

## “BEAUTIFUL ART” — CULTURAL DIFFUSION

Designed by Ramón Esquivel (2006)

INTRODUCTION: This lesson is designed to give students a conceptual understanding of *cultural diffusion* and the notion that *ideas change people and people change ideas*. It involves a teacher demonstration, student role-play, and an activity that engages all students in the class. This lesson integrates history, social studies and science concepts, and utilizes *process drama* techniques.

### CONCEPTS

- Diffusion: *chemical, social, cultural*
- Aesthetics
- Trade
- Supply-and-Demand
- Geographic determinism
- Uniformity and/versus diversity

### OBJECTIVES:

- Students will observe and experience how factors such as *access, aesthetics, choice, and supply-and-demand* influence the flow and spread of ideas.
- Students will be able to cite aspects of American culture that have diffused throughout the country and the world.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: Minimum of 8 students; maximum of 40 students; recommended for grades 3-12 with appropriate content and discussion modification.

ESTIMATED TIME: 40-60 minutes

### MATERIALS:

- *Masking tape*
- *Beaker w/ water*
- *Food coloring*
- *Pattern blocks*
- *Paper*
- *Pens*

### PREPARATION

- Use masking tape to create a box on the floor roughly 4' x 4'.
- Sort pattern blocks by like kind; put each kind in a separate Ziploc bag or other container for easy distribution.
- Fill about two-thirds of the beaker with water.

### MODIFICATIONS

Legos® (large or regular sized), building blocks, different kinds of dominoes or dice, or even multiple decks of playing cards may be used in place of the pattern blocks. There must be variety in the materials used.

## PROCEDURE

- 0 to :10 minutes      The General Concept of Diffusion
- **Chemical Diffusion:** Pour drops of food coloring into a beaker of water. *Why does the color spread? What happens to the clear water? What makes the resulting color unique?*
  - **Social Diffusion:** Ask a group of students to stand in a box masking-taped on the floor. *What does it feel like to stand so close? Students are then “released” to stand anywhere in the room. Why do students spread out? Why do some stay put?*
- :10 to :30 minutes      Cultural diffusion: “Beautiful Art”
- Break into small “civilizations” of three to four students. Ask students to determine a name for their civilization. Require that the name must feature a part of each student’s name.
  - Distribute pattern blocks, one kind for each group.
  - Students create “beautiful art” using only the blocks distributed to their group. Let each civilization decide whether it wants to make individual pieces or a group piece.
  - Compare/contrast: What are the similarities between the “beautiful art” pieces created in your civilization? What are the differences? *Even when there is uniformity, there is diversity.*
  - Establish “trade routes” between neighboring civilizations. They may trade their pattern blocks with neighbors only. How does the “beautiful art” change/diversify with the introduction of new blocks/ideas from other civilizations? If some students choose to reject the new ideas, why might they make this choice? *Greater access leads to greater choices and diversity.*
  - Optional “complications:” Restrict trade partners and routes because of physical obstacles or trade embargo. Introduce new pattern blocks from a distant land, or introduce a single, rare block. Allow civilizations to share news – good and bad – about their experiences deal with others. *Propaganda.*
  - Allow the civilizations to trade again and observe what happens.
  - Clean: students sort blocks and return them in bags/containers.
- :30 to :40 minutes      Summary and Close: How has American culture diffused?
- *Basketball example:* invented by Dr. James Naismith at a YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts. It was first played with a soccer ball and two peach baskets. No dribbling!
  - Students brainstorm other aspects of American culture that have diffused out to / in from other cultures.

OPTIONAL WRITING: Write about one of the ideas that began in America and spread elsewhere, or about an idea that began elsewhere that has spread to America.