

Japanese and Americans Culture: Attitudes about death and grief

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Course: Sociology

Number of Days: 1 45-minute class period

Objective: Students will analyze culture in the United States and Japan by comparing and contrasting cultural norms when it comes to death and grief.

Content Standards (Olentangy Local Schools Content Statements):

- Sociology: I can...Evaluate my own conduct by comparing myself with others.
- I can...Examine the world to develop my own views and to communicate those views with others.

Materials Needed: "Really Long Distance." This American Life. 23 Sept. 2016.

Act 1: 25 minutes. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/597/one-last-thing-before-i-go?act=1>

Lesson Procedure:

1. Start by defining "culture" for students – "the language, beliefs, values, norms, behaviors, and even material objects that are passed from one generation to the next"
2. Provide student with a list of questions about culture. Have them write down at least one idea/example for each in American culture:
 - a. What language do Americans speak?
 - b. What do Americans eat?
 - c. What do Americans wear?
 - d. What do Americans do for fun?
 - e. What music do Americans listen to?
3. Discuss this surface culture with the students – it should be easy for students to generate a list. Ask them to compare this list of American values to other cultures. Do we see these things in other countries? Why or why not?
4. Ask students to answer these more difficult questions about culture. Have them write down at least one idea/example for each in American culture:
 - a. What is the concept of time for Americans?
 - b. What is appropriate personal space?
 - c. What do Americans find beautiful?
 - d. How to Americans communicate nonverbally?

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- e. How do Americans handle emotions?
 - f. How do Americans handle death?
5. Discuss these elements of culture with the students. Ask them to compare this list of American values to other cultures. Do we see these things in other countries? Why or why not?
 6. Focus in on the last question – “How do Americans handle death”. Ask students if they are familiar with other cultures’ notions of death and grief.
 7. Ask students if they remember hearing about the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011. Explain details to students. (Details can be found here: <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/safety-and-security/safety-of-plants/fukushima-accident.aspx>)
 8. Have students listen to Act 1 of “Really Long Distance” about the reaction to death and grief in Japan following the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear accident. (25 minutes) As students listen, ask them to write down ideas to the following questions:
 - a. How do the phone calls demonstrate Japanese cultural values?
 - b. What do you see as similarities in Japanese and Americans handling of death and grief?
 - c. What do you see as differences in Japanese and Americans handling of death and grief? Consider connections with American national tragedies (e.g. 9/11, mass shootings)
 9. At the conclusion of the segment, discuss student answers to the questions.