

Cultural Threads: The Fabric of America

• Keep 'em Reading •

by | Judith Snyder

Grades
K-2, 3-5

We are a land of immigrants, bound together by our heritage and ideals. Our cultural threads intertwine, adding to the color and pattern of our national fabric, and giving it strength and beauty.

The following activities focus on the values that many Americans share, as well as the many different cultures in our society. Weave the activities together in collaboration with a classroom unit on immigrants, families, or communities to address many of the standards for 21st-century learners.

The Beauty of American Values

The basic ideals we Americans hold close to our hearts inspire us and others around the world. The notion of equality, individual rights, liberty, opportunity, and democracy are set forth in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. We also adhere to the importance of self-reliance, hard work, competition, cooperation, educational achievement, personal excellence, creativity, and conservation. These ideals, these values, are at the core of the American spirit. By demonstrating how our values affect our individual lives, we enable students to internalize their meaning.

Primary / Intermediate Activities

Read *Mama Says* by Rob Walker. The rhythmic words and illustrations depict many different cultures, yet they show us our collective similarities. Reread and stop after each page so students can identify the values mentioned. List these on a chart where everyone can see it.

- Use the Activity 1: My Values reproducible on page 6 for primary students and ask them to choose the five values that you listed that best describe how they try to behave. Then, have them write those values on their activity sheet.



- Expand the list of values with intermediate students by asking them to consult with their parents or read the Declaration of Independence. Students can work individually or in groups to add to the list. Pair students to discuss which value is most important to them, and why. Students can then write short individual essays discussing their decision.
- Divide students into groups and give each group a different set of values from the chart. Invite them to illustrate or dramatize what the value looks like in action, as well as how it looks when it is *not* used.
- Another optional lesson found on the Teaching Tolerance website, <http://www.tolerance.org/activity/flag-day>, helps students gain an understanding of how individual similarities and differences strengthen our country.

The Beauty of Diversity

Encourage students to discover how the values that they explored in the previous activity play out in stories about people from all backgrounds. Through research, intermediate students will learn about the contributions that people from different cultural backgrounds have made to American society.

Primary Activity

Select at least one picture book and one nonfiction book from the bibliography on page 5 to share with the class. Read aloud from both and discuss them. Did the books show the class something about the traditions, customs, foods, etc., of other Americans that they did not know before? Did they learn anything about the countries from which these traditions originated?

Intermediate Activity

Divide the class into study clusters of four for a jigsaw activity. Provide each cluster with five or more books about one culture. When choosing the cultures for study, consider your resources and the groups that populate your school/community. Study clusters will work together to discover the values that are important to the people in the culture they are assigned, the contributions to America made by people in this culture, and the reasons that people from this culture came to the United States.

Give each person a copy of the notetaking activity (see Activity 2 on page 7) to use for gathering information found by the whole study cluster. The information will be used to help them share their research with students in the next group. Divide the class again so that at least one person from each cultural study cluster is in the new 'Jigsaw Group'. This group will compile the information about all of the different cultures, and display similarities and differences in a form of their choosing. The discussion and decisions made in the groups are as important as the final product.

- Depending on the skills of the group, mini-lessons may need to be taught to aid in finding keywords, the use of an index, and/or citing the sources.

- Continue explorations into these cultures by having students research the traditions and/or foods that people from this culture brought to the U.S., which have in turn been incorporated into the greater American culture.
- At the conclusion of the presentations, ask students to respond in writing to the following question: What new things have you learned about these cultures? Put a star next to the things that surprised you.

Note: Your local public library may have access to in-depth databases, such as CultureGrams, that may be helpful to students.

The Beauty of Multicultural Arts

Americans value the arts as expressions of creativity. Influences from our diverse cultures intermingle to add color and design to painting, sculpture, dance, and music in the United States.

Primary / Intermediate Activities

- Integrate the arts from the countries your students have explored and/or from the cultures within your school community. Ask the PE teacher to teach dances, the art teacher to display art from these cultures (or to teach the folk art), and the music teacher to teach songs.
- Create a display from items students bring from home. Items might include clothing, games, toys, and photos that depict a family's culture.
- A festival can be organized to include foods, dances, and games. Keep it small, within the classroom, or invite families to participate in the evening. When integrated with a book fair or other school event, it's a great way to get family participation and to create community spirit.

The Beauty of Words

Words from many cultures have found their way into our speech. They beautify our language and

help clarify meanings. Though many of our words come from the Celts, and from Latin and Greek roots, many others come from the numerous cultures that have come to America.

Intermediate Activity

Have students pair up and provide each pair with a dictionary and/or Internet access, and the reproducible Words from Other Languages activity sheets on

pages 8–15. Assign each pair of students 8 words from the activity sheet, and instruct them to research the meaning and country of origin of each assigned word, and complete the chart accordingly. Have them use the dictionary first, and then the Internet if the dictionary is not sufficient (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Lists_of_English_words_of_foreign_origin is one possible site to consult). Use the chart below for vocabulary/spelling challenge words.

Origins of English Words

*Some words may have more than one origin.

Native American	Chinese	Hawaiian	French	Russian	Scandinavian	Japanese
Chinook	Ketchup	Wiki	Volunteer	Babushka	Berserk	Bonsai
Kayak	Tea	Taboo	Bachelor	Sable	Ski	Karaoke
Toboggan	Silk	Ukulele	Enchant	Intelligentsia	Krill	Manga
Skunk	Wok	Luau	Journal	Tsar	Fjord	Tycoon
Pecan	Chow		Deluxe		Anger	Judo

African	Indian	Arab	South American	Italian	Hebrew	Spanish
Banana	Pajamas	Guitar	Chocolate	Balcony	Alphabet	Alligator
Banjo	Verandah	Cotton	Coyote	Corridor	Pharaoh	Armada
Coffee	Calico	Cork	Shack	Grotesque	Cider	Bonanza
Cola	Bungalow	Algebra	Tomato	Mask	Tush	Embargo
Jazz	Jute	Candy	Chili	Rotunda	Bedlam	Florida
Yam	Avatar	Alfalfa	Cougar	Bronze	Bagel	Bronco
Zombie	Cushy	Elixir	Cashew	Gallery	Shalom	Cafeteria
Trek	Jungle	Ghoul	Barbeque	Model	Klutz	Nevada
Chigger	Khaki	Jar	Petunia	Pastel	Schlep	Patio
Jumbo	Loot	Lacquer				Ranch



Next, sort the class into groups of five. Be sure to divide the research pairs so partners are not together. Each student in a group will discuss the words she looked up, and help her fellow group members complete those sections of their sheets. Once the sheets are filled, groups should then create an oral story to share with the class that incorporates all or most of the words.

The Beauty of Variety

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Immigrants have been coming to the United States for hundreds of years, bringing with them customs that have greatly shaped American culture. Today, immigrants still come to our country, and their experiences continue to enrich our society.

Primary/ Intermediate Activity

Read a variety of picture books about immigration. Try to include stories from several different ethnic groups. (See bibliography for ideas.) Intermediate students can use graphic organizers to compare reasons for immigrating, hardships, and expectations.

Intermediate Activity

After exploring the above activity, invite English Language Learners from the high school to speak with small groups of students in an informal set-

ting. Your students can create a list of questions about what it is like to live in a new country. Contact the high school ELL teacher and provide him with the questions, so that the high school students will have time to formulate answers in English. When high school students arrive, put two high school students in each small group of five to six elementary students, to respond to questions. (Option: Adults in the community can also be invited, or try a Skype visit.)

- Write thank you letters to the visitors that include information your students learned.
- As a culminating activity, ask students to consider what it might be like if they relocated to a different country where they didn't speak the language. What problems might they have? What might be frightening? Ask them to write a story from the point of view of a newly arrived immigrant.

The Beauty of the Future

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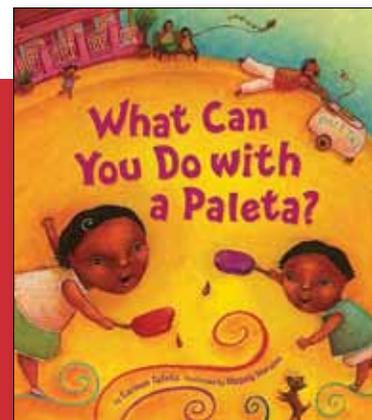
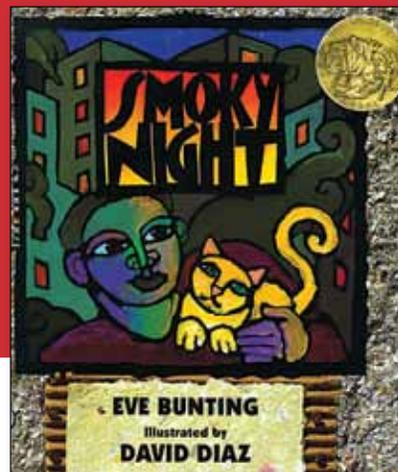
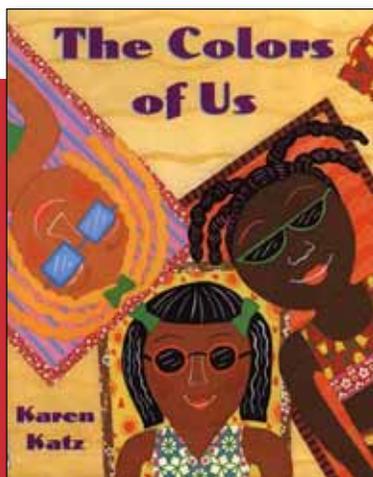
The diverse cultures in our country share many of the same ideals, and add to the beauty of America. The desires of Americans and aspiring Americans to achieve their dreams to build a better future fuel our collective spirit. Nothing is more beautiful than people working together, empowering others to succeed.

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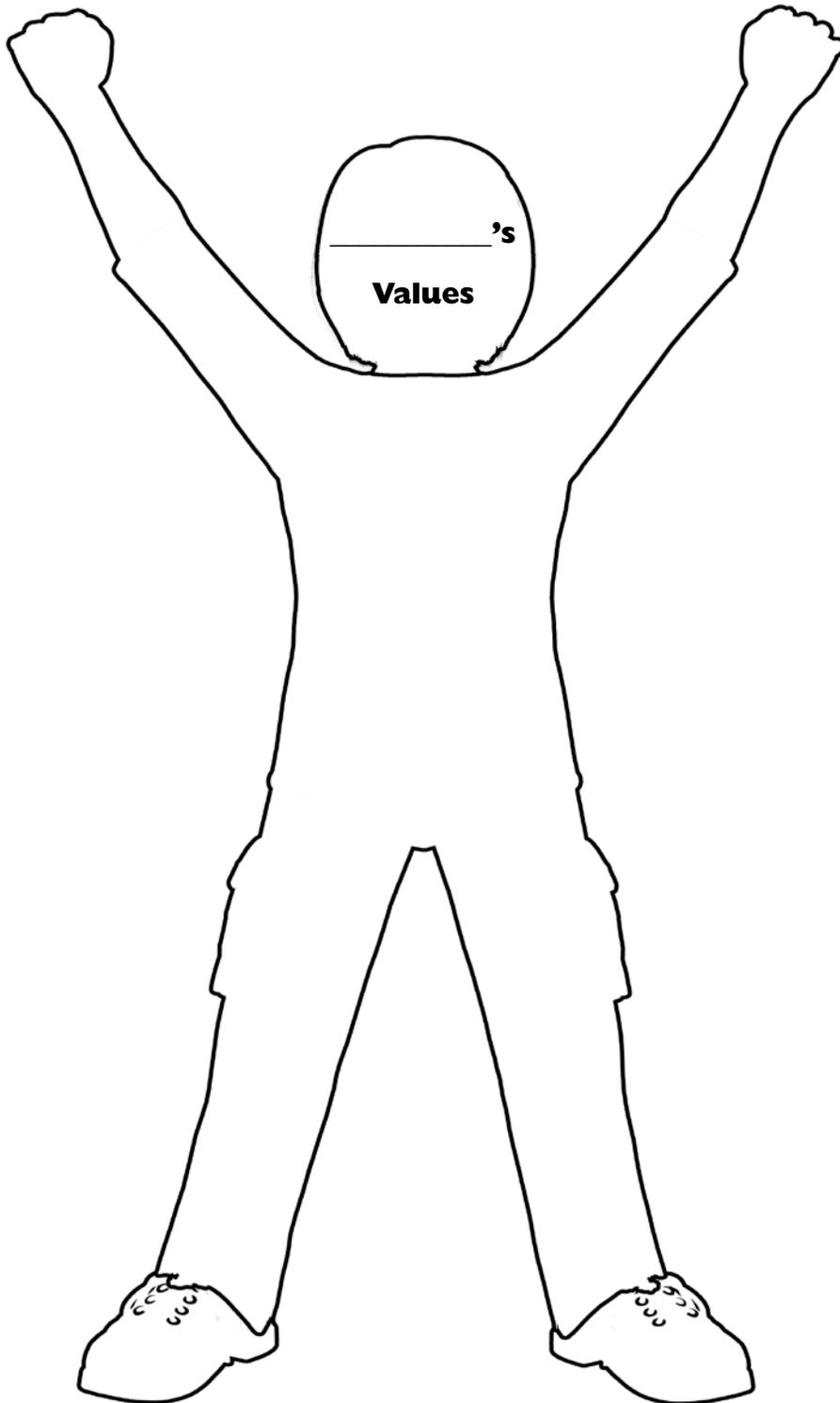
Judith Snyder is a seasoned teacher/librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of the Jump-start Your Library series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from UpstartBooks (2008) and two picture books, What Do You See? (2009) and Stinky Feet (2010) from Odyssey Books. Visit www.judithsnnyderwrites.com for additional literacy ideas and articles featuring integration of the arts and creative thinking.



Name: _____

My Values

Directions: Write your name in the head of the figure below. Then choose 5 values from your class list that best describe the kind of person you are, and write them inside the figure.



Name: _____

Words from Other Languages

WORD	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	DEFINITION
1. banana		
2. wok		
3. coffee		
4. banjo		
5. verandah		
6. yam		
7. cotton		
8. balcony		
9. chigger		
10. alphabet		
11. coyote		

12. armada		
13. ketchup		
15. pharaoh		
16. bronco		
17. alfalfa		
18. Nevada		
19. shack		
20. ranch		
21. cushy		
22. cider		
23. ukulele		
24. cashew		
25. bachelor		
26. chocolate		

27. tush		
28. berserk		
29. tomato		
30. chili		
31. volunteer		
32. cougar		
33. wiki		
34. barbeque		
35. petunia		
36. chinook		
37. mask		
38. bedlam		
39. pajamas		
40. sable		

41. skunk		
42. pecan		
43. rotunda		
44. tea		
45. silk		
46. cafeteria		
47. bagel		
48. bronze		
49. gallery		
50. krill		
51. manga		
52. avatar		
53. judo		
54. elixir		

55. lacquer		
56. shalom		
57. fjord		
58. loot		
59. chow		
60. intelligentsia		
61. kayak		
62. cola		
63. guitar		
64. klutz		
65. enchant		
66. khaki		
67. jar		
68. candy		

69. model		
70. jute		
71. ski		
72. taboo		
73. toboggan		
74. grotesque		
75. trek		
76. Florida		
77. karaoke		
78. anger		
79. jazz		
80. bonsai		
81. deluxe		
82. embargo		

83. luau		
84. pastel		
85. zombie		
86. algebra		
88. bungalow		
89. tycoon		
90. jumbo		
90. ghoul		
92. jungle		
93. alligator		
94. babushka		
95. bonanza		
96. patio		
97. tsar		

98. calico		
99. cork		
100. schlep		

