

1.14 Cultural X-rays

Cultural X-Rays

Kathy G. Short

Why?

Geertz (1973) defines culture as the shared patterns that set the tone, character and quality of people's lives. These shared patterns go beyond external characteristics to include the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives held by a group of people. Culture is therefore a way of living and being in the world; it involves ways of acting, believing, and valuing. These ways of living develop through participation in thought collectives that form whenever groups of people learn to think in similar ways because they share a common interest, exchange ideas, maintain interaction over time, and create a history that affects how they think (Fleck, 1935). Because students are part of multiple thought collectives at the same time, culture has a dynamic, evolving nature as students interact with, and are changed through, transactions with other cultures. Indeed, culture plays out in complex and diverse ways within students' lives and identities. Through creating *Cultural X-rays*, students come to:

- Recognize their multiple cultural identities
- Develop conceptual understandings of culture
- Raise awareness of how and why culture matters to each person

Who?

Use with intermediate or older students.

Materials

1. Cultural X-Ray (outline of a body with a large heart inside)
2. Crayons or colored pencils
3. Literature in which characters explore their cultural identities, particularly books in which characters are exploring multiple identities. (See **For More Information** for a list of suggested books.)

How?

1. Read and discuss picture books in which the characters explore their cultural identities.
2. Discuss the aspects of culture that influence each character's life and thought. Chart these patterns of culture.
3. Have each student create a personal cultural x-ray using an outline of a body shape with a large heart inside. The metaphor of an x-ray highlights the need to understand what is on the outside as well as the inside of each of person's cultural being. On the outside of this shape, students create labels to describe the behaviors, appearance, and other aspects of their identities that others can observe or easily determine (e.g. age, family, gender, language, religion, family composition, places they have lived). On the heart shape inside the x-ray, have students place the values and beliefs that they hold in their hearts and that may not be immediately evident to others around them. Using a mirror, they also fill in the body shape to reflect their actual physical appearance. The three questions students ask themselves in this process are:
 - What am I?

- What is important to me?
 - What do I look like?
4. Students often struggle with placing values and beliefs in their hearts, instead they list people and things that they value, such as their families, rather than why they value these. If this happens, read aloud books, such as *A Day's Work* (Bunting, 1997) and talk about the values and beliefs that are reflected in the interactions between the boy, his grandfather and the employer. Ask students to return to their hearts and think about the values and beliefs that they have gained from each person or thing in their heart (e.g. “What values do you gain from your family?” “What do they add to your life?” “Why are they significant to you?”).

Idea Sheet

1. Use *Cultural X-rays* as a literary response engagement. Students can create cultural x-rays for characters from novels that they are reading either as a class read-aloud or in literature discussion groups. They can work as partners, choosing a character from the novel whom they see as significant and for whom they gradually build an x-ray to show that character's multiple cultural identities.
2. Begin a study of a cultural group by asking students to brainstorm the aspects of culture that would be significant to explore if they want to understand a person from that culture. They can record these on an large-sized x-ray on chart paper. They can also use the x-ray as a way to record insights they are gaining into the culture through their reading and explorations.

For More Information

Fleck, L. (1935). *The genesis and development of a scientific fact*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. NY: Basic Books.

Giff, P. R. (1997). *Lily's crossing*. NY: Delacorte.

This engagement is grounded in anthropological theories of culture, especially the work of Clifford Geertz and Ludwik Fleck.

Children's Books that Explore Cultural Identity.

Ada, A.F. (2002) *I Love Saturdays y domingos*. NY: Atheneum/Simon and Schuster

Bridges, S. Y. (2006). *Ruby's Wish*. CA: Chronicle.

Browne, A.(2001). *Voices in the Park*. City: NY: DK Children

Bunting, E. (1996) *Going Home*. NY: HarperCollins

Bunting, E. (1997). *A day's work*. NY: Clarion.

de Paola, T. (1979). *Oliver Button is a sissy*. FL: Voyager Books/Harcourt Brace.

Elya, S.M. (2002) *Home at Last*. NY: Lee & Low Books

Herrera, J.F. (2000) *The Upside Down Boy/El niño de cabeza*. CA: Children's Book Press

Igus, T. (1996) *Two Mrs. Gibsons*. CA: Children's Books Press

Lacapa, K. & Lacapa, M. (1994) *Less Than Half, More Than Whole*. AZ: Northland

Levine, E. (1989) *I Hate English*. NY: Scholastic

Mandelbaum, P. (1990) *You Be Me, I'll Be You*. NY: Kane/Miller Books

McKay, L., Jr. (1998) *Journey Home*. NY: Lee & Low Books

Recorvits, H. (2003) *My Name is Yoon*. NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux

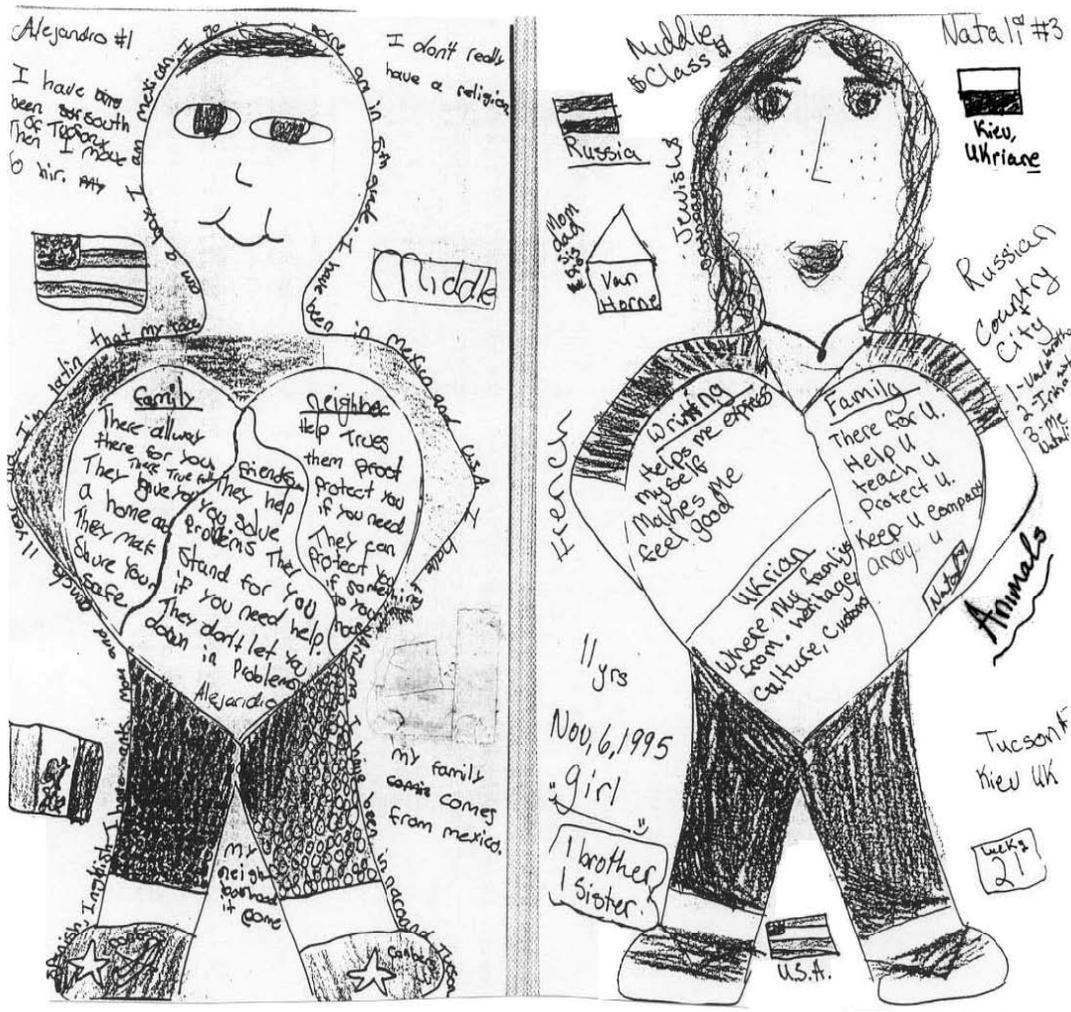
Rodríguez, L.J. (1997) *América is Her Name*. CN: Curbstone Press

Rosenberg, L. (1999) *The Silence in the Mountains*. NY: Orchard Books

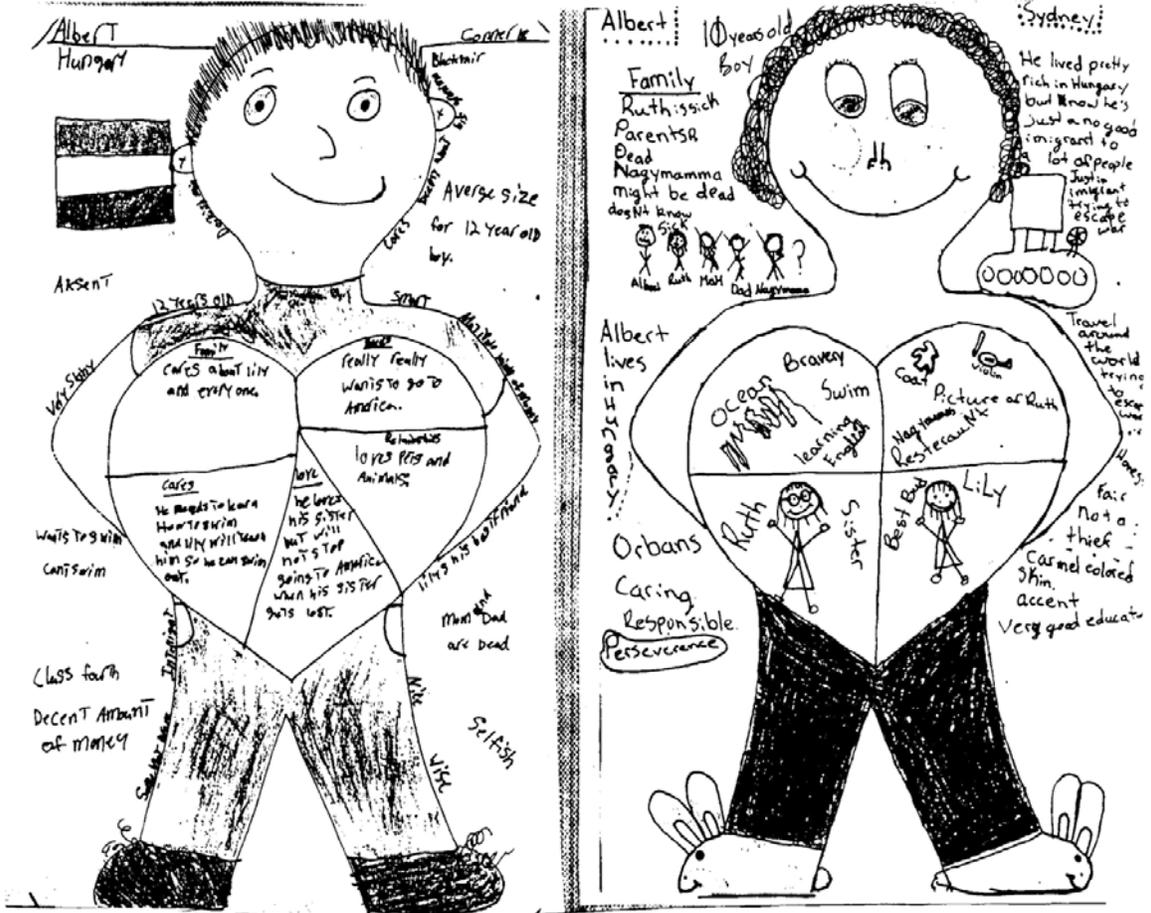
Say, A. (1993) *Grandfather's Journey*. NY: Houghton Mifflin

Shin, S.Y. (2004) *Cooper's Lesson*. NY: Children's Book Press

Williams, K.L. (1991) *When Africa Was Home*. NY: Orchard Books



Cultural X-rays of Personal Cultural Identity, Alejandro and Natali, 5th grade.



Cultural X-Rays of Character from *Lily's Crossing* (Giff, 1999), Fifth graders.