

Gullah: The Unique South Carolina Sea Island Culture

Contributing resources from ETV's Gullahnet, The Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor's gullahgeecheecorridor.org, and McKissick Museum's Folklife Resource Center – Digital Traditions.

Time: 1 - 2 hours for activity and discussion (more or less time can be used depending on the depth of the research and presentations)

SC Education Standards:

- Social Studies: 2-4.1 - 2-4.4; 3-2.4, 3-2.5, 3-4.1, 3-4.2; 4-2.1, 4-2.3, 4-2.4; 6-4.1, 6-4.2; 8-1.4, 8-1.5, 8-4.1; 8-5.2
- English Language Arts:
 - Grade 1:
 - Inquiry Based Literary Standards: 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1-4.3, 5.1-5.3
 - Reading: Informational Text: 6.1, 7.1
 - Communication: 1.1-1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2
 - Grade 2:
 - Inquiry Based Literary Standards: 1.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1-4.3, 5.1-5.3
 - Reading: Informational Text: 5.1, 6.1, 7.1
 - Communication: 1.1-1.5, 2.1, 2.2
 - Grade 3:
 - Inquiry Based Literary Standards: 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1-4.3, 5.1-5.3
 - Reading: Informational Text: 5.1, 6.1, 7.1
 - Communication: 1.1-1.5, 2.1 - 2.4
 - Grade 4:
 - Inquiry Based Literary Standards: 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1-4.3, 5.1-5.3
 - Reading: Informational Text: 5.1, 6.1
 - Communication: 1.1-1.5, 2.1
 - Grade 5:
 - Inquiry Based Literary Standards: 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1-4.3, 5.1-5.3
 - Reading: Informational Text: 5.1, 6.1
 - Communication: 1.1-1.5, 2.1
 - Grade 6:
 - Inquiry Based Literary Standards: 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1-4.3, 5.1-5.3
 - Reading: Informational Text: 5.1, 7.1
 - Communication: 1.1-1.5, 2.1, 2.3
 - Grade 7:
 - Inquiry Based Literary Standards: 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1-4.3, 5.1-5.3
 - Reading: Informational Text: 5.1, 6.1
 - Communication: 1.1-1.5, 2.1-2.3
 - Grade 8:
 - Inquiry Based Literary Standards: 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1-4.3, 5.1-5.3
 - Reading: Informational Text: 5.1, 7.1
 - Communication: 1.1-1.5, 2.1-2.3

Materials

For each student/group:

- Access to the internet and classroom research materials
- Materials to create a small visual presentation (optional)
- If accessible: Gullah cultural materials such as a small sweetgrass basket or raw sweetgrass

Introduction

Gullah Geechee is a culture located on the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia. They have a unique culture that is directly linked to several historical cultures from West Africa and were brought to South Carolina for their expertise in rice and cotton farming. In South Carolina, this group of African-Americans and the language they speak are referred to as Gullah (Gul-luh). In Georgia, they are called Geechee (Gee-chee). Native Islanders is another term that refers to the Gullah and Geechee people. The Native Islanders illustrate the anthropological concept of a creole culture, a culture influenced by several cultures forming something entirely new

Activity Steps

1. Use the following online resources to help you discuss the origins and features of the Gullah Geechee culture:
 - a. ETV's Gullah Net at <http://www.knowitall.org/gullahnet/main/overview.html>
 - b. Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor at <http://www.gullahgeecheecorridor.org/?Itemid=102>
 - c. McKissick Museum's Folklife Resource Center – Digital Traditions: Row Upon Row: Sea Grass Baskets of the South Carolina Lowcountry at <http://www.digitaltraditions.net/html/RecordPage.cfm?RecordID=140&FromVarRef=Project.cfm>
2. Define the term creole – A process in which cultures that come into direct contact with each other for long periods of time produce an entirely new culture that is built on the cultural features from all the cultures involved. For Gullah, there is a mixture of West African, Native American, and European cultural features that make up its traditional characteristics.
3. Have students divide into four (4) groups and assign/draw topics.
 - a. Language
 - b. Crafts
 - c. Foodways
 - d. Storytelling & Songs
4. Discuss the various resources available for research including the websites above and allow the groups to begin researching to find as much information as they can about their topic.
 - a. This portion of the activity can be adjusted for time – for less time, have a limited number of facts the students must discover. For more time, have this be a take-home project to be presented later.

- b. How the research is presented can also be altered – for less time, simply have the students give an oral report. If time and resources are available, have students make visuals to accompany their presentation.
5. Once the research is completed, have each group present their findings in front of the class.
6. Discuss with the students how the activity examined the Gullah Geechee culture holistically, by researching different cultural characteristics that make the culture distinct.

What did the students learn new about the Gullah Geechee culture? Why is it important to research all of a culture's characteristics? Cultures all over the world have been formed from historical roots. The Gullah Geechee culture illustrates the concept of a creole culture. Learning how to examine culture holistically allows us to be able to appreciate different cultures and how they came to be what they are today.