

Textbook Discussion Questions Chapter 5: Intercultural Relations

Cultural Misunderstandings in an International Milieu

1. The chapter states that cultural anthropology is “the comparative study of common sense”—what does this mean? Explain this in your own words.
2. How does the concept of “common sense” help anthropologists (and us) to determine how cultural misunderstandings can occur?
3. Have you ever felt that you were misunderstood due to a cultural difference between yourself and someone else? What was the nature of the misunderstanding? Were there different cultural logics at work, do you think? How did you resolve the issue?

What Is Culture?

1. If a symbol is defined as “something that stands for something else to someone in some respect,” how is language symbolic? What is standing for what?
2. What is ideology? Explain the term in your own words.
3. What kinds of ideologies drive your daily routine? Where did you acquire these ways of thinking?
4. The process of enculturation consists of both formal and informal learning. Give two examples of each type.
5. What is the type of enculturation known as “embodiment”? How is it a form of cultural learning?
6. How do cultures share, adopt, or borrow ideas from one another? What different kinds of ideas spread, and how can this spread happen? How many different ways can you think of?

Levels of Culture

1. What three levels can be used to describe and analyze the way a given culture operates?
2. What is the difference between cultural practices and cultural logics? What is a culture’s worldview, and how does it come into play?

Intercultural Relations

1. Explain the concept of cultural diffusion in your own words.
2. Think of a cultural practice that is important to you. (Something you like to eat, something you like to wear, a recreational activity you enjoy pursuing, etc..) Did this practice originate in this country, or somewhere else? If it originated somewhere else, did you pick up this practice while traveling, or in some other way? How do you think the practice came to be practiced here, by you?

Studying Culture: The Anthropological Perspective

1. What exactly is it that anthropologists study?
2. List the five facets of the anthropological perspective and briefly define each in your own words.

3. How would you explain the difference between theoretical relativism and philosophical relativism? Which one do anthropologists more often practice?

Anthropology and International Studies

1. What five dimensions does the author say anthropology brings to international studies?
2. As stated in the book, early anthropologists tended to see a culture as “people who lived within a defined geographical territory and shared a common and stable system of symbols.” By way of contrast, how do modern-day anthropologists see culture? And what does this difference in understanding about the nature of culture offer to the field of international studies?
3. The chapter quotes anthropologist Michael Agar as saying, “Culture is something those people ‘have’, but it is more than that. It’s also something that happens to you when you encounter them.” In light of this chapter, what do you think Agar means?