

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

People usually live with others who follow similar beliefs learned from the past.

Terms to Know

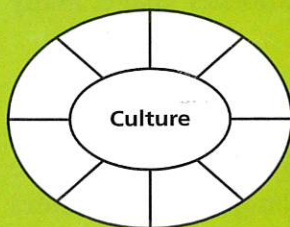
- culture
- ethnic group
- dialect
- monarchy
- dictator
- democracy
- economic system
- cultural diffusion
- civilization
- culture region

Places to Locate

- Iraq
- Egypt
- India
- China

Reading Strategy

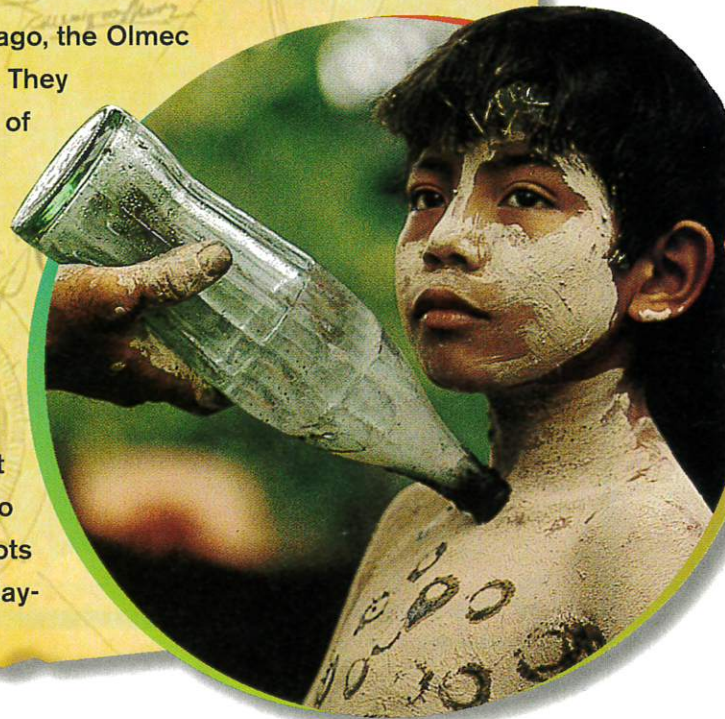
Draw a diagram like this one. In each section, write one of the eight elements of culture and give an example of it from the United States today.



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Exploring Our World

Three thousand years ago, the Olmec people lived in Mexico. They sometimes wore skins of jaguars, cats that were sacred to them. This young boy lives in an area where the jaguar is still honored. He is preparing for a jaguar dance. An object from modern culture—a soft drink bottle—is used to make the “jaguar” spots of ash on the boy’s clay-covered skin.



If you wake up to rock music, put on denim jeans, speak English, and celebrate the Fourth of July, those things are part of your culture. If you eat a tortilla, or flat bread, for breakfast, speak Spanish, and take part in celebrations honoring the jaguar, those things are part of your culture.

What Is Culture?

As used in geography, **culture** is the way of life of a group of people who share similar beliefs and customs. In studying a society’s culture, geographers look at eight elements called *traits*. They study what groups the society is divided into, what language the people speak, and what religion they follow. They examine people’s daily lives. They consider what history the people share and what artworks they have created. They also look at how the society is governed and how the people make a living.

Social Groups One way of studying cultures is by looking at the different groups of people in the society. For instance, geographers study how many people are rich, poor, and in the middle class. They

World Religions



Applying Map Skills

1. What religion is found across northern Africa?
2. Where is Buddhism practiced?

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look at how the young and the old are treated. They also study the roles of men and women. In many societies, males and females have different rights and responsibilities. Understanding those differences is a vital part of understanding a particular culture.

Geographers also examine how people in the culture treat others who are different from themselves. Most countries include people who belong to different ethnic groups. An **ethnic group** is a group of people who share a common culture, language, or history. Many societies have people who have moved there from another place. Many have people who practice different religions.

Language People use language to share information. Sharing a language is one of the strongest unifying forces for a culture. Even within a culture, though, geographers find language differences. Some people may speak a **dialect**, or a local form of a language that differs from the language in other areas. The differences may include pronunciation and the meaning of words. For example, people in the northeastern United States say “soda,” whereas people in the Midwest say “pop.” Both groups are referring to soft drinks, however.

Religion Another important part of culture is religion. In many cultures, religion helps people answer basic questions about life's meaning. Religious beliefs vary significantly around the world. Struggles over religious differences are a problem in many countries. Some of the major world religions are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. The map on page 78 shows you the main areas where these religions are practiced.

Daily Life Do you enjoy eating pizza, tacos, yogurt, and eggrolls? All of these foods came from different cultures. What people eat and *how* they eat it—whether with their fingers, silverware, chopsticks, and so on—reflect their culture. What people wear also reflects cultural differences. The same is true of how people build traditional homes in their societies.

History A culture group has a shared history, and that history shapes how they view the world. People remember the successes of the past and often celebrate holidays to honor the heroes and heroines who brought about those successes. Stories about these heroes reveal the personal characteristics that the people think are important. A group also remembers the dark periods of history, when they met with disaster or defeat. These experiences, too, influence how a group of people sees itself.

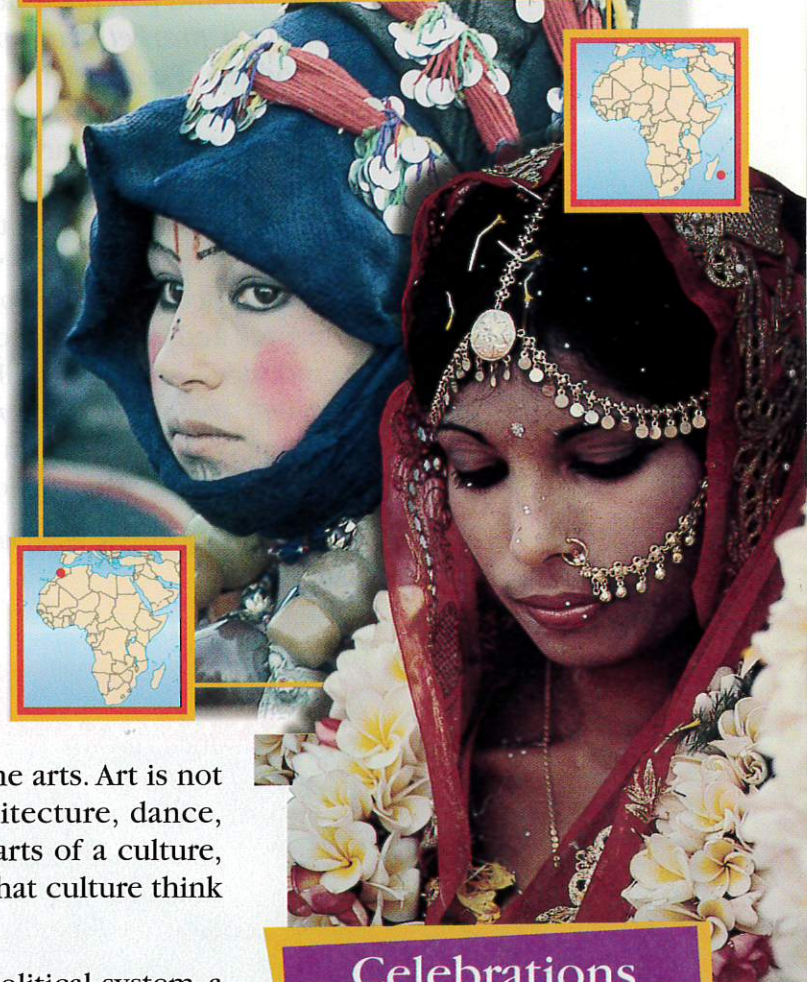
Arts People express their culture through the arts. Art is not just paintings and sculptures, but also architecture, dance, music, theater, and literature. By viewing the arts of a culture, you can gain insight into what the people of that culture think is beautiful and important.

Government The kind of government, or political system, a society has reflects its culture. Some countries are led by individuals. In a **monarchy**, kings and queens inherit the right to rule. In others, **dictators** take control of the government and rule the country as they wish.

In many countries today, power rests with the people of the nation. Citizens choose their leaders by voting for them. When the people of a country hold the power of government, we call that government a **democracy**. Some places have mixed forms of government. For example, the United Kingdom is both a monarchy and a democracy. The queen is the symbolic head of the country, but the power to rule is in the hands of elected leaders.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

On Location



Celebrations

In most cultures, people often bring out their most beautiful clothes for events like weddings. This wedding guest is from Morocco (upper left), and this bride is from Mauritius.

Place What aspects of daily life besides clothing reflect culture?

The Economy People must make a living, whether in farming or in industry or by providing services such as designing a Web page or preparing food. Geographers look at how people in a culture earn a living. They also look at the culture's economic system.

An **economic system** sets rules for how people decide what goods and services to produce and how they are exchanged. In a *traditional economy*, things are done “the way they have always been done.” Economic decisions are based on customs and beliefs—often religious—handed down from generation to generation. For example, if your grandparents and parents fished for a living, you will fish for a living.

In a *market economy*, individuals make decisions about what to produce. People who own businesses make what they think customers want. Customers have the freedom to choose what products they will buy. A market economy is based on *free enterprise*. This is the idea that you have the right to own property or businesses and make a profit without the government interfering. People are free to choose what jobs they will do and for whom they will work.

In a *command economy*, however, the government owns businesses and controls decisions about what goods and services will be produced and who will receive them. A command economy is often called *socialism* or *communism*, depending on how much the government is involved. In some command economies, the government even decides which people receive training for particular jobs.

✓ **Reading Check** What is culture?

Sri Lanka

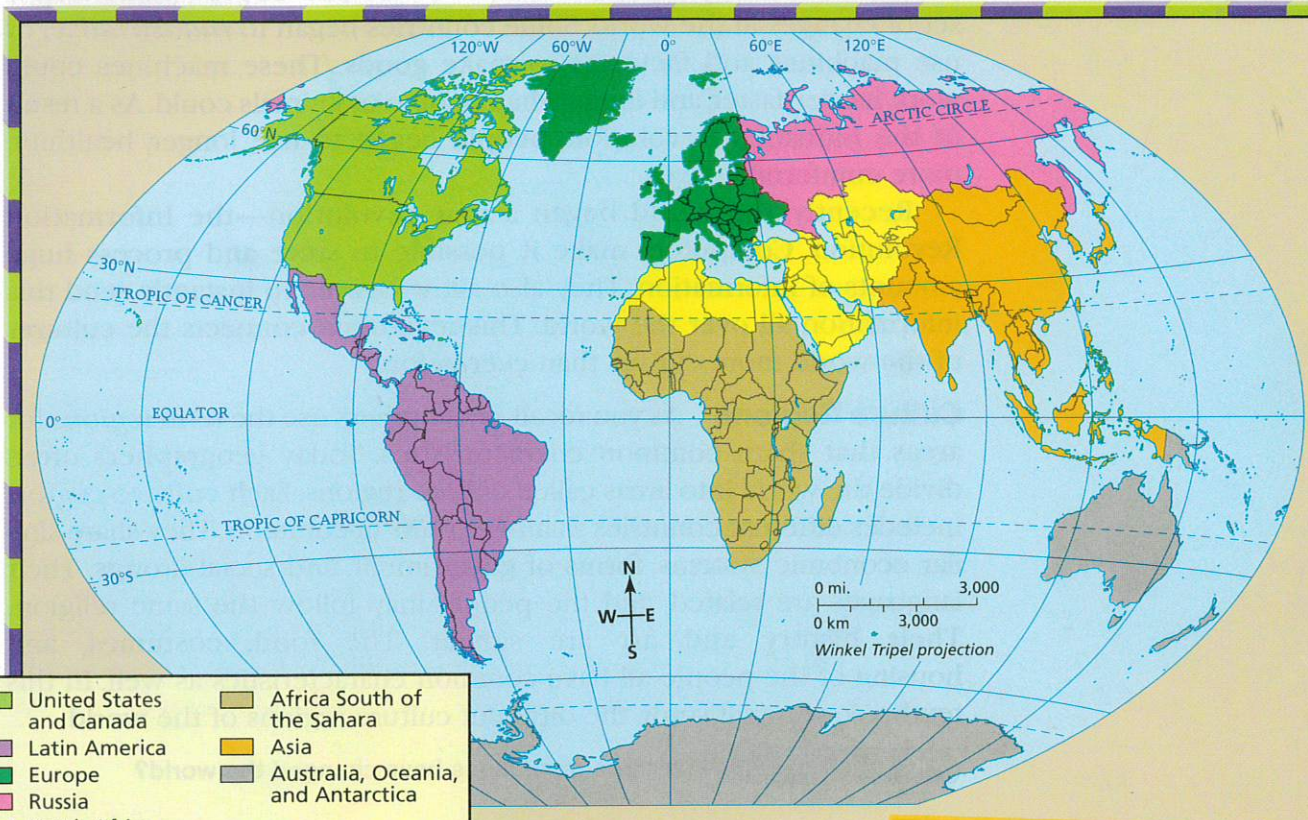
Some people in Sri Lanka harvest tea (left). Others work in factories making dolls to be sold around the world (below).

Place On what is a market economy based?

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

On Location





United States and Canada	Africa South of the Sahara
Latin America	Asia
Europe	Australia, Oceania, and Antarctica
Russia	
North Africa, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia	

Applying Map Skills

1. Which culture region includes most nations of Africa?
2. What culture region is on the continents of both Africa and Asia?

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Cultural Change

Cultures do not remain the same. Humans constantly invent new ideas and technologies and create new solutions to problems. Trade, the movement of people, and war can spread these changes to other cultures. The process of spreading new knowledge and skills to other cultures is called **cultural diffusion**. Today the Internet is making cultural diffusion take place more rapidly than ever before.

Culture Over Time Historians have traced the tremendous changes that humans have made in their cultures. In the first human societies, people lived by hunting animals and gathering fruits and vegetables. They were *nomadic*, or lived in small groups that moved from place to place to follow sources of food.

Starting about 10,000 years ago, people learned to grow food by planting seeds. This change brought about the Agricultural Revolution. Groups stayed in one place and built settlements. Their societies became more complex. As a result, four **civilizations**, or highly developed cultures, arose in river valleys in present-day **Iraq, Egypt, India, and China**. These civilizations included cities,

complex governments and religions, and systems of writing. The map on page 83 shows you where these civilizations were located.

Thousands of years later—in the 1700s and 1800s—came a new set of changes in the world. Some countries began to *industrialize*, or use machines and factories to make goods. These machines could work harder, faster, and longer than people or animals could. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, people began to live longer, healthier, more comfortable lives.

Recently, the world began a new revolution—the Information Revolution. Computers make it possible to store and process huge amounts of information. They also allow people to instantly send this information all over the world. This revolution connects the cultures of the world more closely than ever before.

Culture Regions As you recall, geographers use the term *regions* for areas that share common characteristics. Today geographers often divide the world into areas called culture regions. Each **culture region** includes different countries that have traits in common. They share similar economic systems, forms of government, and social groups. Their languages are related, and the people may follow the same religion. Their history and art are similar. The food, costumes, and housing of the people all have common characteristics as well. In this textbook, you will study the different culture regions of the world.

 **Reading Check** What three revolutions have changed the world?

Section

1

Assessment

Defining Terms

1. **Define** culture, ethnic group, dialect, monarchy, dictator, democracy, economic system, cultural diffusion, civilization, culture region.

Recalling Facts

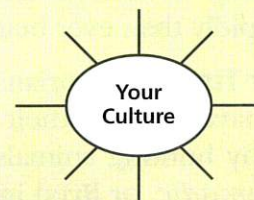
2. **Culture** What kinds of social groups do geographers study?
3. **Government** What are the different forms of government a society may have?
4. **Culture** In what ways does cultural diffusion occur?

Critical Thinking

5. **Understanding Cause and Effect** How does history shape a people's culture?
6. **Making Comparisons** Describe two kinds of economic systems.

Graphic Organizer

7. **Organizing Information** Create a diagram like this one that describes features of your culture. On the lines write the types of food, clothing, language, music, and so on.



Applying Geography Skills

8. **Analyzing Maps** Look at the map on page 81. In which culture region do you live? In which culture region(s) did your ancestors live?