

MODULE #1: Latino Culture

Objectives

- Participants will learn the meaning of culture and heritage.
- Participants will have the debate around Latino as a race or a culture.
- Participants will identify traditions associated with one family holiday.
- Participants will be able to explore various cultures and diverse groups.
- Participants will develop awareness about the custom of celebrating Valentine's Day.

Context



The rich cultural traditions of the Hispanic-American community have made a remarkable impact on American society. The diverse backgrounds of Hispanic Americans and their dedication to family have become an integral part of America. With a deep commitment to faith and a strong desire to live the American dream, these citizens are realizing the full blessings of liberty (President Bush for Proclamation of National Hispanic Heritage Month, 2008).

Handouts & Resources Needed

Handout 1.2: Questions to Prompt Discussion

Handout 1.3: My Favorite Holiday

Handout 1.4: Valentine's Day Around the World

Sheets of paper

Pen/pencils

Journals

Activity #1: The meaning of Culture and Heritage (20 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Introduce and share with participants what "culture" and "heritage" are:
 - *Culture* is the attitudes, beliefs and traditions of a particular social or ethnic group.
 - *Heritage* includes aspects of culture that are passed down from generation to generation. Heritage is cultural history.
- Ask participants to write as a homework assignment a journal entry based on the following questions: "When you describe your identity, do you use the term "Latin@," your racial background, or your specific national roots? Why? What has caused you to identify in this way?"
- Debriefing

Activity #2: Latino Race or Culture (30 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Explain to participants that having an understanding of the meaning of race and culture will allow them to understand why and how racism stems. Engage in debate on whether Latino is a race or a culture. Remind participants to think creatively and critically. Look up the meaning of “race” in the dictionary. (Refer to Handout 1.2: Questions to Prompt Discussion).
- If the group is larger than 10, divide into smaller groups. Have each group discuss Handout 1.2.
- Once discussion has taken place, tell participants that the concept of race is controversial because it consists of the grouping of people into a single category because of their [skin color](#), [facial features](#) and [hair texture](#) and language. Provide an example, of how these qualities are linked to the climate from where we come from; people’s physical qualities varied from city to city, country to country and continent to continent. Thus, many view “race” as non-existent, and as a social construct applied to human beings for social, economic and political reasons. Explain that the term “Hispanic” is used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census to count those who come from Spanish-speaking countries.
- Debriefing

Activity #3: My Favorite Holiday (55 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Explain that just like in the Latino/Hispanic culture; people of other cultures even other Spanish speaking countries, celebrate holidays like Christmas in a very special way. In this activity, participants will have an opportunity to learn about how other peers celebrate certain occasions and learn about their culture.
- Have participants form small mixed groups of 3-4, and have each student complete Handout 1.3: My Favorite Holiday. Assist participants by asking the following questions, and ask them to follow along:
 - Does your family celebrate a special holiday?
 - When? What is it?
 - What certain foods do you eat at that holiday?
 - What songs do you sing or music do you play?
 - Do you decorate your house?
 - What other special things do you do?
 - Do you dress differently?

- Have students within their groups compare their similarities and differences. List all the holidays on the board. Have a spokesperson from each group share the information of his or her group. Make sure to convey that respecting others' cultural differences is very important as well as showing appreciation for diversity. Add that cultural competent leaders have the ability to interact effectively and show understanding and respect for other people's differences.
- Debriefing

Activity #4: Valentine's Day Around the World (30 min)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- The facilitator should begin by asking participants if they celebrate Valentine's Day. Tell them that during this activity they will learn about how other countries celebrate this special occasion. Read and discuss Handout 1.4: Valentine's Day Around the World.
- Have students discuss ways their family and culture celebrate Valentine's Day.
- Have the students make Valentine cards. Search the Internet for further instructions on how to make a Valentine card. Visit, for example: http://familyfun.go.com/arts-andcrafts/season/specialfeature/valentines_cards_ms/
- Debriefing

Handout 1.2

Questions to Prompt Discussion

1. Is "Latino a race or a culture? Do all Latinos have the same race/same culture?
2. Is it possible to have no culture?
3. How do you describe yourself in terms of race and ethnicity?
4. What persons, events, or experiences have shaped how you define "Latino and your own identity?
5. Why does the stereotypical image exist of a Latinos a brown-skinned and Spanish-speaking exists?
6. Is it sufficient to say we are the "Mestizo" race? What does this mean for the upper class, white Latinos who may not be mixed or Indigenous Latinos? Is there a history of rape and slavery of various groups within *latinidad*?
7. Why do many Latinos value lighter skin and straighter hair more?
8. Is it your choice to straighten or to perm your hair?
9. Do we choose to highlight certain cultural parts of our mixed race identity over others?
10. Is the U.S. Africa American experience the same for Latino/Hispanic and Afro Caribbean Americans today? Can you say that the experience of being Black is the same despite different cultures and history?
11. What is the difference between Hispanic and Latino?

Handout 1.3

My Favorite Holiday

Does your family celebrate a special holiday?

When? What is it?

What certain foods do you eat at that holiday?

What songs do you sing or music do you play?

Do you decorate your house?

What other special things do you do?

Do you dress differently?



Valentine's Day Around the World

Australia	During the Australian gold rush period, miners who were suddenly in possession of money from the new-found wealth of the Ballarat Mines were willing to pay a princely sum for elaborate valentines and merchants in the country would ship orders amounting to thousands of pounds at a time. The most extravagant Australian valentines were made of a satin cushion, perfumed and decorated in an ornate manner with flowers and colored shells. Some might even be adorned with a taxidermied humming bird or bird of paradise. This treasure, contained within a neatly decorated box, was highly valued, being both fashionable and extremely expensive.
USA	In USA, there have been many varieties of cards given over the years, some of which have been rude, even quite cruel in their humor. During the Civil War, cards were flagged with rich colors accompanied by patriotic and/or political motifs. Early American valentine cards were specially lithographed and hand-colored, beautiful and distinctive in design, produced with intricate lace paper and decorated with such ornaments as beads, sea shells, cones, berries and seeds, seaweed or moss, in addition to dried and/or artificial flowers, all of which were attached to a string which was pulled and could then be suspended, thereby creating a three-dimensional picture. Many early American cards were imported from abroad, given the poor quality of American paper at the time, which was not suitable for embossing. Today, American children usually exchange valentines with friends, sometimes at a classroom party.
Great Britain	The poets of Britain have probably penned the majority of the best-loved romantic verses associated with Saint Valentine. Different regions of the nation celebrate their own customs to honor this day, although sending cards, flowers, and chocolates is standard throughout the country. Children often sing special songs and then receive gifts of candy, fruit, or money. In some areas, valentine buns are baked with caraway seeds, plums and raisins.
Denmark	The Danish valentine card is known as a "lover's card." Older versions of this greeting came in the form of a transparency which, when held up to the light, depicted the image of a lover handing his beloved a gift. One custom in Denmark is for people to send pressed white flowers called Snowdrops to their friends. Danish men may also send a form of valentine known as a gaekkebrev (or "joking letter"). The sender of this gaekkebrev pens a rhyme but does not sign his name. Instead, he signs the message with dots...one dot for each letter in his name. If the lady who receives the card guesses the name of the sender, then she is rewarded with an Easter Egg later in the year.
Italy	In Italy, Valentine's Day was once celebrated as a Spring Festival, held in the open air, where young people would gather in ornamental gardens to listen to music and poetry. However, this custom has not been celebrated for centuries. In Turin, it was formerly the custom for betrothed couples to announce their engagements on February 14. For several days ahead of time, the stores would be decorated and filled with all manner of bon-bons.
Japan	In Japan, Valentine's Day is celebrated on two different dates...February 14 and March 14. On the first date, the female gives a gift to the male and on the second date...known as White Day and supposedly introduced by a marshmallow company in the 1960s...the male returns the gift he received on February 14. Chocolate is the most popular gift in Japan. However, since most Japanese females believe that store-bought chocolate is not a gift of true love, they tend to make the confection with their own hands.