WHAT IS CULTURAL IDENTITY?

Est. Time: 60 minutes
Subjects: ELA, History/Social Studies, SEL
Age Range: All Ages
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What is cultural identity?

In this lesson you will:

• Understand the term “Cultural Identity”

• Learn how musicians Taboo, Stevie Salas, Robbie Robertson and Jimi Hendrix negotiated their diverse heritage

• Discover how Fred Kabotie and other Indigenous artists express their complex identities

• Discover how Native American poets Diane Burns and b: william bearhart have expressed their identity

• Think about how you navigate your own complex identity
Consider or ask a friend:

- Do you behave in the same way with all groups of people you know? For example, do you behave the same way with your parents as you do with your friends?

- Do you feel you are “more true to yourself” in some places versus other places?

- Do you feel there are times or places where you are not allowed to fully “be yourself”? Why?
What is Cultural Identity?

Your cultural identity reflects who you are, it is a feeling of belonging to something bigger than yourself. Cultural identity is your understanding of yourself, it reflects your nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, age, where you live, or any social group that you belong to.
Fitting into a larger society while also being true to your cultural identity presents challenges.

Robbie Robertson, Steve Salas, and Taboo are all well known musicians.

**In this video**, each musician discussed how they have expressed their identity, and the way different spaces might allow them to “be themselves.”
Consider or ask a friend:

• Why might Robbie Robertson have been told, “Be proud you’re an Indian, but be careful who you tell?”

• Why do you think Robertson’s peers doubted the possibility that he could become a successful musician outside of the reservation?

• Why do you think Stevie Salas might not have wanted to be seen as an “Indian rockstar”?

• Why did Salas feel he needed to create an “identity” to fit into the Los Angeles scene, and why did he feel like he didn’t fit into that space?

• Who inspired Taboo to recognize his Native ancestry?
Read the poem *Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question* by Anishinaabe-Lac Courte Oreilles and Chemehuevi poet Diane Burns.

Then consider or talk with a friend:

- How would you describe this poem?
- Who might Diane Burns be having a conversation with in this poem?
- Do you get the sense that Burns is enjoying this conversation or not? Why?
- What kind of assumptions are being made about Burns in this poem?
- How might this poem relate to the comment Robertson received “Be proud you’re an Indian, but be careful who you tell?” Why might Burns be reluctant to admit her heritage after having the conversation represented in the poem?
How can an artist's identity and their personal story be reflected in their artwork?

Fred Kabotie was a well-known artist who was born in the Hopi Village of Shungopavi around 1900. He spent his early years in an Indian Boarding School in Santa Fe, New Mexico, 300 miles from his Hopi Village.

During this time, educators, government officials, missionaries, and social reformers had launched a campaign to prohibit indigenous clothing, music, and ceremonial dances. Fred Kabotie was treated harshly at Indian School and was forced to put his Hopi culture out of his thoughts because of these reforms.
In 1918, a progressive educator named John David Dehuff, was appointed superintendent of the Santa Fe Indian School that Fred Kabotie attended. Dehuff and his wife changed the practices of the school and encouraged students to remember and record their cultural traditions.

Kabotie recalled, “Mrs. De Huff got me some drawing paper and watercolors and I started painting things I remembered from home, mostly kachinas. When you’re so remote from your own people you get lonesome. You don’t paint what’s around you, you paint what you have in your mind.”
Fred Kabotie dedicated his life to preserving his Hopi Culture through his art, and in his later years he worked to promote the work of other Hopi Artists. Kabotie died in 1986. Today his valuable artwork can be found in numerous galleries, including the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.
Consider or ask a friend:

• What role do you think painting served for Kabotie while at the Santa Fe boarding school? How might it have helped him with his situation?

• How did painting allow Kabotie to represent his Hopi identity?

• Why do you think that Kabotie worked to promote the work of other Hopi Artists in his later years?
What does contemporary Native Art say about the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous Americans today? Examine these images and consider what these artists are expressing through their work.
Consider or ask a friend:

• What message do you think these artists are trying to convey with their work?

• Which pieces stood out to you?

• Choose one of the pieces of art presented and share how it conveys the artist’s experience in being an Indigenous American
Some musicians and artists express their cultural identity through their clothing. The band Redbone was known for performing in their native ceremonial clothing and starting their shows with native drumming and dancing.

Watch this video of Jimi Hendrix’s famous rendition of the U.S. national anthem at the Woodstock music festival in 1969 to see his expression of cultural identity.
Consider or ask a friend:

• How did Jimi Hendrix express his multiethnic background through this version of the “Star-Spangled Banner”?

• Why do you think that this song and performing it in this way was important to Jimi Hendrix?

• Why was Jimi Hendrix’s father concerned about the reactions to his performance of the “Star-Spangled Banner”? 
Read the poem *When I was in Las Vegas and Saw a Warhol Painting of Geronimo* by Anishinaabe-St. Croix poet b: william bearhart.

Then consider or talk with a friend:

- How would you describe this poem?
- What kind of thoughts is bearhart having while looking at the painting of Geronimo?
- How does he identify with Warhol? How does he identify with Geronimo? Are the connections he’s making sincere?
- How might this poem represent a process of understanding one’s cultural identity?
Consider your cultural identity. How do you express yourself with your words, your actions, and your clothing in different places and spaces? Do you talk, act, and dress differently when you visit a grandparent or elderly relative compared to when you are online or with friends?

This diagram helps to describe how a person might express their cultural identity in different settings.
Create a similar diagram on your own or invent another way to show how you express yourself in various places and with different groups of people. What role does cultural identity play in each of these situations?
SUMMARY

• Cultural identity belongs to you as an individual and is also shared by people who have the same identity or upbringing

• Pride in your cultural identity can be an essential part of personal experience, but people can experience barriers in sharing their cultural identity

• Indigenous musicians, poets, and visual artists have used art as a way of expressing their often complex cultural identity

• Understanding and sharing your cultural identity is an important component in living a positive and authentic life
BE CREATIVE

• Talk with an older family member, neighbor, or friend about their cultural identity and any barriers they may have experienced in their life. Create a colorful infographic to share what you have learned about this person’s identity and their personal journey.

• Write a poem about your cultural identity or that of an elderly family member or friend.

• Research one of the artists or poets introduced in this lesson, and write a biography of their life and work.
BE CURIOUS

Explore two student-created videos about their cultural identity at this website.

Learn about the idea of Cultural Icebergs by viewing the video at this website.
CONNECT

Share with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your cultural identity Infographic, biography, or Poem with TeachRock on Instagram or Facebook, email to info@teachrock.org, or Tweet it to @TeachRock
Visit us at teachrock.org for hundreds of other free arts-rich resources for every age range and classroom.

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