

Let's Play Ball:  
Using Cultural Themes in the English Classroom

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Does the teaching of culture have a place in the  
EFL classroom?

Why?

*(Don't worry, there are no wrong answers!)*

# Why Teach Culture?

In the old days we taught exclusively "target culture" competence (Canale, 1983).

Why is this not enough?

# Why Teach Culture?

Intercultural Communicative Competence:

The ability to interact successfully with people who are different from you (Alptekin, 2002).

Culture is...???



# A Possible Definition:

Culture is:

Values and beliefs

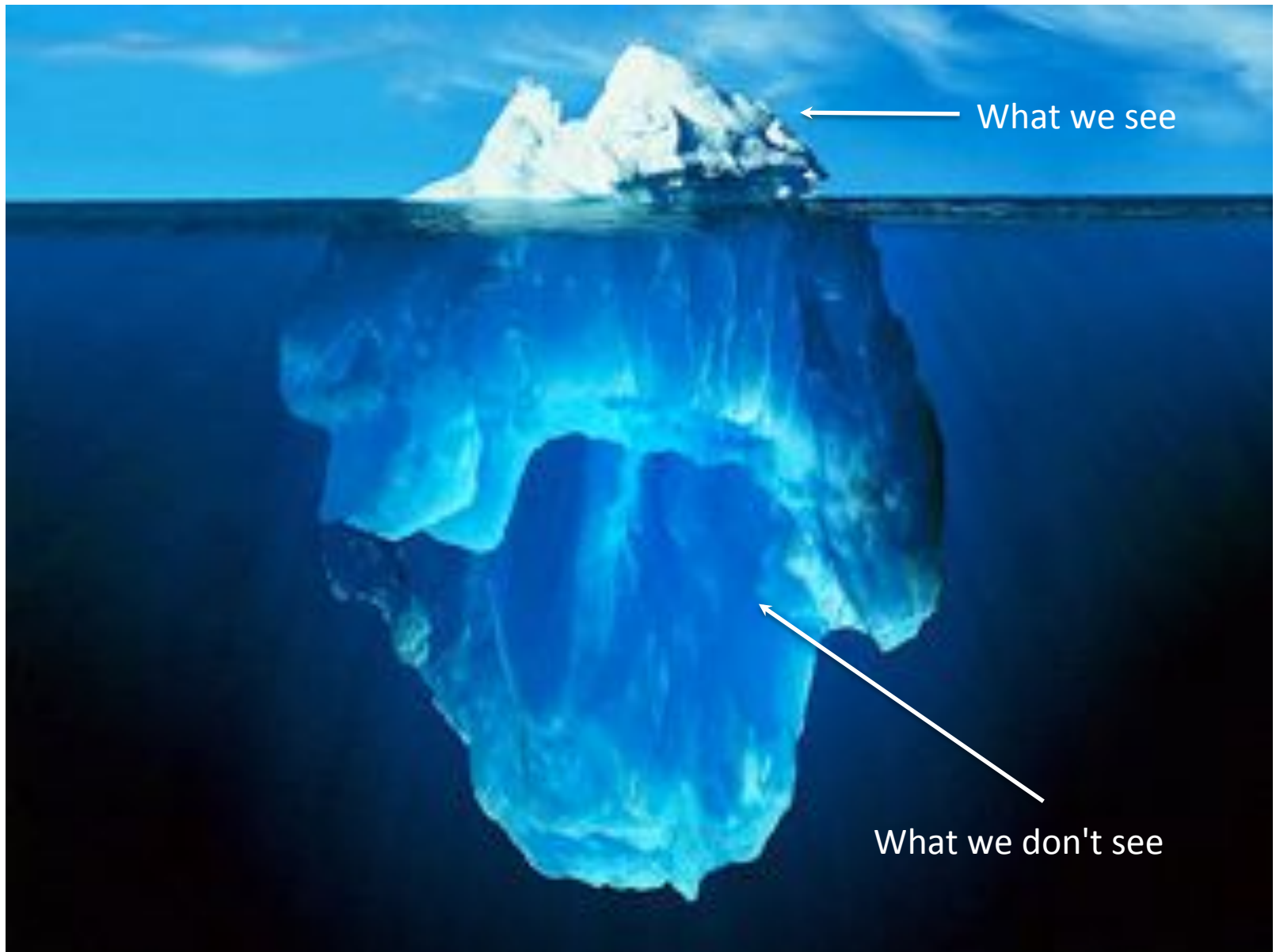
*that help us to*

**identify ourselves**

*and*

**understand others**





What we see

What we don't see



What do you see?

# Interpreting Cultural Messages

*It's difficult!*

*When we lack background knowledge, we can  
easily misinterpret what we see*

*But we often have no choice but to try and  
interpret anyway*

# Interpreting Cultural Messages

*As language teachers, we have a responsibility to help our learners to be better at this!*

*To make them better intercultural communicators*

*Because the world of English is made up of thousands of different cultures*

# Critical Thinking Skills

*A **set of skills** our students can use to go beyond what they see and raise their awareness of the differences between people.*

For Example...

*Why do people smile?*







# What Does This Word Mean to Me?

*Directions: Roll the dice and move the prescribed amount of spaces.  
Describe what the word in the box means to you!*

 The Past	 My Room	 Music	 Family	
 School			 Money	
 Holidays			 Pets	
 Sports			 Favorite Food	 Friends
 My Country			 Hometown	
 English			 Ideal Job	 U.S.A.
				<b>Start</b>

*These “traditional” topics are already in your textbooks.*

Use them to teach **usable** and **relevant** cultural skills!



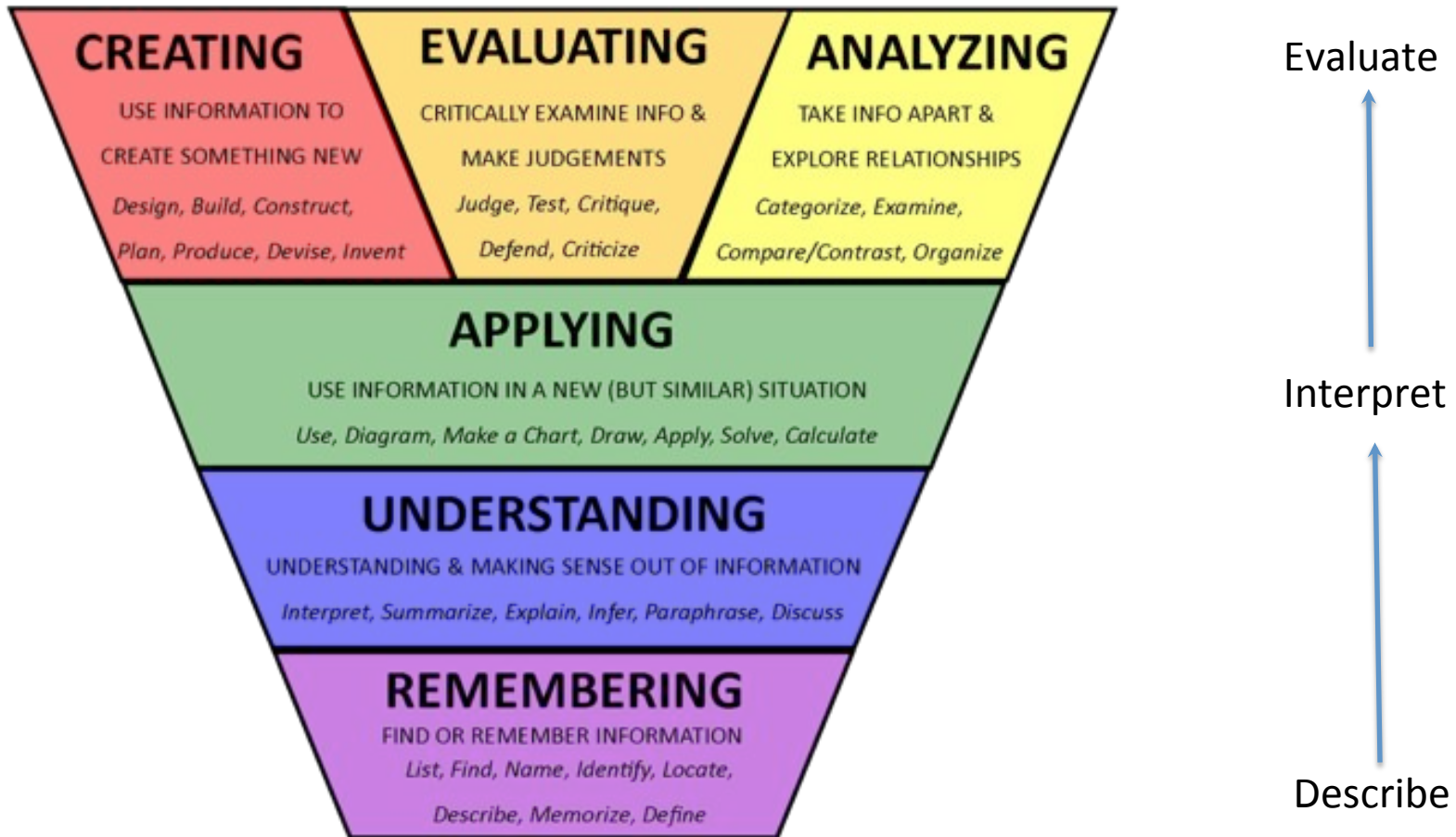
**Describe:** *What do you see?*

**Interpret:** *What do you think is happening?*

**Evaluate:** *What cultural values do you think are expressed in this activity?*

(Bennett, Bennett, & Stillings, 1977)

# Remember Bloom's Taxonomy?



(Anderson, Krathwohl, et al., 2001)

# Practice!

*Let's use Describe/Interpret/Evaluate to try and understand what we see*

*You can do this in the classroom!*







Triumph of the Underdog



Hard Work

*American Values Communicated through Baseball*



Self-Reliance



Sportsmanship



# Universal Sports Themes

Rite of Passage

Uniforms

Songs and Dancing

Rules and Judges

Competition and Skill

Tradition and History

Rituals and Superstition

Spectators

Physical Prowess

Famous Players

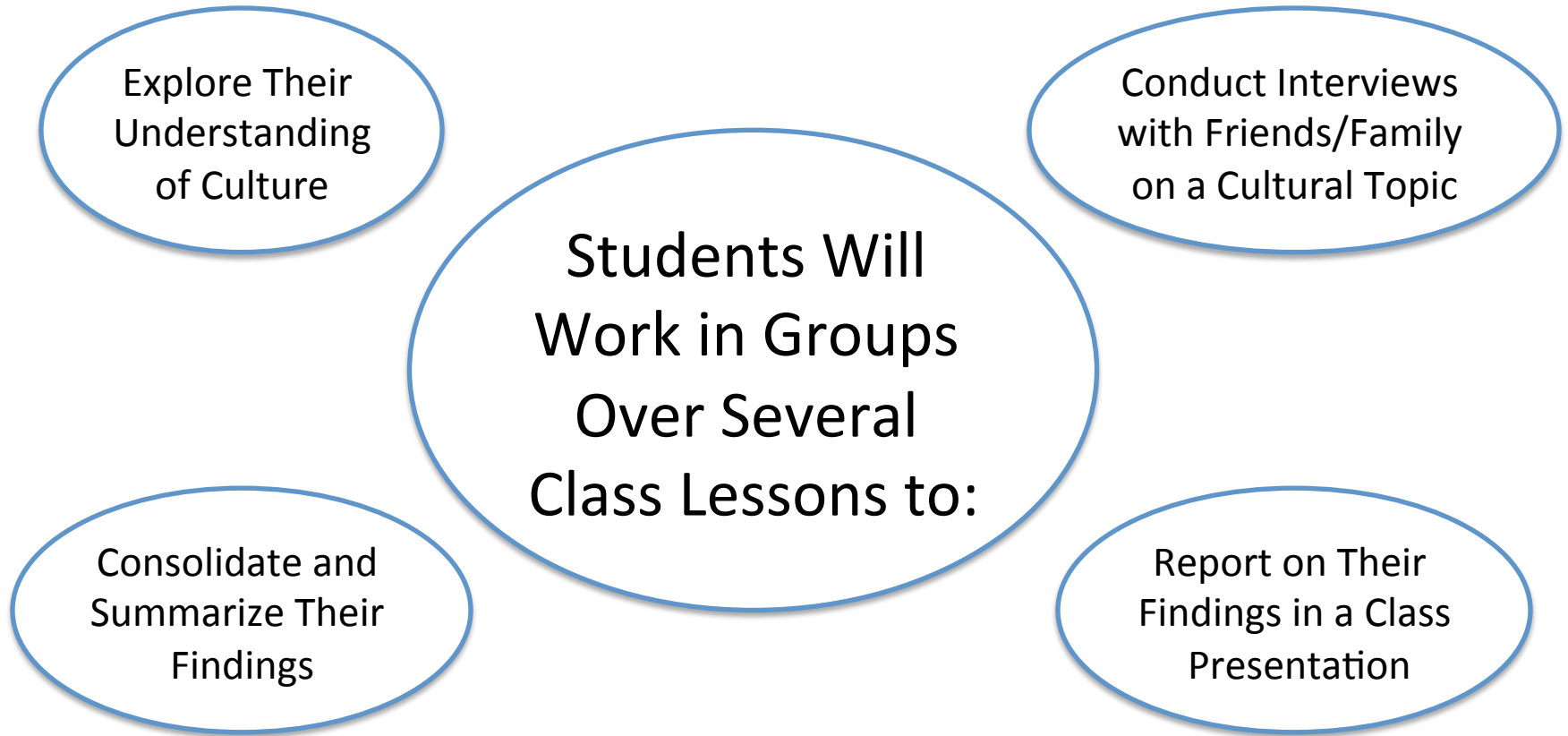
Practice

# How About Some Other Sports?


*We want you to practice  
**Describe/Interpret/Evaluate**  
with two other sports!*







## Our Project Plan: Overview



Practice the  
Four Language Skills  
for  
Useful, Communicative  
Purposes

Improve Skills in Critical  
and Creative Thinking

Explore Culture  
in a New Way that  
Makes Them Better  
Intercultural  
Communicators!

# Our Project Plan: Goals

# OUR PROJECT PLAN: STAGES

## **Stage 1: Controlled Activities**

- Form project groups and discuss definitions of culture
- Read, write, and discuss the topic: Universal Sports Themes

## **Stage 2: Semi-Controlled and Independent Activities**

- Practice interviews in class with your project group
- Conduct interviews outside of class on your sports theme
- Discuss your interview findings in your project group

## **Stage 3: Independent Activities**

- Practice and give your group presentation
- Complete peer- and self-assessment worksheets

# Why Project-Based Learning?

Provide Holistic Feedback

Engage in Critical Thinking Activities

Allow Creative Language Use

*What do you think?*

Tailor to Your Students' Needs and Interests

Encourage Independent Learning



Learn about  
American culture as  
it is expressed  
through baseball

Explore  
universal  
sports  
themes

In this stage,  
learners will...

Select and explore a  
sport that has local  
cultural value

Explore their own  
definitions of culture

## Stage 1: Controlled Activities

# Sports Brainstorm!



# Cultural Values

Social Change

Definition of Time

Competition/Cooperation

Privacy

Work Ethic

Optimism/View of the Future

Collectivism/Individualism

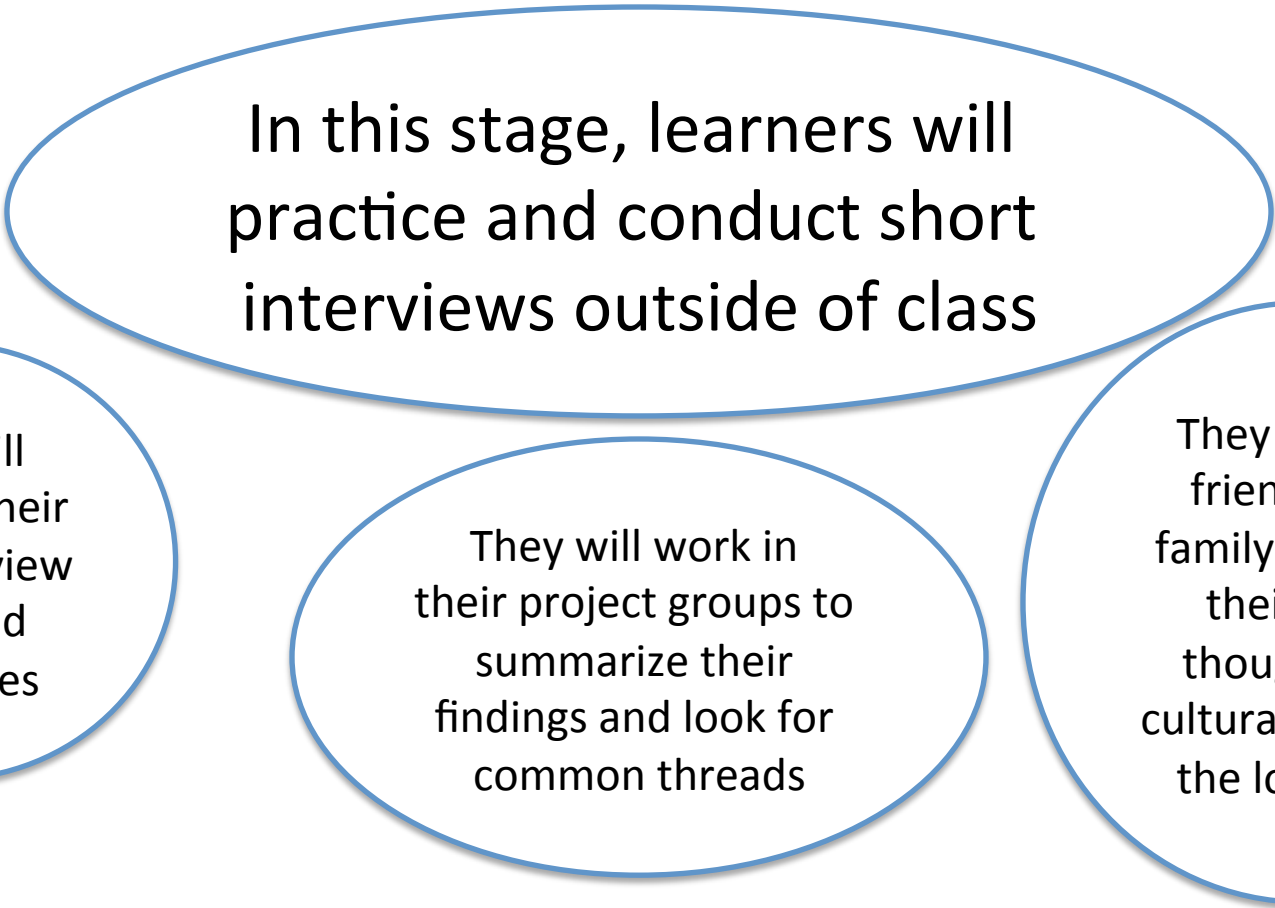
Equality

Level of Formality

Materialism

Directness/Honesty

**GAME  
SHOW**



In this stage, learners will practice and conduct short interviews outside of class

The diagram consists of four blue-outlined ovals. One large oval is at the top, and three smaller ovals are arranged in a row below it. The top oval contains the text 'In this stage, learners will practice and conduct short interviews outside of class'. The three bottom ovals contain the following text: 'They will develop their own interview skills and strategies' (left), 'They will work in their project groups to summarize their findings and look for common threads' (center), and 'They will ask friends and family to share their own thoughts on cultural values in the local sport' (right).

They will develop their own interview skills and strategies

They will work in their project groups to summarize their findings and look for common threads

They will ask friends and family to share their own thoughts on cultural values in the local sport

## Stage 2: Semi-Controlled and independent Activities

Take Good Notes

Be Friendly and Patient!

*What are some qualities of an effective interview?*

Ask Follow-Up Questions

Make Sure Your Interviewee  
Understands What is Expected of Them

**In this stage, students will:**

Plan and practice their presentations

Give presentations to the class

Complete peer- and self-assessment worksheets

Revisit their original definitions of culture

## Stage 3: Independent Activities



PRACTICE!



Organized



Concise



Personalized

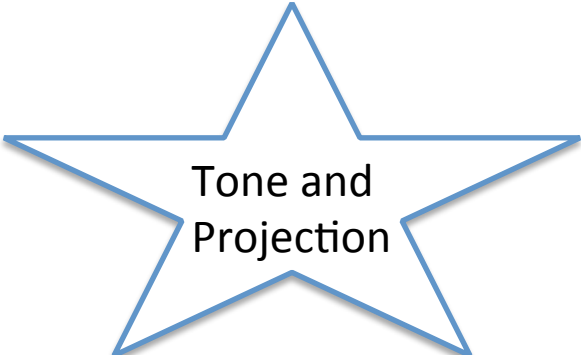
*What makes a good  
presentation?*



Gestures



Eye Contact



Tone and  
Projection



SMILE!



# In Our Webinar Today

We looked at  
traditional  
concepts of  
culture

We discussed the  
importance of  
understanding  
the depth of  
culture

We raised our  
awareness of the  
impact of lack of  
background  
knowledge

We examined  
universal sports  
themes and  
cultural values

We practiced  
engaging in the  
three phases of  
Describe/Interpret/  
Evaluate

We explored a project  
to implement with  
our students to teach  
them usable and  
relevant cultural skills

OK, let's do the same thing that our students will do in this project.

Answer the following question again:

*What is culture?*

# References

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