

Identity Recipes: What makes me part of a cultural community?

Overview

How do we think about ourselves (and others) in relation to the places we live? How do individuals fit into a larger cultural community? This lesson explores these questions through the creation of identity recipes. First, in small groups, students will evaluate and discuss how their city or town is imagined or represented in tourist brochures, regional magazines, advertisements, newspapers, or in different historical time periods. Then students will compare these media images and representations with their daily experiences of “locality” or living in a particular city, town, village, reservation or neighborhood. Next, students will create identity recipes. An identity recipe takes the format of traditional recipe, but instead of being a guide for cooking food, it represents who you are both as an individual and as part of a broader community. What are the different elements or ingredients that make you unique? Where do the ingredients come from? Share your personal identity recipe with your classmates. What do you share in common with others?

Objectives

1. To learn about how people think of themselves and others in relation to the places they live.
2. To reflect upon how places are imagined in tourist literature, magazines, advertisements, history books, and art and how these images might influence how we think about ourselves.
3. Understand how culture is lived in relation to place and space.

Activities

1. Assign students into small discussion groups.
2. Distribute print materials (images or short descriptions) representing your particular city, town, or neighborhood to each group. Have students examine the materials and draw critical comparisons (either in writing or conversation) between these media representations and their daily life experiences.
3. Have students list different “ingredients” taken from the local environment that they feel shape their daily lives. Some of the items can be food, but you also want to include elements of the natural and built environment. The ingredients need to be representative of the specific city, town or neighborhood in which the students currently live. (i.e. one cup green chile; ½ cup of brown sugar; three cups sunshine; a dash of desert sand; bake for 15 years in an adobe *estufa* in Santo Domingo Pueblo).
4. Students can use their artistic talents to individualize their identity recipes any way they like.

Materials

This is a 45 – 75 min. lesson plan. The materials recommended are the following:

1. Media representations of the place you live such as magazines, tourist brochures, post cards, movies, advertisements, art books, museum literature and newspapers.
2. Media representations can also be taken from different historical periods to think about how places have change over time in response to different agents of change.
3. Construction paper, markers, scissors, crayons, writing materials, paints, decorations...be creative!
4. Notebook paper or computer for recording group discussions, listing ingredients, brainstorming and writing up drafts or expanding the assignment into a personal essay.

5. Students will discuss their identity recipes in small groups or present them to the class (compare and contrast, explain why they chose particular ingredients and their specific amounts).

Adaptations and Extensions

An identity recipe is an individualized project, but it should also be shared so that students can compare them and evaluate their commonalities and differences. Students can create a collage of images to represent their recipe or use their personal names as acronyms by using each letter to begin their list of ingredients. After the identity recipes are completed they can be posted to a class blog or website or be used to decorate the classroom. They can also be used as pre-writing or brainstorming activity for writing a personal essay. Students should be encouraged to talk about their identity recipes in small groups and then share what they learned about themselves and one another. This lesson can also be done as a web-quest activity where students research how their neighborhood, town or city is represented in different kinds of media and in different historical periods. Students can evaluate the relationship between the tourist economy and local histories, cultures, and celebrations but also in terms of social inequality and identity politics.

Evaluation

At the end of this lesson students will have an identity recipe to share with their classmates. Students should be able to answer or discuss the following questions to evaluate their understanding of the concepts included in this lesson plan:

1. How does the place in which you live influence you are or how you think about yourself in relation to the environment?
2. Why do people who live in the same place have different identity recipes? What makes us unique? What makes us part of a broader cultural landscape or community?
3. How have representations of your neighborhood, city or town changed over time? What can this tell us about the relationship between people and the places in which they live?