



Developed with Shelly Birch, RN, MSNEd, Health Sciences Teacher, Riverwatch Middle School, GA

# Cultural awareness in healthcare

(This is lesson 1 of 2. Please see "Health equality vs. health equity, Vol. 8" for lesson 2.)

Volume 7 | Gr. 6–8

Time required: 1–2 class periods



## Standards

**STEL-2U.** Diagnose a flawed system embedded within a larger technological, social, or environmental system.

**HS-LS4-2.** Construct an explanation based on evidence that the process of evolution primarily results from four factors: (1) the potential for a species to increase in number; (2) the heritable genetic variation of individuals in a species due to mutation and sexual reproduction; (3) competition for limited resources; and (4) the proliferation of those organisms that are better able to survive and reproduce in the environment.

**MS-HDS-HDSS-1.** Demonstrate employability skills required by business and industry.

## Materials

- World map
- Symbols or objects that represent your heritage

## Objective

Students will be able to describe what culture is, recognize the scale of diversity in the United States, and become aware of their cultural differences and biases.

## Lesson prep

Make sure that students have been given the "My cultural awareness" handout on p. 3 to complete the day before the lesson. This will allow them to have a more relatable experience.

# Directions

## Cultural differences

1. Start by defining culture for students by projecting the slide on p. 5. Use the slide on p. 6 to talk about the cultural differences that exist in the world.
2. Then, ask students why they think the United States is described as a “melting pot.” (The name comes from the idea that all the cultural differences in the U.S. meld together as if they were metals melted down to become one strong alloy.) Show them the slide on p. 7 and discuss the population of the U.S.
3. Have students take out their completed “My cultural awareness” sheets. Tell students that people come from all over the world to live in the United States, which is another reason that the U.S. is referred to as the melting pot of the world.
4. Then, tell students a little bit about your own background and where your ancestors came from. If possible, show them symbols or objects that represent your heritage. Have students choose three other students in the class to share their own background with.

**Teacher tip:** Make sure that all students are actively engaged in both telling and listening to each other as they share their cultural heritages. After about five minutes, ask if anyone would like to share their background with the entire class. Then, ask students if they learned anything new about each other. There may be students who have forgotten to bring their “My cultural awareness” sheet. Let them share what information they know about their culture.

## Cultural bias

5. Use the slides on p. 8 to discuss why understanding and respecting cultural differences in healthcare is so important. Explain to students that how they handle a patient’s cultural heritage can determine how they respond to medical services and interventions. It can also affect communication.
6. Then, talk about cultural biases and share the “Cultural biases” slide on p. 9 with them. Ask students if they think they’ve ever experienced cultural bias in their lives. Walk them through the questions on p. 10 and discuss as a class or in small groups how cultural biases affect healthcare.
7. **Chalk talk activity:** This activity will help students understand that different cultures express themselves in different ways. The activity asks learners to silently respond to a prompt in writing both to the prompt and to others’ responses.  
Start with a prompt such as, “Why is reading important to me?” Write it in the center of a large sheet of paper or in the middle of the board. Set a time limit of three to five minutes and allow three to four students at a time to silently walk to the board and write their answers or respond to others’ answers. Students should work fast and take as many turns as they can during the time frame.
8. Next, put students into pairs to create a presentation about a culture of their choosing, either their own or one they are interested in. Share the rubric on p. 4 with students. Tell them their presentations should include where their culture is most prevalent, as well as the culture’s beliefs, customs, arts, and way of life. Have them pay particular attention to how members of the culture would behave in a healthcare setting. What communication barriers might they encounter? Do they have rituals or practices for childbirth or death?
9. Each set of partners should present their slides to the class and talk about the culture they chose. Display a map of the world, and let the students put a pin where their chosen culture is most prevalent. Provide sticky notes to the rest of the class and have them provide feedback to the presenters by writing something that they learned or liked about their presentation.

**Teacher tip:** Be sure to review the notes written by the students before handing them to the speakers. Have the presenters keep these notes in their notebooks.

Using the student’s written responses, discuss how different cultures express themselves in different ways and how we all have different lenses that we view the world through. Point out that communication is different in every culture, and the key to understanding each other is learning how different cultures express themselves.

Stress the importance of this. Not understanding one another can create difficulties in creating a treatment plan for both the provider and the patient. Let students talk about times they might not have felt understood and how that made them feel.

10. Use the “Presentation rubric” if you are making the presentation a summative grade. If you choose not to make this a summative evaluation, you can evaluate each student’s knowledge and feelings by having them write a reflection statement in their journals by answering the following question: How would I respect other people’s cultures in a healthcare setting? Collect the journals and check students’ understanding of the importance of cultural awareness. Use any gaps in knowledge to identify where they may need additional guidance and instruction.

# My own cultural awareness

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The United States is unique because it is a country with a rich mixture of cultures. The U.S. is influenced by many cultures, including African, Asian, Native American, Polynesian, European, and Latin American. These cultures provide a diversity that is evident in any setting, including our schools, military, and even in our health care system.

Use the questions below to interview a parent or grandparent and discover your own unique culture. Fill in the information and be prepared to share this with other members of your class.

1. List the countries your family members came from. What brought them to the U.S.?
2. What kind of traditions or celebrations does our family participate in?
3. What kinds of spiritual or religious beliefs are important to your family?
4. List 3 interesting facts about your family:

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# Presentation rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Final Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

| Category points          | Above (4)   | Meets (3)  | Partially meets (2)   | Does not meet (1)                                      |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Requirements</b>      | All requirements are met and exceeded.  | All requirements are met.  | 1 requirement is not completely met.  | More than 1 requirement was not completely met.        |
| <b>Content</b>           | Covers culture in-depth with details and examples. Subject knowledge is excellent.    | Includes essential knowledge about culture. Subject knowledge is good.                                       | Includes essential knowledge about culture but there are at least 2 factual errors. | Content is minimal and there are many factual errors.  |
| <b>Organization</b>      | Content is very well organized.   | Content is organized.  | Content is logically organized for the most part.                                   | There was no logical organization of material.         |
| <b>Mechanics</b>         | No misspellings or grammatical errors.  | 3 or fewer misspellings or grammatical errors.   | 4 misspellings or grammatical errors.   | More than 4 errors or grammatical errors.              |
| <b>Oral presentation</b> | Interesting, well-rehearsed with smooth delivery, and holds the audience's attention. | Relatively interesting, rehearsed with a fairly smooth delivery that usually holds the audience's attention. | Delivery not smooth but able to hold the audience's attention most of the time.     | Delivery not smooth and the audience's attention lost. |

# What is culture?

Culture is the system of shared attitudes, values, and beliefs that are common among a group of people.

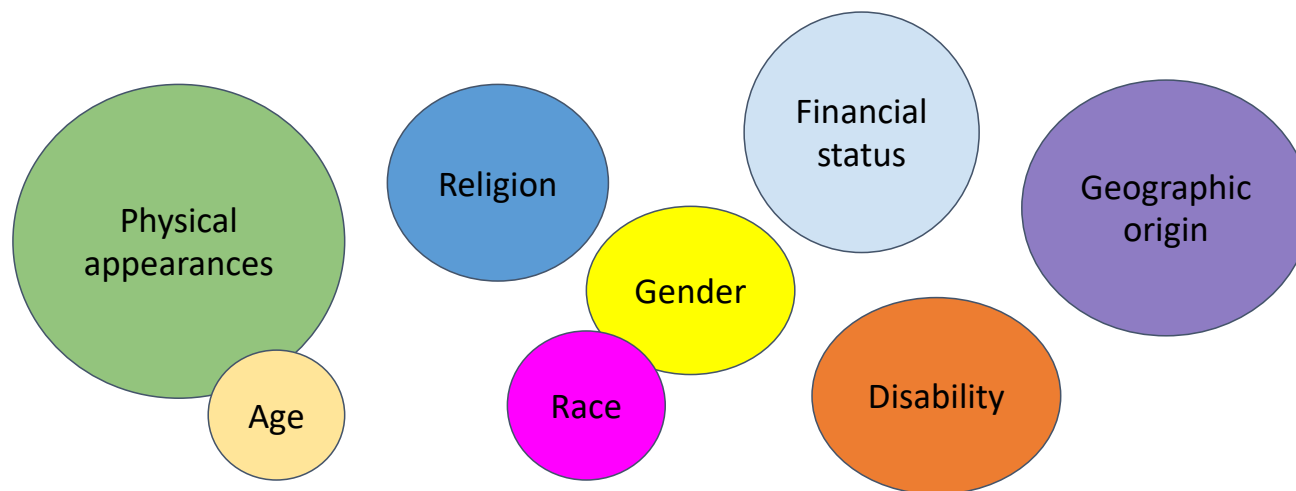
This includes things such as language, customs, values, art, and social norms. These are taught and passed down from generation to generation.

## **Culture affects:**

- How we think, act, and feel
- How we communicate with others
- How we feel about medicine, illness, pain, healthcare, disability, and death

# Culture diversity:

Cultural differences that exist in the world.



# The United States is ethnically and culturally diverse

The U.S. population is increasingly becoming more ethnically diverse. The Hispanic population, for example, is expected to constitute one-quarter of the population by 2050. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2044, the U.S. will no longer have a single ethnic majority.

As of 2019, the U.S. population was roughly:

- 60.1% non-Hispanic white
- 18.5% Hispanic and Latino
- 13.4% Black or African American
- 5.9% Asian
- 2.8% two or more races
- 1.5% Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Alaska Natives

Source: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/2020-united-states-population-more-racially-ethnically-diverse-than-2010.html>

# Handling cultural diversity

**Respecting** other cultures is very important. How you handle cultural differences in a healthcare setting will affect how patients respond to medical services and medical interventions.

- Healthcare professionals must be aware of cultural practices of their patients.
- Healthcare professionals must communicate with their patients' cultures in mind.



# Cultural biases

Cultural bias means viewing people and situations through the lens of your own culture. In healthcare, it can affect the care that your patient gets if you let it affect your behavior, actions, and decision-making.

The decision to become a healthcare professional comes from your desire to help people. Even with your best intentions, your personal biases may get in the way of helping others.

# What do you think?

If a person does not speak English as their first language, do you assume they can't understand what you're telling them?

Why or why not?

Do you believe that the color of a person's skin affects the treatment they receive?

Why or why not?

Do you think that most people believe their culture is superior to other cultures?

Why or why not?