vocabulary regarding culture then consider whether the United States is more of a melting pot or salad bowl.

#### Extend

Students contribute to a class or school cultural diversity quilt.

#### Evaluate

Students reflect on their learning using the 3-2-1 strategy.

## Standards

*ACT College and Career Readiness Standards (6-12)*

**WME201:** Understand the implication of a familiar word or phrase and of simple descriptive language

*Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: World Human Geography (9th through 12th grade))*

**7.5.2:** Describe how cultural diffusion, both voluntary and forced, impacts society.

*Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: World Human Geography (9th through 12th grade))*

**WG.3.3:** Explain the processes of cultural diffusion, acculturation, assimilation, and globalization regarding their impact on defining a region.

**WG.3.5:** Explain how cultural characteristics, such as language, ethnicity, and religion impact different regions.

*act.org (6-12)*

**I&A 301:** Understanding the task and writing with purpose. A score in this range indicates that the writer is able to: -Generate a somewhat clear thesis that establishes a perspective on a contemporary issue - Respond to other perspectives on the issue

**D&S 201:** Building and strengthening the argument. A score in this range indicates that the writer is able to: - Arrive at a weak understanding of the issue and differing perspectives on it through inadequate reasoning and examples - Offer a rationale that fails to clarify the argument - Provide elaboration of ideas and analysis that is illogical, disjointed, or circular

## Attachments

- [Cultural Insights—Melting Pot or Salad Bowl.docx](#)
- [Cultural Insights—Melting Pot or Salad Bowl.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—Melting Pot or Salad Bowl.pptx](#)
- [Quilt Squares—Melting Pot or Salad Bowl.docx](#)
- [Quilt Squares—Melting Pot or Salad Bowl.pdf](#)

## Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Cultural Insights handout (attached; one per student; printed front only)
- Quilt Squares handout (attached; one per three students; printed front only)
- Coloring utensils
- Glue or tape
- Construction paper (optional)

10 minutes

## Engage

### Teacher's Note: Sharing Different Cultures

During the Engage portion of this lesson, students watch three videos, each representing a different culture. The videos share information about the Japanese, Mexican, and Black cultures, which are a random sampling of varying cultures. Customize the videos and content on slides 5-13 to meet your needs.

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to guide the lesson. Transition through **slides 3-4** to review the essential questions and learning objectives.

Display **slide 5** and tell the class that they are going to look at various cultures. Preview the activity with the students and explain that they are going to watch a video about Japanese culture. Encourage students to think about the following questions while they watch the video:

- What do you notice about this culture?
- What information does this video tell you about the culture?
- Are there any images that might seem offensive or not representative of this culture?

Move to **slide 6** and play the "[Where Tradition Meets the Future](#)" video about Japanese culture. After the video ends, move to **slide 7** and facilitate a brief discussion regarding the above questions.

### Embedded video

[https://youtube.com/watch?v=WLLv7HnZ\\_fE?si=NNtW8HZj0yxV6M6o](https://youtube.com/watch?v=WLLv7HnZ_fE?si=NNtW8HZj0yxV6M6o)

### Alternative Approach

If time is a concern, consider having small groups of students watch only one of the three videos and share what they learned with the whole class.

20 minutes

## Explore

Show **slide 14** and introduce students to the [Think-Pair-Share](#) strategy. Share with students what culture is, then ask them to think quietly for a moment about the following question: *What evidence of different cultures do you see within your school or community?* Have students find a partner to share their responses. Then ask for volunteers to share their responses in a whole-class discussion.

Move to **slide 15** and use the same strategy again. Begin by asking students first to think quietly about the following questions: *Do our cultural differences (diversity) enrich or complicate our lives? Why do you think that?*

### Teacher's Note: Guiding the Activity

Here students are going to share with a partner what some may feel is personal information. Do not pressure students to share anything they are not comfortable sharing. Additionally, students will see a list of options for how they ethnically identify. If they do not feel that any of the options represent them, remind them that that is why "other" is listed. Some students may have parents from different ethnicities, so they do not identify with one ethnicity over another—and that is perfectly okay.

If time allows, consider asking students why they think those are the "only given options" on many official documents.

Have students continue using the Think-Pair-Share strategy as you transition through **slides 16-19**, giving students time to discuss each of the following questions from the slides:

- How might gender impact your culture? Are roles dependent on gender?
- How would you describe your ethnicity? How might ethnicity impact your culture?
- What languages are spoken at home? How might language impact your culture?
- How might religion impact your culture? What traditions do you have that are based on your religion?

After pairs have had time to discuss each question, ask for volunteers to share with the class. Emphasize that commonalities are ways we have **a shared cultural identity and differences are our diversity**.

### Teacher's Note: Guiding the Activity

If time allows, consider sharing with students the benefits of being bilingual and how it can create professional opportunities for students after high school.

Students may ask what the difference is between race and ethnicity. Guide students in understanding that race is more of a biological description while ethnicity is more of a cultural description. However, many forms use the two words interchangeably. Allow each student to identify with the culture or ethnicity that they choose. This lesson only asks students to consider their ethnicity as many may not know their race.

Show **slide 20** and facilitate a class discussion asking students whether they think their culture influences what food (or dishes) they eat, how they dress, and/or what music they listen to. Encourage students to share their reasoning.

As time allows, use **slide 21** to facilitate a whole-class discussion asking students if they have ever experienced prejudice because of their culture and what they think can be done to prevent racism and prejudice.

30 minutes

## Explain

Display **slide 22** and ask students how they would define American culture, using the elements (from earlier): traditions or rituals, religion, race, gender, dress or clothing, music, food, and language. This could be a wide-open discussion with varying answers.

Show **slide 23-24** and give each student a copy of the attached **Cultural Insights** handout. Use the slide to introduce the vocabulary: *cultural identity*, *cultural diversity*, *cultural diffusion*, *assimilation*, and *acculturation*.

Move to **slide 25** and pose the question: *Is the United States a melting pot or salad bowl?* Use the slide to share with students the two metaphors for describing culture: “melting pot” and “salad bowl.” Introduce students to the [Walking Vote](#) strategy. Have students who believe that the U.S. is a melting pot move to one side of the room and those who believe the U.S. is a salad bowl move to the other side of the room.

### Teacher's Note: Guiding the Lesson

Help students understand the abstract concept of a “melting pot.” Consider using the analogy that a “melting pot” is like soup, having one flavor and texture.

Show **slide 26**. Use the following questions to facilitate a class discussion, having students identify the type of culture the United States currently is.

- Are we a country that has assimilated immigrants into a melting pot?
- Are all Americans expected to act in a certain way?
- Are we a culturally diverse country where cultures have their own communities?
- To what extent are we (the United States) a mixture of the two? Is there some assimilation but not all?

Ask students to return to their desks. Transition to **slide 27** and introduce the metaphor for a third option: “mixed salad.” Explain that “mixed salad” is a mixture of the two—that some ideas of American culture are non-negotiable but cultural identity is not fully assimilated either. Consider sharing that a “mixed salad” is more like a stew, having one flavor, but varying textures.

Display **slide 28**. Have students get out notebook paper and write one paragraph about whether they believe the U.S. is more a melting pot, mixed salad, or salad bowl. Ask them to write a second paragraph addressing the following question: *In what ways can cultural diversity enhance or complicate our lives?*

15 minutes

## Extend

Revisit the elements of culture with students: food, language, traditions or rituals, religion, race, gender, dress or clothing, music, and so on. Then show **slide 29**. Ask students to reflect upon their personal culture and the larger "American" culture to create a class "community" quilt.

Give each student two squares. Have students design and label one square as an example of **cultural diversity** and the other square as an example of **cultural diffusion**. Have students attach their squares with glue or tape to chart paper to create their community quilt.

5 minutes

## Evaluate

Display **slide 30** and introduce the [3-2-1](#) strategy. On a piece of notebook paper, have students demonstrate their understanding by responding to each of the following prompts:

- What are 3 ways that culture shapes our identity?
- Give 2 examples of how cultural diversity can enhance or complicate life.
- What is 1 question you still have about culture?

### Digital Option

If you would prefer students to respond to these prompts digitally, consider using [K20's digital version](#) of this instructional strategy.



## Resources

- Akhtar, J. (2023, April 3). Diffusion. [Illustration]. Noun Project. <https://thenounproject.com/icon/diffusion-5680026/>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). 3-2-1. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/117>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Think-pair-share. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/139>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Wakelet. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/2180>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Walking vote. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/4126>
- JNTO. [visitjapan]. (2016, November 6). *Japan - Where tradition meets the future.* [Video]. YouTube. [https://youtu.be/WLlv7HnZ\\_fE?si=NNtW8HZj0yxV6M6o](https://youtu.be/WLlv7HnZ_fE?si=NNtW8HZj0yxV6M6o)
- Marhendra, D. (2024, May 30). Identity. [Illustration]. Noun Project. <https://thenounproject.com/icon/identity-6937567/>
- Mrfa Studio. (2016, September 15). Diversity. [Illustration]. Noun Project. <https://thenounproject.com/icon/diversity-642226/>
- VisitMexico. (2018, February 7). *Mexico, a world of its own.* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/P6Oz626qERs?si=zAXBrk9KVKLDRPvy>
- YouTube Originals. (2021, March 1). *Black renaissance: What is black culture?* [Video]. YouTube. [https://youtu.be/weCGpwm4\\_UU?si=k4ffDHjzr1cdjcX-](https://youtu.be/weCGpwm4_UU?si=k4ffDHjzr1cdjcX-)