

Introduction

What is a culture? Let's imagine a group of people who come from the same country, or belong to the same tribe, or have the same religion, for instance. In other words, the people in the group share some kind of background that links them. As a group, they have created certain ways of doing things. If they have handed down these ways of doing things from generation to generation—like certain **customs** or traditions, the way they dress, their art, or their beliefs, to name some examples—we say they have preserved their culture.

Different groups arriving in the United States have brought with them their beliefs, traditions, music, celebrations, foods, and much more. The contributions made by each group, no matter what part of the globe they came from, or whether they came many years ago or only recently, have enriched the lives of all Americans. Learning about the different cultures that make up the fabric of American life will help you get to know and understand the wonderful ways in which people are both unique and alike.

The American Cultures merit badge project is an exploration that may be just the beginning of your curiosity, and the start of an important journey for you. And what that journey can do for you! Your understanding of many cultural backgrounds can benefit you in friendships, in the work you choose, and in living in harmony in your community.

***Customs** are part of the culture shared by members of a social group. Customs evolve because people like to know what to expect in social situations, and they evolve differently in different cultures.*



You and the American Cultures Merit Badge

“I’m Danish,” one person says. “I’m Cherokee and Irish,” says another. “My family comes from Italy,” or, “I’m Cuban,” others may say. Many Americans can name several countries from where they trace their origins. A friend might tell you, “My ancestors came from Scotland, Germany, France, and India.”

This gives them a connection—an idea about the lives their families lived many years in the past, and the places their ancestors came from. They may have learned about the challenges some members of their family faced, and even the reasons they came to America.

Perhaps you have noticed how strong this knowledge is in some families, how proud those families are of their **heritage**, and for some, how a particular culture influences their daily lives. They treasure and preserve the unique qualities of their culture. Other families may find themselves somewhat distant from their origins and might not know much about their ancestors’ lives and customs.

Choosing Cultures to Study

The American Cultures merit badge shows you how to explore other cultures. You will choose two groups or cultures to learn about. You may decide to study a culture associated with your own family so that you can learn more about it. Your family might learn along with you, in this case. If you go to an **ethnic** festival,

*Your **heritage** is your birthright; it is the rights, privileges, and possessions that become yours at birth. The body of customs and beliefs of your family are part of your heritage.*

***Ethnic** means of or relating to a group of people who share common characteristics that distinguish them from other people in the community, and common ancestry, culture, language, nationality, race, religion, or a combination of these things.*



they can go along. And there could be extra benefits beyond the badge's requirements. You might discover some ethnic foods you want to prepare for your family, get them interested in traditional arts for your home, or add a "new" custom to your next holiday.

You are fortunate if your parents or grandparents can answer questions about your family's past and tell you about the accomplishments of fellow countrymen. On the other hand, you could choose two cultures completely different from your own background that you are curious about. Your choice may be influenced by the presence of those groups in your community.



Old family photographs offer a glimpse of the past and are good sources of information about your own heritage.

Experiencing the Journey

As you journey through your exploration of cultures, depending on the groups you choose, you may

- See American society and the world through other eyes
- Understand how new **immigrants** and their children handle the adjustments to living in the United States
- Discover how parents react to their children becoming "Americanized" and how children cope with one set of rules and values at home and another set among their friends from other cultures
- Learn why in some cultures, group members tend to cluster together in neighborhoods and why some groups have schools where their children learn their ancestral language and customs
- Understand how the racial and ethnic groups that make up this country's **multicultural heritage** have experienced common difficulties in being accepted into the mainstream of American life
- Meet bilingual people and find out the advantages of a second language

*An **immigrant** is a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence.*

*A person's **multicultural heritage** is the blend of characteristics from his or her country or countries of origin. As Americans, we share a multicultural heritage that is a combination of all the different cultures that are found in America.*



As you investigate other cultures, you will learn how different groups practice their religions.

- Recognize similarities between groups in their plans for their lives and their expectations for their children
- Appreciate the treasures of a heritage that goes back hundreds, or even thousands, of years
- Realize how much you have in common with other people, and how much you care about the same things

The new understanding and knowledge you gain through your study of cultural groups will help you become a better Scout and a better citizen of your community, the nation, and the world.

Appreciating the Differences

Knowing about cultural differences in customs and courtesy can prevent misunderstandings between people. In one group, a person might be expected to use only the last name when speaking to someone who isn't a close friend or relative. The casual use of a first name, so natural in this country, may be insulting in some groups.

What a person has learned in his home and his community—his culture—may make him act in a way that might surprise you, make you angry, or make you laugh. Of course, it can work the other way around. Your behavior could unintentionally surprise or offend someone from another group. Knowing about these differences could save everyone embarrassment.



At this festival, visitors could sample a variety of homemade Asian foods. You don't have to grow up in a certain group to enjoy feasting on that culture's traditional foods.

As Americans, we are all free to preserve our cultures. Since we have this freedom, we also must respect the rights of others to be different from us and to practice their own customs.

The differences you will discover are what give America a rich mix of cultural traditions, and many traditions can be shared. You don't have to grow up in a certain group to enjoy feasting on spicy Mexican food or dancing to energetic German polka music!

Traditions or Stereotypes?

Cultural traditions are ways that have been preserved and handed down. You can recognize a tradition when someone tells you, "This is our language, these are our special foods, this is the way we celebrate a holiday, and here is what our music sounds like." Tradition can also affect behavior, attitudes, and family relations. "This is how we show respect to an elder; this is what we believe children should be allowed to do or not allowed to do."

A stereotype is created when someone says that all people in a culture are likely to behave in a certain way, whether that behavior is related to actions, choices, or likes and dislikes. Often the observation is negative and is harmful to the group to which it has been applied.

Here is an example of how stereotyping works. Each of us is born with a certain color hair and eyes, and some of us even have characteristics like freckles. What if you were born with blue eyes and freckles and someone decided that everyone with blue eyes and freckles was lazy? What would happen if that negative **perception** about blue-eyed freckled people became a common belief among almost everyone in the community? Do you think that would make it difficult for you to succeed in school or at a job, or to get promotions? After all, everyone thinks you are lazy. You can see that stereotypes are dangerous because they try to characterize an entire culture from one narrow point of view.

A perception is a mental image or sensation a person experiences. It is the way a person mentally "sees" a certain situation or another person.

People who believe the stereotypes may never really get to know anyone in the culture they're criticizing. In your research of cultures, try to avoid accepting stereotypes as facts. Get to know individual people with their many different personalities, views, and behaviors.

What's Next?

The next section of this pamphlet will tell you about some of the forces in history that have caused different groups to come to live in America. In your research, you will want to find the reasons why your two groups (or their ancestors) came here.

There is also a how-to section to prepare you for your fact-finding mission. For each requirement, you will find a section that will help guide you on your journey.



Archaeologists uncovered the remains of this ancient Native American village in New Mexico. Stones in the foreground mark the entrance to the village.

Why Did We Come to America?

The First Americans

Can you imagine the very first people who came to America? Who were they? What did they look like? Where did they come from?

These questions fascinate **archaeologists** who pursue this **prehistoric** mystery.

The most widely accepted **theory** is that the earliest Americans came from Asia, crossing a land bridge that connected Siberia and Alaska, where the waters of the Bering Strait are now. They may have been hunters following animals.

We know they stalked the **woolly mammoth** and the **long-horned bison**, because excavations at kill sites and campsites in the United States have revealed ancient animal bones and spear points. It's likely the hunters were hunted themselves, by **saber-toothed tigers** and huge **dire wolves**. Scientists know many of these events occurred because bones and other artifacts at the digs were preserved by nature through a process called fossilization. Fossils are formed when objects are encased in a natural preservative, such as ice or amber, or hardened by minerals, so that they are still recognizable hundreds or even thousands of years later.

How long ago did these ancestors of American Indians arrive? It depends on which archaeologist you ask. Some say the Clovis people, named for an archaeological site in New Mexico, were the earliest group. Their mammoth kill sites date back 11,500 years.

Archaeologists are scientists who study the material remains of past human life and cultures by examining the objects those people left behind, such as their buildings, artwork, tools, bones, and pottery. They also study the objects they find in relation to where they were found. If an object was found deep in the ground, the archaeologist studies the layers of soil and rock in which it was found to understand the conditions that existed when the object was placed there. The sites where these artifacts are found are called "digs" because the scientist must often carefully unearth or dig out these pieces of evidence of ancient cultures.



Prehistoric events happened before man began to record history, either orally or in written form.

A theory is an unproved assumption or idea about how something happened.

Woolly mammoths, long-horned bison, saber-toothed tigers, and dire wolves were animals that lived in prehistoric times. The giant mammoth is related to the modern-day elephant, and the bison was a forerunner of the American buffalo or bison. The saber-toothed tiger was a catlike creature about the same size as today's tiger.

But new evidence of earlier cultures keeps turning up. At a dig in Pendejo Cave in southern New Mexico, archaeologists have found stone tools, charred bones of extinct animals, and rock-lined fire hearths. Through a process called radiocarbon dating, which allows scientists to determine how old an object is by its rate of decay, archaeologists have placed the oldest artifacts found in the deepest layer of explored earth at more than 55,000 years of age. Intriguing evidence was found in another layer, where 35,000-year-old fingerprints were baked into clay.

With an unpredictable supply of places to dig and new clues to be found, the exciting mystery of the first Americans will continue to unravel for many years to come.

Groups of the earliest Americans and their descendants migrated along river valleys and across plains. Over thousands of years, they developed their own separate languages and cultures. When Europeans arrived, the New World was the ancient home of these Indian tribes.



These Native American boys are descended from the American Indians who were the first people to come to this land in prehistoric times.

Newcomers and Their Reasons

The story of immigration to America is like a many-branched tree that keeps on growing. Every new branch is linked to the history of the world, when something happened somewhere else to cause people to cross a border or an ocean to seek a new life in America.

If you have always lived in the United States, then imagine what it must be like going to live in an unfamiliar country, thousands of miles away from your homeland. What would be important enough to make you do this? Here are some of the reasons why groups of people have come to America:

The Spanish and Mexicans

In 1492, Christopher Columbus first set foot in the New World. His discoveries led the way for Spanish exploration of North and South America, and among their many conquests during the 1500s, the Spanish claimed what is now Texas, California, and the American southwest. Santa Fe, New Mexico, had a governor's mansion before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620.

The Spanish came in search of adventure and gold and other riches. The Christian clergymen who followed them came to spread their religion to the Indians. Catholic priests from Spain founded missions for their Indian converts across much of the area that is now the states of Florida, Georgia, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

Colonists also came to the New World. Some came from Spain, but most of these early settlers in Spanish-dominated areas were poor Mexicans of Indian and Spanish ancestry, called mestizos, who were attracted by promises of equipment and herds of cattle. The Spanish government also allowed **emigrants** from the United States, called Anglos, to settle.

By 1848, after several wars between the United States and Mexico, the United States had gained possession of California and the southwest territories. The border of

A colonist is a person who settles, or colonizes, a new country. An emigrant is a person who leaves a country to settle elsewhere.



The oldest government building in the United States is the Palace of the Governors, built in 1610 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, ten years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. Today, it is the site of a historical museum.

Texas was moved south to the Rio Grande, and thousands of Mexicans living south of the old border were now living inside the United States. Mexicans had the option of staying in the United States or going to Mexico. Many who stayed worked as farm laborers and miners.

Before the California gold rush, Mexicans outnumbered Anglos in California by about ten to one. By 1849 the Anglo population skyrocketed to one hundred thousand, compared to thirteen thousand Mexicans.

Since then the Hispanic population in the United States has climbed to twenty-four million in 1992 (9 percent of the total U.S. population) and represents origins in many Spanish-speaking nations. In the early 1990s, Hispanics made up 40 percent of the population of Los Angeles, California.

The British

The British began colonizing the New World as early as 1585. Many of these first colonists left Great Britain to escape religious persecution. Others who followed came seeking the possibility of a better life than they could find in their home country. While most of these first colonists were English, people from France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, and other countries also immigrated to the colonies and helped establish a foothold in the wilderness of the New World.

The Irish

Oppression by English landlords caused the beginning of Irish immigration to the United States in the early 1800s. But in 1845, a disease began to destroy potato crops, the main staple in the diet in Ireland. The Great Potato Famine, which lasted almost ten years, forced about 1.5 million Irish to escape starvation by going to the United States.

On arrival, many women became domestic servants or workers in textile mills and the garment industry. Men worked in shoe factories, became coal miners and laborers in the construction of roads and canals, and built thousands of miles of rail line westward.

In the **census** of 1990, 15.6 percent of Americans (more than thirty-eight million people) reported that at least part of their ancestry was Irish.

The Chinese

War, high taxes, floods, dense populations, and starvation prompted emigration from China to the United States in the mid-1800s. Most were men who went to California, drawn by stories of "Gold Mountain." They joined the gold rush, mostly as independent prospectors. By 1865, many had turned to railroad work, laying track for Central Pacific Railroad's transcontinental line eastward. They constructed irrigation canals and taught their employers how to work with orchard and garden crops. The way was not easy, and when ethnic conflicts forced many out

A census is a periodic count by a government of a country's population. The United States conducts a census every ten years.



Chinese workers lay railroad track across the Cascade Mountains in 1885.

of their jobs, they started small businesses, such as stores, restaurants, and laundries.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 closed America's doors to people from China until the law was repealed in 1943, when the United States and China became allies in World War II. Around 1.6 million Americans reported Chinese ancestry in the census of 1990.

More Reasons

Some newcomers escaped situations they couldn't bear, hoping for abundant food and freedom in their new country. Some came for work, the challenge of adventure, or to find a place they could call their own. Some were forced to come to America. There is a story behind every arrival, and you can read more complete explanations in books about each group's immigration. A few more reasons people came to America:

- British colonization established England's claim in the New World.
- America was a haven for those fleeing religious persecution. The Puritans fled from England, and other Protestant groups fled from countries such as France and Germany to seek religious freedom.
- Africans arrived as slaves.
- Indentured servants, many from the British Isles, agreed to work for several years in return for payment of their passage to America.
- When Japan imposed heavy taxes to support a buildup of military and industrial power, farmers immigrated to Hawaii and California beginning in 1885.

- To escape persecution, Jews from Russia and eastern Europe began to emigrate in the 1880s.
- Europeans displaced by German and Soviet troops during World War II arrived after 1945.
- Hungarians fled the failed revolution of 1956.
- In recent years, Cubans, Vietnamese, Haitians, Salvadorans, and many others have come as political refugees.



The contributions made by members of many different cultures have enriched the lives of all Americans.

It Hasn't Been Easy

America has provided a safe haven for many, but has offered no guarantee of an easy life. Immigrants have often taken menial and dangerous jobs. Even today, many new immigrants with good educations and professional standing in their home countries must take jobs that require less skill while they learn English and meet the requirements of their professions here in the United States.

Immigrants have faced discrimination, struggle for equality, racial and religious strife, and competition for jobs throughout our nation's history. Citizenship and voting rights were denied to certain groups until laws were changed.

The U.S. government has periodically set immigration quotas, or limits, on the number of people allowed to come from certain countries. Also, there have been times when great numbers of **refugees** have put a strain on resources for health care and the social services they needed when they arrived.

To Change or Not to Change?

From 1900 to 1910, nearly nine million newcomers arrived in the United States, including Poles, Slavs, Italians, Russians, and Greeks. They were encouraged to give up their languages, native dress, and lifestyles—to “melt” into American life. Fortunately, that view has changed, and the value of preserving languages and cultures became recognized.

Many communities have done their best to help newcomers adjust. One example is Garden City, Kansas, which has welcomed thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong refugees since the early 1980s. Many of them accept demanding work in the city's two meatpacking plants, save money, and then relocate to other parts of the country. Some choose to establish businesses and stay.

*A **refugee** is a person who flees his or her homeland to escape danger or persecution.*



The Statue of Liberty has become a symbol of the “safe haven” that the United States offers to immigrants.

How to Start

You're the Detective

When you set out to learn about cultural groups, you are like a detective or a news reporter, gathering information and collecting facts.

To do this, you will be going places, attending events, talking with people, and reading. Whether you are listening to a Mexican mariachi band, sampling a kolache pastry from one of the eastern European countries, or learning the steps of a Scottish Highland fling, you will want to absorb the details like a sponge. If you take notes, you will be able to talk about your experiences without forgetting anything.

The idea is to dig for information beyond what you may have already observed or heard about an ethnic group in your community. Your previous views may be inaccurate or might only scratch the surface of what there is to know.

Your "People" Sources

Like a reporter, you need good sources, or contacts, which will lead you to people to interview and events to attend. Here are some places you might start your investigation:

- If there is a large ethnic community in your town, check the phone book for names of civic, social, or religious associations in that neighborhood.
- A library reference department may keep a list of local clubs, including ethnic and religious organizations. The list should provide names of people to contact.
- If there aren't any local ethnic organizations, you can write to cultural or consular offices in a larger city. At your library, look for the address in a directory of associations or in the phone book of a large city under "Consulate and Other Foreign Government Representatives."

School systems in cities like Garden City provide an English as a second language program for the children. Students who learn English can translate for their parents, and parents may attend English classes at an adult education center.

Changing Patterns

The origins of Americans have always been diverse, and the ethnic makeup of the country undergoes continual change. Since the 1960s, more Asians and Hispanics have immigrated to the United States than have Europeans. By 1990, about one-third of American people could trace their origins to places other than Europe. The 1990 census

listed 197 ancestry groups in the U.S. population.

Now and in the future, all Americans have opportunities to understand and preserve our many cultures and work together for the best quality of life for everyone.

Coming Up Next

The next section offers tips on how to start work on your merit badge.

There is no "better" or "worse," only different. That difference has to be respected whether it's skin color, way of life, or idea.

Kote Kotah, California Chumash,
quoted by David Hurst Thomas
in *The Native Americans*



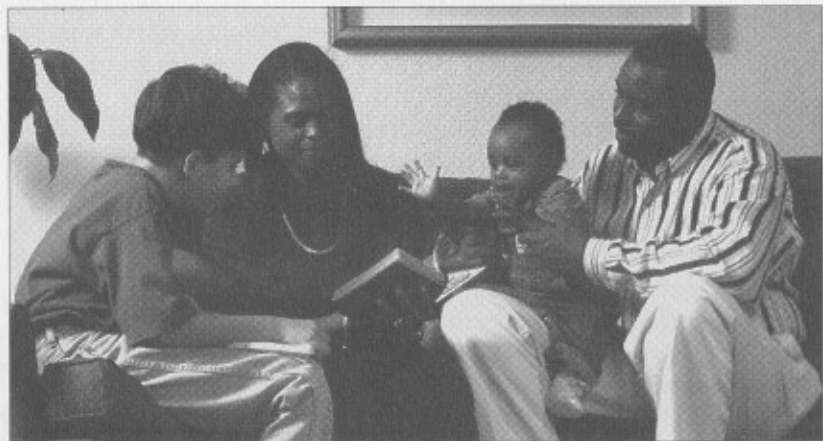
This Native American is wearing traditional ceremonial dress that is unique to his tribe.

- Whenever you write or call a source, explain you are working on a Boy Scout merit badge and mention the type of information you are seeking. Add your thanks to the request.

Asking Questions

You can expect people who agree to talk with you to be friendly, proud of their heritage, and pleased to share their knowledge. Here are some tips on interviewing a subject:

- Prepare for the interview. At the library, find a book with background on the cultural group, such as *The Japanese in America*.
- Make a list of your main questions for the interview.
- Ask questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no. "What did you like about growing up in the Puerto Rican community?" will get you details. "Please tell me about . . ." and "I'm interested in . . ." are good ways to start questions. A question patterned after "What does it mean to you to be Japanese?" may yield quite a long and enthusiastic answer.
- When you meet with your subject, introduce yourself and thank the person for taking time to talk with you.
- Listen carefully and take notes.
- If a fascinating topic comes up, ask questions about that, rather than going on to your next written question right away.



Be prepared: Before interviewing a person about his or her cultural heritage, read up on the culture you are investigating and prepare a list of the questions you want to ask.

- Your interview is really a conversation, so relax and make it enjoyable. Be friendly and respectful. Thank the person when you leave.
- Afterward, go over your notes and fill in anything you remember but didn't have time to write down.

Reading Books

A reporter working on an assignment usually has to look for background information, and that is what you need to do, too. How can books help you?

- An encyclopedia quickly gives you an idea of the origin of the culture you are researching. For example, the entry on Ireland tells you where it is in the world, its geography, politics, religions, and history. You may be talking with people who are very interested in what is going on in their home country, so your research helps you understand their views.
- A world atlas provides detailed maps and quick information on a country.
- Books like *The Norwegians in America* or *The Hungarian Americans* fill you in on a culture's history and contributions to American life. On the list at the end of this pamphlet, you will find two series of books that cover more than fifty ethnic groups. Another series, *Indians of North America*, profiles different tribal cultures.
- Curious about food? Ethnic cookbooks will reveal the favorite ingredients in Italian dishes, the specialties of India, and other cooking styles. And don't forget music, dancing, art, literature, and folk legends—all possibilities for research.
- Books with personal stories about newcomers to America will show you the contrast between life in their home countries and life in the United States. You will find out how a culture influences the way people talk to each other, what is important to them, and what they consider to be good and bad. *New Kids in Town* by Janet Bode is told in the words of teenagers who are new to America.

People are said to be **assimilated** when they have absorbed the culture and traditions of the group in which they live. Thus, a teenager from India might quickly begin wearing jeans to school to be like his or her schoolmates, while the mother and grandmother continue to dress in the traditional draped garment of India called the sari.

Clues and Where to Find Them

It is easiest to see the cultures of home countries in families that have only recently come to America, especially in grandparents and parents. The children and teens of newly immigrated families often strive to become **assimilated** quickly to strike a balance between their family life and the different life they join at school.

As years go by, many families continue to preserve and treasure their traditions. At the same time, the lives of each new generation are changed as children grow up with “American” influences. The marriage of two people from different cultures can result in a combination of traditions.

What you learn from people often depends on the strength of their ties to their original culture.

Basic Needs

Scientists who study social and cultural groups are called **ethnographers**. In all cultures, ethnographers say, there are “universal” basic human needs: shelter, food, water, clothing, friendship, and security.

That’s a good place to begin thinking about your project and observing people in the cultures you have chosen. When you look at the way people take care of these basic needs, you will see patterns in what they do.

Also look for patterns in the way they decide who they will marry, how they take care of their children, what games they play, and their



As you learn about other cultures, you will have the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends.

philosophy or outlook on life. There are differences in these patterns from one culture to another, but you will also see similarities.

Keep in mind that the patterns you see may not apply to every person in the group. Individuals have different influences and ideas.

About Family Life

If you have a friend who is part of the culture you are studying, you may know his or her family. Here are some ideas to consider about this family:

- Is it an extended family, with several generations living together?
- Does the family look to one person as their leader—father, mother, grandfather, or grandmother?
- Are there certain standards of courtesy and behavior the children learn at home?
- What values do the parents encourage in their children?

Participating

At first, you may be just an observer of any group you are visiting—a family, club, or church group. As you make new friends, you will probably become a participant in some of their activities, social events, and games. Those experiences will expand your ideas of what it would be like to grow up in that culture.

Take These Along

There are some tools you will want to take with you as you conduct your interviews and observe cultural groups in different activities.

The first tools you need are open-mindedness and courtesy. Be ready for new ideas and *thank* those who take time to help you.

It’s a good idea to take a notebook and pencil with you so that you can jot down what you learn. If you have access to a tape recorder, use it for an important interview, a musical performance, or a speech. Take a camera if you can, for photographs of festival activities, art, neighborhood buildings, and people you meet.

Always ask permission to use the tape recorder and camera, and don’t use them if you feel it might offend someone.

Ready to Begin!

The following five sections of the pamphlet will give you specific ideas about completing each requirement.



At ethnic festivals, such as the Greek festival pictured here, you can learn about the music, singing, dancing, dress, and food of other cultures.

Going Places

Requirement 1

You are ready for action. Now you are ready to travel out on your fact-finding mission—to visit a festival, talk with someone about a culture's heritage, or take in a museum exhibit of traditional arts, for instance. (See requirement 1 on page 2 for all the choices you have.)

A Day at a Festival

Exploring an ethnic festival is quite an enjoyable adventure. It's a great place to experience many aspects of a culture you are learning about, so try to see and do as much as you can.

If you already know someone who is familiar with the group you are studying, that person would be a good guide for you at the festival. Multicultural festivals are sometimes held in metropolitan areas, which is a great way to experience the diversity of many peoples' traditions in one day.

Music, Singing, and Dance

Take time to enjoy the music and note the different instruments. Be conscious of the rhythm, the pitch, and the emotion in instrumental and vocal music. The rollicking sound of a German **concertina** will be a world away from sinuous Egyptian music that combines the **lute**, **violin**, **drum**, **tambourine**, and **finger cymbals**. When the musicians take a break, see if you can ask them questions about the music and their instruments. Ask if there are any handmade instruments. You might discover a craftsman who makes **Appalachian dulcimers** or **Native American flutes**.

The **concertina**, a smaller version of an accordion, is a portable keyboard wind instrument that produces sound when wind is forced past reeds with a hand-operated bellows. The **lute**, a stringed instrument played much like today's guitar, dates back to biblical times. The **violin** also is a stringed instrument, with sounds that are produced by running a bow across the strings. The **drum**, **tambourine**, and **finger cymbals** are percussion instruments; that is, sound is produced by hitting or shaking the instrument. The **Appalachian dulcimer** is a stringed instrument played with the hands and used chiefly to play folk songs, while the **Native American flute** is a woodwind instrument that produces sound when the player blows across a hole in the instrument.



If spectators are invited to dance, don't hesitate to join in, because it will bring the experience alive for you, and you will discover if the dances are easy or challenging. You might learn the polka, a clog dance, or the skip-step for a Native American tribal dance.

Storytelling

Stories and legends are treasured by many cultures. Some are just for fun, but many have meaning and lessons in them. Listen to the story, but also watch the storyteller's expressions and movements. If you do the storytelling portion of the requirement, this would be a good place to hear a traditional story and find out how to make it entertaining for an audience.

Clothing

You will see many traditional costumes, so notice everything from hats and headdresses down to shoes and boots. Look at fabrics, styles, embroidery, and jewelry. All of these items are part of the tradition these people are preserving. Some Americans wear the distinctive clothing of their culture in their everyday lives, as you know if you have been to an Amish community or have seen women who wear saris.

Think about the origins of traditional clothing, which often have to do with climate and available materials. For example, the sealskin clothing worn in winter by the Eskimo is treated to withstand extreme cold. The Indian sari is made of such lightweight fabric that the wrapped layers keep the wearer cool in extreme heat. The ti plant, which grows in Hawaii and other South Sea Islands, provides fibers for weaving fabric for traditional skirts worn there.



Some Americans wear the distinctive clothing of their culture in their everyday lives. This woman wears the traditional headdress and gown from her country of origin in Africa.

Food

As you sample food at the festival, find out what ingredients are special to that group of people, such as paprika in Hungarian dishes, hot chilies in Latin-American food, and oregano for flavoring Italian recipes. What are the special holiday menus, and what are the everyday foods?

As with clothing, many traditional dishes are linked to climate and availability of foods in home countries. Hot and hearty potato soup comes from eastern Europe, where root vegetables are plentiful and winters are cold. Gazpacho, a refreshing cold soup made with tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and onions, comes from Spain.

Handmade Crafts

Keeping the mastery of handmade crafts alive is important to a culture. At a multiethnic festival, you could be treated to the intricacies of Lebanese lace making, Ukrainian egg painting, Hispanic tinwork, and weaving and woodcarving from many cultures. You might be lucky enough to watch craftspeople at work from the two cultures you have chosen.



Look for opportunities to learn about the handicrafts of other cultures and other eras. Ethnic festivals and living museums are good ways to see artisans create items that are traditional to a culture.

Meet the People

You will find opportunities at a festival to talk with people and to see exhibits about associations or schools that support the culture. Do people in your two groups help one another in various ways, like the “keh” organizations that provide funds to help Korean immigrants start businesses?

Celebrations, Etc.

If you are fortunate enough to attend a wedding, baptism, or **bar mitzvah**, you will have a wonderful chance to witness a religious ceremony and the celebration that follows. In the groups you are studying, many special occasions may include certain customs, music, and dance.

Or, what about a sports event? Many ethnic groups sponsor soccer clubs; others arrange baseball or basketball games among their members. You will meet people on an informal basis, and you can see how a culture handles winning, losing, team loyalty, encouragement, and star performances. You may be surprised at the differences you discover.

Visiting Neighborhoods

When you visit a church, clubhouse, or school, you will find out how this place and its activities fit into people's lives. You will think of a lot of questions along these lines:

- **School:** Is this a full-day school for children to learn their parents' language or religion, or is it an after-school activity? What subjects and traditions are taught? How does the school involve the community?
- **Club:** Who goes to the clubhouse? Is it the center of activity in the neighborhood or area, or is the church the center?
- **Church:** How do values and beliefs of the church guide people's lives? What activities does the church offer?



Cultural and community centers such as this one in a Hispanic neighborhood of Los Angeles are good sources for the cultures you are studying.



Visit ethnically distinct neighborhoods during their holidays and festivals to get a flavor of how different cultures celebrate important events. This parade celebrates the Korean culture.

- **Neighborhood:** What is neighborhood life like? Do people visit back and forth? Do many relatives live in the same area or building?
- **Restaurants and grocery stores:** These can be informal gathering places for people to talk. You will have chances to meet people and also learn about the foods they like.

You may know someone well enough to be invited into a family's home. (Check with your parents first to be sure it's okay.) If there are several generations (grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents, children) living together, you will probably see much more tradition from the “old country” in the home.

A bar mitzvah refers either to a Jewish boy who turns age 13 and attains the age of religious duty and responsibility, or to the ceremony that recognizes a boy as a bar mitzvah.

The oldest family members keep the language and culture alive. The children are often bilingual (they know two languages) and bicultural (they know the home culture and the American culture).

Heritage and Traditions

Talking with a person who belongs to the culture and knows it thoroughly is an excellent way to learn about heritage and traditions. Why is this important? History and customs are rich treasures that help people remember their origins with pride, and remind them of the struggles and conflicts their ancestors endured.

A strong heritage can affect the way people live today. A teacher in the group's school, or a minister, priest, rabbi, mufti, or other religious leader will tell you how heritage, customs, and beliefs relate to daily living.

Learn a Song, Dance, or Story

Most countries have stories, songs, sayings, and legends that have been handed down, often carrying a message on how to behave and live. An older person who has lived in the native country is a good source for these "oral traditions," but younger people also may help you. Another place to check is at a school or a club, where songs, dances, and stories are taught.

As you learn the dance, story, song, or poem, learn its history—when it was written or performed in the native country. It may be a folk tradition, which means it has been handed down and no one knows who started it. Ask when it is used now—for example, for certain events or celebrations.

Books are another source, though it always helps to hear someone sing the song you are learning, and it's more fun to hear someone tell a story.

Along the way, you may hear and read many exciting personal stories about leaving a native country and coming here. If you get a glimpse of family life, you may see a difference in the way parents and children from other countries treat each other. In some cultures, children have a much stricter upbringing than most American children.

You may be amazed at the many differences you discover between your life and the life of someone your age who belongs to another culture; or you may be surprised at how much is familiar to you.

At the Museum

You can learn a lot from an African mask: how it was made, how it was used, what its symbolism is. That's the beauty of a museum. Items in its collection are displayed with explanations, and often you can join a tour with a guide to learn more.

Items from a culture could be on permanent display or in a temporary exhibit. Check the schedules of museums, libraries, and art centers to find programs and speakers that will fit into your research.

Specialized Museums

Some museums are devoted to one culture and bring together art, history of the people, dioramas showing daily life and shelters, and examples of clothing. At a "living history" museum, roles in a culture are played by staff or volunteers to show how people lived.

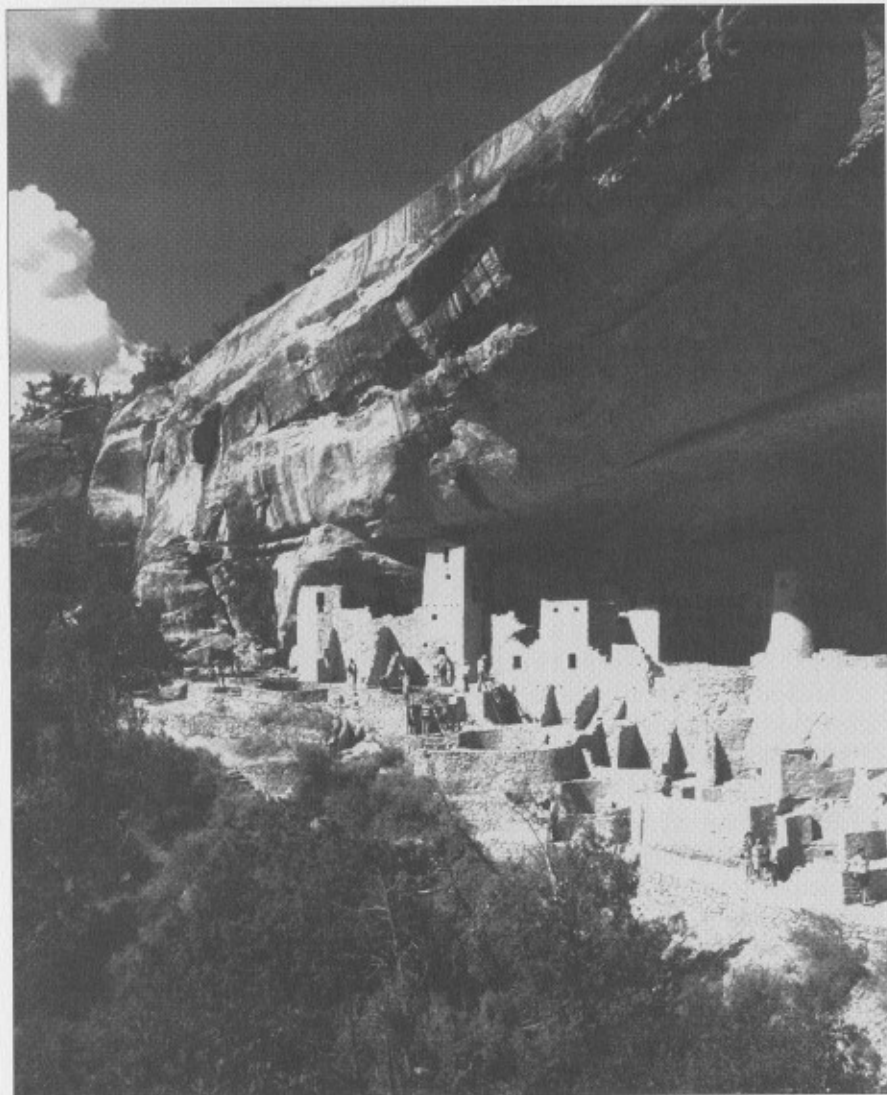
In the southwestern states, there are many places where you can explore Native American tribal cultures—in museums, ruins, and ancient cliff dwellings at national monuments. Several pueblos in New Mexico, where tribal members still live, offer tours to the public at certain times.



Specialized museums can show you how other cultures live, or how people lived in earlier eras.

If you plant a tree and you don't water it, it's going to die. I'm watering the roots of this tree called Cajun culture so it can be preserved and grow.

Dewey Balfa, Cajun Fiddler, in
National Geographic, January 1991



The Anasazi, considered some of the most civilized North American Indians, were cliff dwellers—people who built their homes in the high cliffs of the Southwestern United States between A.D. 1000 and 1300. You can visit the ruins of these ancient homes at national monuments in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah.

An Isolated Group in Today's Society

Requirement 2

Can you imagine a group of people living totally apart from the rest of the world? Today, that would be an **anthropologist's** dream—to find people living in the way their ancestors did a thousand or more years ago. Their shelter (possibly a cave in a remote area), their tools (made of stone), their clothing (made of soft leaves), their food (nuts, berries, roots of plants, fish, frogs) would remain unchanged.

But the arrival of one visitor from another culture can change the situation rapidly. The gift of a knife, so much more efficient than a sharpened stone, will change the way certain things are done, such as skinning animals or carving utensils. The art of making animal traps will bring a change in diet as food becomes more plentiful and varied. New words will appear in the people's language, to describe the stranger's hat and shirt, which they have never seen before. Once contact has been made, the untouched society starts adopting ways that seem more helpful to it. It's no longer completely separate.

Still, it's intriguing to imagine that such an isolated group of people—if they had no outside visitor—might not stay in the Stone Age. On their own, they might discover how to mine and work metals to make tools and jewelry. They might devise their own animal traps and discover how to weave plant fibers into cloth. Over thousands of years, all by themselves, do you think they could advance technologically and eventually invent something like a computer?

An anthropologist is a scientist who studies human beings in relation to where they live or lived, their origins, race, physical characteristics, environmental and social relations, and culture. Some anthropologists study ancient civilizations such as the Incas or the Mayans; others study people and cultures that exist in the modern world.



Requirement 2 asks you to imagine what would happen if one of the groups you are studying had always lived completely apart from the rest of the world. There are no visitors, no outside communication, no news from the other side of the world, no movies or books or music from faraway cities or countries, and no restaurants with exotic menus from other places. There is no technology someone else thought up.

Think of your group as an early culture, developing without outside influences and without conflicts with other groups. Can you picture their lives today? Would they have developed any modern technology? Would their traditions be different than they actually are today?

You are also invited to imagine both your groups living in one isolated place. Would they change each other's ways and beliefs?

Your creativity in imagining isolated cultures will probably lead you to some fantastic conclusions. The truth is, few people get by without being changed by the world around them, and most cultures are likely to see changes over time.



People of the Amish faith cling to the traditions and dress of their early American roots.

It takes a lot of faith and determination to hold on to traditional ways, but some groups do their best. The Amish, a religious group with roots in Switzerland, began to immigrate to America in the early 1700s. They established communities in Pennsylvania and several other states, always striving to keep their original culture free from outside influences. They are known for their horse-drawn buggies and plain clothing, and the strictest groups live without cars, electricity, and farm machinery.

Their children attend one-room Amish schools within walking distance of their farm homes, and education ends after the eighth grade. Two or three generations of a family may live in neighboring houses on one farm.

Different Amish groups have made compromises with the modern world. You may see a phone booth at the edge of an Amish farm, with a community phone for outgoing calls about farm business, to make appointments, and for emergencies. No phone is allowed in the house, but the kitchen might have a modern refrigerator and stove, powered by bottled gas.

Even with these additions, the Amish have been able to maintain their traditional ways, with lives focused on their faith and on their work on the farm and in the home.

For most of us, life on earth is a life of change and **adaptation**. The world greets us every day, with news, products, entertainment, travelers from other places, and immigrants arrive with their customs and languages. What we know, what we talk about, what we drink and eat and wear, are constantly affected and challenged by our contact with the rest of the world.

***Adaptation** means the ability to adjust to one's environment. For example, the pupils of your eyes **adapt** to a change in light or dark by dilating or contracting, depending on light conditions.*

Religious and Social Customs

Requirement 3

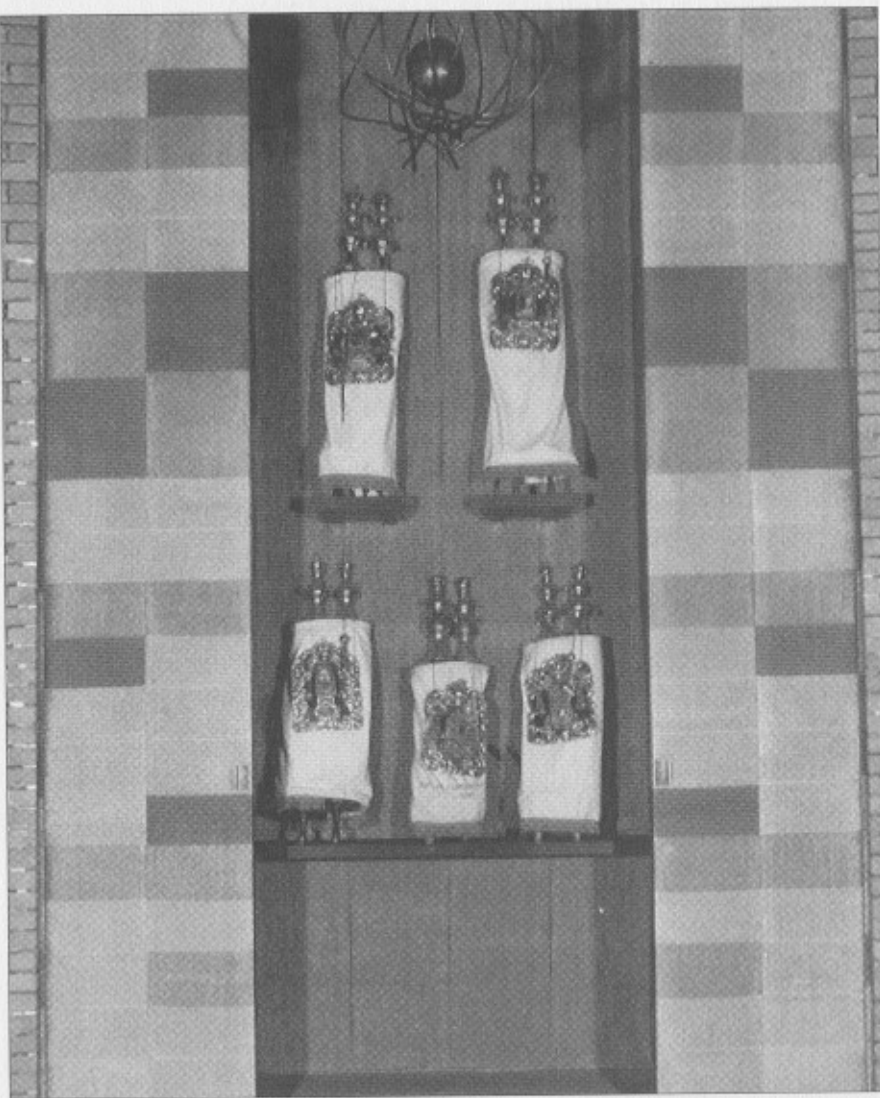
As you compare cultures, keep in mind that you may tend to use your own culture as a measuring stick. It can be a good way to make a comparison, but don't let the differences make you judge another culture's ideas as good or bad. Instead, be an **impartial** observer and get the facts.

Requirement 3 asks you to investigate the religious and social customs of the two cultural groups you are studying. These customs could be extremely important in their lives, so try to see them through the eyes of the people you are studying. Here are some questions to help find out about religions:

- What are the important religious customs in each culture?
- Are many of their holidays religious?
- How does the family take part in religion? Do both men and women participate? Do children? Is there a tradition of family prayer?
- How does religion play a part in birth, marriage, and death?
- What is the role of the priest, minister, rabbi, mufti, or other religious official in the community?

Social customs are tied to religious customs in some cultures. A traditional Italian community, for example, has the church as the center of its religious and social activities. In most cultures, a wedding is both a religious and social experience, a ceremony plus a celebration.

An impartial person is unbiased; that is, he or she is fair and does not take sides or prejudge people or situations.



The five sacred Torah scrolls, pictured here, are an essential element of the Jewish faith. You will learn about different religious customs as you investigate other cultures.

Social customs include everyday behavior. In a classroom where there are children of different cultures, the typical American child would look at the teacher when the teacher is speaking to him; it is a sign of respect. The Hispanic child may have been taught to look downward when the teacher is talking to him, which is also a sign of respect. What if a teacher didn't understand these differences? You can see how important it is to know what is customary and right for cultures other than that of your own.

Social customs can determine

- The roles of men and women at work and at home
- The relationship between grandparents, parents, and children
- The family teachings about eating, dressing, and helping at home
- The parents' views on teenage dating

The American custom of a young man and woman being out alone together before marriage is unacceptable in some cultures. Their customs might require that the young woman be accompanied by a relative when going out with a young man. In a few cultures, marriages are still arranged, even in families that have been living in the United States for years.



Many cultures have a tradition of family prayer. What are some of the religious traditions of the cultures you are studying?



As you study a culture, learn about the relationships between different generations. For example, the Chinese venerate their elderly. Other cultures emphasize different kinds of relationships among generations.

Outstanding Ethnic Americans

Requirement 4

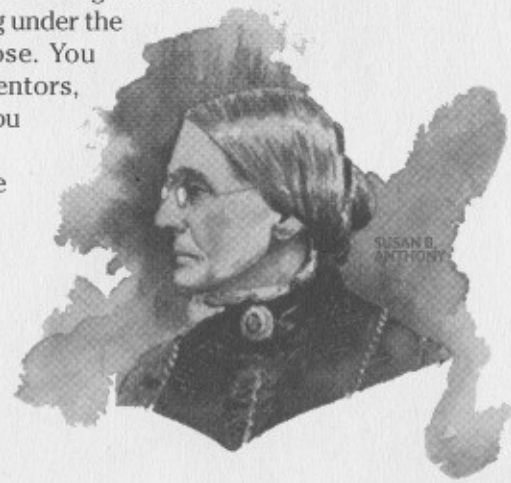
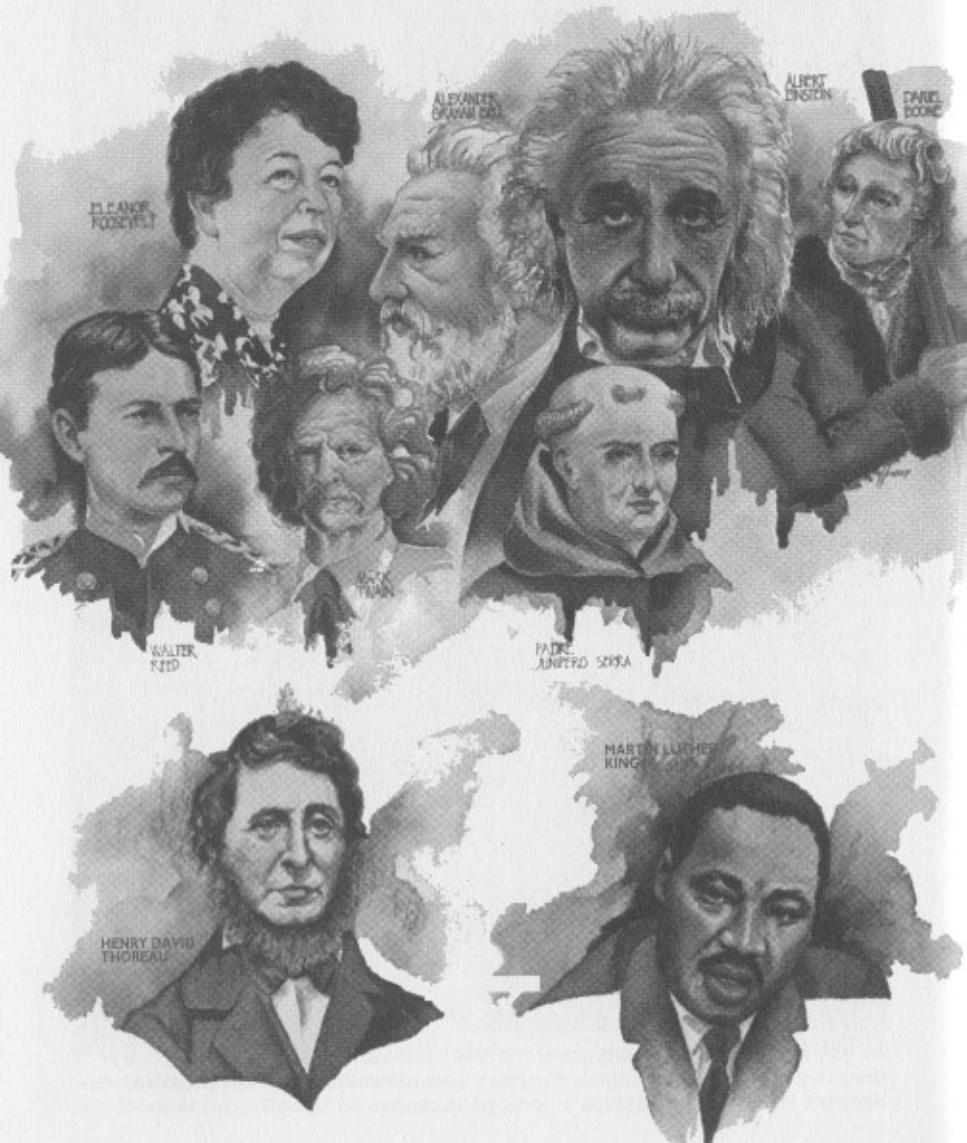
When a Person Makes a Difference

Have you ever dreamed of making a great scientific discovery, finding a cure for an illness, or solving a tough problem for your country? You would have a good feeling about it, your name would go down in history, and your family would be proud of you. It brings pride to an ethnic group, too, when one of its members makes a difference in people's lives.

In requirement 4, you will learn about contributions of three Americans from different ethnic backgrounds.

Check your library catalog under the ethnic groups you choose. You will meet explorers, inventors, and national leaders as you browse through books.

You also can ask people who the "heroes" are in their culture. You may discover some local achievers, *men and women* who have made a difference in your own community. Find out as many details as you can, so you can tell their stories well.



Getting Along Together

Requirement 5

A Talk with Your Troop or Class

In talking with people from different cultures, you may have heard of examples of both conflicts and cooperation between groups. Perhaps in your reading you found accounts of groups opposing each other or working together. You may have heard or read of a conflict or resolution that has been in the news recently. This is what you need to know if you choose requirement 5a.

Use the contacts you have made in the two cultures you are studying. These people will be able to tell you about any local difficulties between various groups as well as advances toward harmony.

Conflicts

What causes conflict? People who are struggling to attain certain goals, like jobs, economic advantages, and a better way of life, may find themselves competing for those goals with members of other groups. Another cause of conflict or mistrust can arise when people are unwilling to understand and respect another culture. Acts of hostility or violence, such as gang warfare, or violent acts of religious **discrimination**, can instill fear and mistrust between groups of people.

Cultural conflicts at their worst can explode into wars, as history and the daily news show us. At one

***Discrimination** is the act of treating a person or group of people unfairly because of the way they look, think, believe, dress, act, or are otherwise different from most members of the community.*



The camaraderie that is associated with the Boy Scouts of America is exemplified through its proud tradition and strong ties to the U.S. presidency. When it was founded in 1910, President William Howard Taft agreed to be honorary president. Every U.S. president since then has held this position, and living former presidents may be elected as honorary vice presidents.

point in 1994, there were thirty-six wars going on in the world, and all of them were "civil" wars, meaning that different groups of people living in the same country were fighting and killing one another. Many wars between cultures, however, are really quests for political power or territory, rather than conflict over differences in beliefs, languages, and customs. Most wars have a complex mixture of causes.

Cooperation

What benefits does cooperation bring? People from different groups can work together to improve a community, a nation, or the world. They can tackle environmental problems and find solutions to social problems like homelessness. **Coalitions** of representatives from different groups in a town or city are powerful forces for change. In workplaces, schools, and volunteer organizations like Scouting, individuals from different backgrounds work together to achieve common goals. At the same time, they can enrich one another's lives and become friends.

In talking to your troop or class, you will want to give examples of conflicts and cooperation in the United States from the past and the present. Are cultural groups working together in your community today?



Nowhere is the cooperative spirit better portrayed than through the U.S. Peace Corps. Members of a Guatemalan village learn about nutrition and cooking from this American Peace Corps volunteer.



Peace Corps members give of their time and expertise to these natives of Botswana, one of thirty-five African countries in which Americans serve.

A Discussion

You will also lead a discussion on ways that people from different groups can understand one another better. A good place to start is with personal stories. How does it feel to be a newcomer? Some people in the discussion probably have moved to a new school, troop, town, or country. Ask them to talk about experiences that made the transition easy or difficult for them. Then you can move the discussion on to ideas about how the group can reach out to newcomers from various cultures and countries. Talk about ways to promote understanding between groups.

Your discussion group may come up with ideas on welcoming newcomers, bringing different groups together, and encouraging mutual appreciation and respect. Suggest a get-together where each person brings an item or food that reflects some aspect of their family or culture. Or get involved in a joint work project, or a work/play event. Who knows, it could actually happen after you discuss it.

When you think about it, such an event has at its heart some common goals: to achieve something meaningful and to have fun together. The discussion may even produce good ideas on how to improve understanding among all ages on a community level. You may decide to hold a multicultural festival, perform a project that brings all elements of the community together, or put on a neighborhood "Olympic Games." Again, the key is to find a common goal.

Your own experience with this merit badge will come in handy during the discussion, because you now have a deeper understanding of the two cultures you have studied. You can relate those experiences to your group, because whether you were talking with people, getting to know families, reading, or attending or participating in events, your understanding of these cultures grew out of your desire to learn, your respect for the traditions of others, and your willingness to be friendly. You made an effort, and that is what it takes to achieve understanding.



The United Nations in New York City provides ways for governments of countries around the world to work together to solve problems.

The United Nations

You know how difficult it is at times for a family to get along smoothly. A family is an assortment of personalities, needs, goals, and ideas, and not everyone can have his or her way all the time.

Knowing this, it's easy to understand how challenging it is for the many countries of the world, with different needs and goals, to get along together. After **World War I**, the **League of Nations** was formed to promote peace, but the United States didn't become a member. The league collapsed early in **World War II**.

Two of the bloodiest and costliest wars in history were fought in the twentieth century. They are called **world wars** because both wars involved many nations of the world. **World War I** began in 1914 in Sarajevo, in the Austrian capital of Bosnia, following the murder of the heir to the Austrian throne and his wife. The war ended in 1918. Bosnia continues to be a serious trouble spot in the world. **World War II** was the most expensive war in the history of the world. More people died, more property was damaged, and more money was spent on war than ever before. World War II also ushered in the age of the atomic bomb and the prospect of nuclear warfare.

After World War II, the United Nations was founded in 1945 to prevent war, maintain peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, promote social progress and better standards of life, and to achieve international cooperation. The United Nations provides ways for governments to consult immediately on emergencies and to work together on long-term problems. If you choose requirement 5b, you will find out how people of many nations and cultural viewpoints unite and work on common concerns.

You have probably seen **General Assembly** sessions on television news, with delegates discussing and voting on international issues at the U.N. headquarters in New York City. Each country, regardless of its size or population, has one vote.

The U.N. Security Council, responsible for maintaining international peace and security, is in the news when it attempts to control conflicts while political solutions are being sought.

The Economic and Social Council coordinates the work of many specialized agencies in areas of health, education, and human rights. Examples include:

- **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** works to raise levels of nutrition, improve production and availability of foods, and eliminate hunger.
- **World Health Organization (WHO)**. By the late 1970s, **smallpox**, one of the most feared diseases in the history of man, was eradicated from the earth in a campaign coordinated by WHO. Smallpox killed hundreds of millions of people, and scarred and blinded millions more. With the smallpox victory to its credit, the agency developed a global strategy to achieve its goal, "Health for All by the Year 2000," involving prevention, control, and treatment of human diseases.
- **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** is concerned with health, nutrition, education, environment, and other areas that affect children. An immunization program carried out by UNICEF and WHO has reached 80 percent of the world's children under age 5, saving at least three million lives each year.
- **United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** promotes literacy, education, and human rights, and safeguards cultural heritage.
- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** addresses such issues as climate change and global warming, desertification, destruction of tropical forests, pollution, and acid rain.

In 1992, the United Nations held the Earth **summit**, the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, in Brazil. It was the largest gathering ever of world leaders. From the conference came Agenda 21, a five hundred-page blueprint for action that world leaders hope will help to save the earth for future generations. The conference also produced two **legally binding** documents. It is hoped the Framework Convention on Climate Change will help to curb global warming and that the Convention on Biological Diversity will help to prevent the **extinction** of species.

How can you find out what has been going on recently in the United Nations? Your library might subscribe to the quarterly news magazine *U.N. Chronicles*.

This excellent source will fill you in on recent problems and U.N. programs throughout the world. You will find news on such subjects as conflicts, political developments, peace-keeping measures, human rights efforts, refugee aid, sustainable development, and environmental action. Look through several issues of *U.N. Chronicles* to get a good idea of what has been happening over the past year.

American Cultures: A Far-Reaching Subject

As you have traveled the path toward the American Cultures merit badge, you have discovered how different—and how alike—Americans are. Our continuing challenge is to preserve our diverse cultural heritages, and at the same time join together to solve problems and improve quality of life.

We are all Americans, and have come together from many places in the world. Our tremendous cultural diversity and our many talents and ideas have shaped America. As a nation, the United States evolves and changes constantly. Who and what the American people and the nation will be in the twenty-first century depends on every one of us.

In the preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO, a stated goal is "mutual understanding and a truer and a more perfect knowledge of each other's lives." That is essential to getting along together in our neighborhoods, our nation, and the world.

A summit is a conference that involves the highest levels of government officials, such as the president of the United States.

Something is said to be legally binding when the parties involved in the matter can be forced by law to carry out the terms of the document, contract, or agreement.

Something becomes extinct when it no longer exists. A species of plants or animals is declared extinct when the last known example of the species either dies or is destroyed. Civilization, particularly in recent years, has been responsible for the destruction of many species of plants and animals.

Every ethnic and racial group needs to express and celebrate their cultural uniqueness because they, like different instruments in an orchestra, make distinctive and enriching contributions to the whole. But also, as a Korean-American, I feel strongly that, like an instrument in an orchestra, each group and each person should listen to one another and work together for the common good. Each person should actively participate in the life of the community and make a contribution to making our community a harmonious and better place to live.

Sunok Chun Pai, an elder at
Kansas City (Missouri) Korean Church

