

Activity 1: Culture Circles

Time: 30 minutes

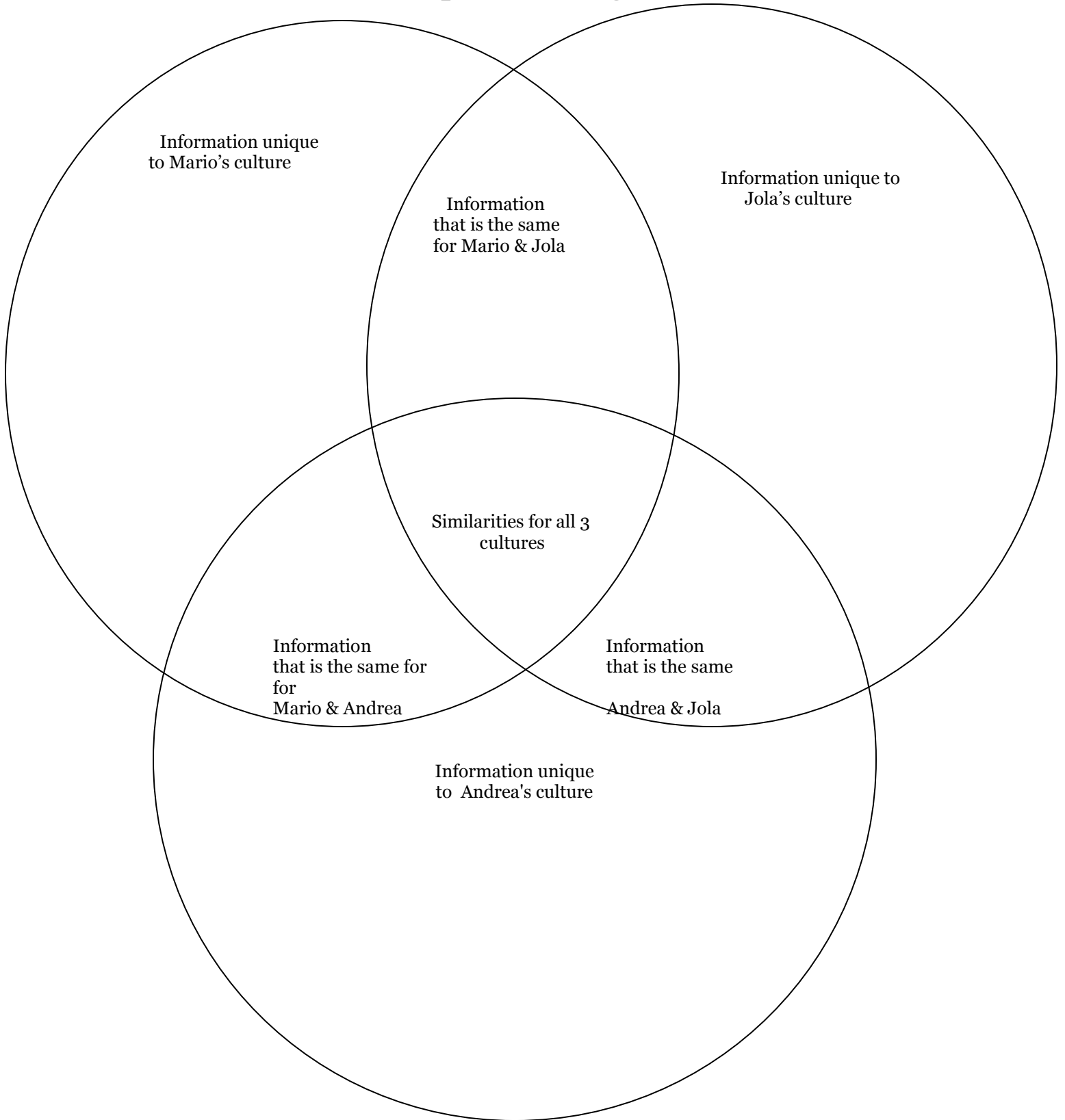
Materials: Pen/pencil, chart paper, marker, “Culture Circles Questions” handout

Objective: To gain a better understanding of differences and similarities between cultures.

Procedure:

- Divide into groups of 3. Try to have three different cultures represented in your group.
- Take turns interviewing each other using the questions provided on the “Culture Circles Questions” handout.
- Draw a Venn diagram on the chart paper provided. An example has been provided.
- Where no part of the circle is shared, write information that makes your culture unique. Title it: *Information unique to _____*.
- Where the circle is shared with one other circle, write the commonalities for two people. Title it: *Information that is the same for _____ and _____*.
- Where all three circles overlap, write the cultural similarities for all three people in your group. Title it: *Similarities for all 3 cultures*.
- If time permits, share your Venn Diagrams with the other participants.

Sample Venn Diagram



Culture Circles Question

Use the following questions to interview the other members in your group about their culture:

1. Which country did your ancestors/family come from?
2. What languages do you speak/know?
3. What do you think is interesting about your culture?
4. When people from other countries think about your culture, what do they usually think of?
5. In your culture is it polite to be straightforward and direct when you talk to someone?
(With whom is it OK and with whom is it not OK?)
6. What makes your culture different/unique from other cultures?
7. What do you like about your culture?
8. What don't you like about your culture?
9. How do young people in your culture behave differently from older people?
10. How do young people in your culture behave differently from people in this culture?
11. Are there many people of different cultures in your country?
12. If you could change one thing about your culture, what would it be?
13. What does it mean to be polite in your culture?
14. What is considered rude in your culture?
(Is there anything in your culture that is considered rude that may not be considered rude in Canadian culture?)
15. If a group of people just came to your country from overseas, what advice would you give them?
16. Do you pray before each meal?
17. What is the best/most important thing your culture has given to the world?
18. What is the best/most important thing your culture/country has adopted from another culture?
19. Who is an important person (someone who is admired and respected) in your culture?

Activity 2: What Would You Do?

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Scenario cards

Objective: To help educators understand how to be culturally sensitive and help students feel proud of their cultural heritage.

Procedure: Each card contains information about a cultural situation that your students may experience. Read over the card, and think about a solution to the situation that would be culturally sensitive and enable your students to feel proud of their distinct identity. This activity can be done individually, in pairs and in small or large groups.

Scenario Cards

Card 1

Minoj Sindhu and his family arrived from Jullundur, India, two months ago. Minoj's first language is Punjabi, but he is also fluent in English and Hindi. Minoj is 13 years old and is in grade 7. He wears the traditional Sikh headdress, a turban, and as part of his religious doctrine, he, as well as all of his male relatives, do not cut their hair. During a lunch period that you were supervising, you noticed that Minoj was wearing a toque over his turban – an unusual sight for this normally well-groomed young man. The school's policy is such that students are not to wear toques or any headdress that is not specific to their cultural or religious traditions. You ask Minoj to remove his toque, and he hesitantly does so. That evening you get a call from Minoj's mother who is very concerned because her son is threatening to not go to school unless he can cut his hair. His mother wants to know why the school is not supporting her son's practice to wear the turban. As an educator what is your response? What is your response to Minoj? What is your response to Minoj's family?

Card 2

Rohma and Adil Nasser are 15 year-old twin siblings in grade 9. Both Rohma and Adil were born in Canada to Egyptian-born parents. Once Rohma turned 11 years-old, she began to wear the Islamic head-dress, the *hijab*, and this past year the twins requested to be excused from lunch period during the Islamic month of fasting, *Ramadan*. In two weeks, the grade 9 students will be going on a three-day, two-night winter camping excursion. The excursion is an annual trip for all grade nine students and is an opportunity for students to learn about wilderness survival. The Nassers agreed to allow Adil to attend the field trip, but refused to allow Rohma to attend. You asked Rohma why she was not going, and she explained that in her culture girls are not allowed to take part in such activities. What is your response? What is your response to Rohma? What is your response to Rohma's family?

Card 3

Xiao is an 8 year-old new immigrant from China in Grade 3. She is fluent in Mandarin and spends part of the day in an ESL class. On the first day of school, your colleague changed Xiao's name to Cynthia, explaining that it is a much easier name for the teachers to pronounce and explained to Xiao and her parents that from now on she should answer to Cynthia. What is your response? What is your response to Xiao? What is your response to your colleague?

Activity 3: Personal Reflection

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Pen/pencil, “Cultural Behaviours” handout, “Personal Reflection” worksheet.

Objectives: To reflect on different cultural behaviours present in the classroom. To brainstorm strategies to support your students’ cultural adjustment.

Procedure: Read the list of various cultural behaviours explained on the “Cultural Behaviours” handout. Answer the questions that follow on the “Personal Reflection” worksheet.

Cultural Behaviours

1. *Avoiding eye contact* – this is considered polite and respectful behaviour in some cultures, such as Laotian, Hmong, or Hispanic.
2. *Different attitudes about cooperation* – some students come from cultures that are based on the premise that people help each other in all areas. People from such cultures are unaware that in Canadian schools helping a fellow student with a problem may be construed as cheating. Cultures that strongly encourage cooperation include Polynesian, Southeast Asian, and Aboriginal cultures.
3. *Fear of making mistakes* – for some students, making a mistake is a greater error than leaving a question unanswered or asking another student for help. In such cultures the primary objective is ultimate correctness.
4. *Fear of being singled out for individual praise* – group or family is more important than the individual in some cultures.
5. *Different role expectations for males and females* – this attitude is most prominent with students who come from countries that ascribe different roles for men and women.
6. *Uneasiness with the informality of the classroom atmosphere* – public behaviour in certain cultures is always formal. Some cultures view North American schools as bordering on chaos and the informality as an invitation to misbehave. Students may be surprised when teachers wear jeans, sit on their desks, and insist on being called by their first names.
7. *Uneasiness with the Canadian school system* – Newcomers are often uneasy about the learner-centered, process-oriented curriculum and educational practices of our school systems, as opposed to other more traditional subject-centered learning environments.
8. *Taboos about certain forms of physical contact* – for some cultures, the area around the head and shoulders is sacred and it is considered impolite for another person to touch these areas. In other cultures, persons of the opposite gender who are not related should not have any physical contact; this even includes shaking hands.
9. *Beliefs about the propriety of certain kinds of dress* – certain cultures have rigid customs as to what is proper and improper dress. Some students feel distress about having to wear gym clothes.

