

Cultural Universals

SECTION

3



TEKS 15E, 16A, 16B, 16C, 18A, 18B, 18C, 18D, 19A, 20A, 20B, 20C

If YOU lived there...

You're touring What the World Eats, a photography exhibit that shows families from 25 countries displaying the food they eat in a week. The food varies from image to image. Some foods—sheep meat soup, mutton dumpling—seem unusual. Still, each photo shows that families all over the world spend time together over food.

How can the world's people be so similar and so different?

BUILDING BACKGROUND You have learned about how culture traits set cultures apart from one another. In this section, you will learn about features that people everywhere hold in common, including social institutions, cultural expressions, and technology.

What Do All Cultures Have in Common?

You may be wondering how cultures can be so different when all people have the same basic needs. All people need food, clothing, and shelter to survive. Geographers and other social scientists believe that some needs are so basic that societies everywhere have developed certain features to meet them. **These features, common to all cultures, are called cultural universals.** In this section, you will learn about three important cultural universals: social institutions, creative expressions, and technology.

READING CHECK **Finding Main Ideas** What can geographers learn from cultural universals?

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. The features common to all cultures are called cultural universals.
2. All societies have social institutions that help their groups survive.
3. Every culture expresses itself creatively in a variety of ways.
4. All societies use technology to help shape and control the environment.

The Big Idea

Geographers study cultural universals, features common to all societies, to understand similarities among the world's people.

Key Terms

cultural universal, *p. 91*
social institution, *p. 92*
heritage, *p. 93*
universal theme, *p. 94*
technology, *p. 94*
science, *p. 94*



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TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to compare features shared by all cultures.

Basic Social Institutions

Societies, like people, have basic needs that must be met for a group to survive. **Social institutions** are organized patterns of belief and behavior that focus on meeting these needs. They exist in all societies.

However, their specific characteristics vary from culture to culture. The most basic social institutions are family, education, religion, government, and economy.

Family

Family is the most basic social institution. In all societies, its purpose is the same. The family ensures that children are cared for until old enough to fend for themselves. Families provide emotional and physical support. They also teach the accepted norms, behaviors, and values of a culture.

Education

Societies rely on education to pass on knowledge to young people. For example, schools across the world teach reading, writing, math, and technical skills that prepare students to take on adult roles. Schools also teach the norms and values that sustain, or support, a society.

For instance, one goal of U.S. public schools is to develop informed citizens who contribute to the good of their communities.

Religion

The world's religions are incredibly diverse. Still, in all societies, religion helps explain the meanings of life and death and the difference between good and bad behavior. Over time, religion is passed down and supported by traditional practices, literature, sacred texts and stories, and sacred places. All of this makes religion a powerful force. It is often the foundation of a culture's philosophical beliefs and attitudes. Moreover, in all world regions, it has inspired and sustained itself through great works of devotion, including art and **monumental** architecture.

Government

To keep order and resolve conflicts, people need a government. A government is a system of leaders and laws that help people live safely together in their community or country. In Chapter 5 and throughout this book, you will learn about world governments and how they shape people's lives.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

monumental
impressively large, sturdy, and enduring

Education



In the United States (left) and in Peru (below), schools teach knowledge, skills, and cultural norms to prepare students for adult roles.

ANALYZING VISUALS What similarities and differences do you detect between the two classroom environments?



Economy

To support its people, a society must have an economy, or a system of using resources to meet needs. People must be able to make, buy, sell, and trade goods and services to get what they need and want. In Chapter 5, you will learn about and compare the features of various economic systems.

READING CHECK Summarizing What are the main social institutions?

Creative Expressions

All people are creative. Everyone has the ability to imagine, think, and create. Not surprisingly, all societies express themselves creatively, too. The main types of creative expression are:

- **Performing Arts**—art forms that combine sound and movement for an audience such as music, theater, and dance.
- **Visual Arts**—creative expressions that have both a visual and material form, such as painting, jewelry, sculpture, textiles, and architecture.
- **Literary Arts**—art forms rooted in words and language such as literature, folktales, and stories.

Monumental Architecture

Religion inspires creative expressions, including monumental architecture such as France's Notre Dame Cathedral (below) and Schwedagon Pagoda (right), a Buddhist temple in Myanmar.

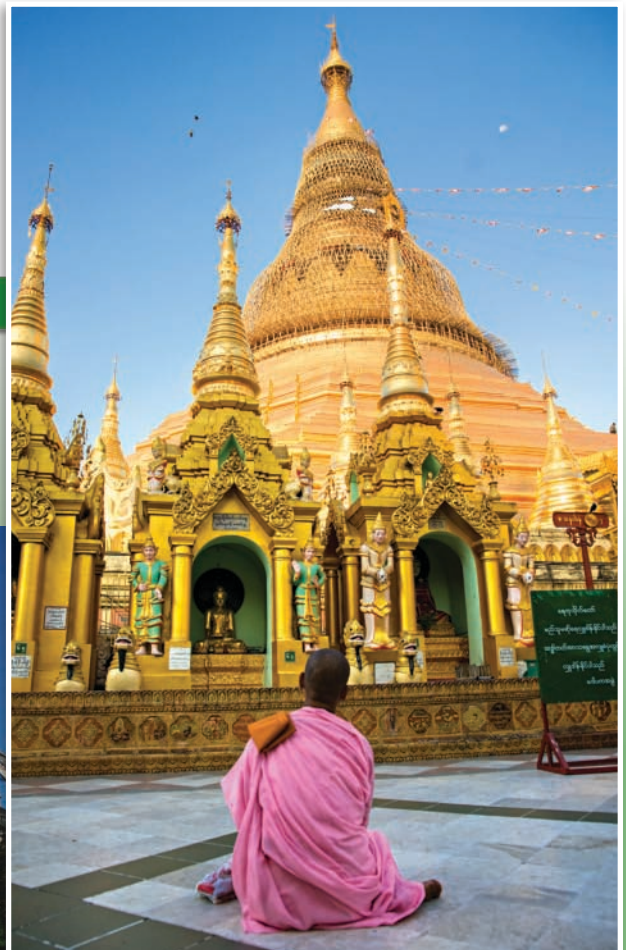
ANALYZING VISUALS How do examples of monumental architecture express the power of religion?



Creative Forces

Throughout this book, you will explore creative expressions from all world regions. As you discover them, note how they are influenced by the availability of natural materials and resources. Look, too, for how creative expressions reflect a specific **heritage, or the wealth of cultural elements that has been passed down over generations.**

Creative expressions also express individual choices. People use artistic forms to express individual, as well as cultural, ideas about what is pleasing, proper, and beautiful. They also use them to address contemporary issues such as politics, war, and social inequality. This is because the arts can inspire us. Creative forms communicate ideas and emotions that stir people to action.



Universal Themes

Some creative expressions communicate universal themes. A **universal theme** is a message about life or human nature that is meaningful across time and in all places. Because they express basic human truths, universal themes transcend, or move beyond, the boundaries of a particular society. They speak to people everywhere.

Masterpieces of art have qualities that are meaningful and timeless. Examples include Egyptian hieroglyphics and the sculptures of ancient Greece. The woodblock prints made by the Japanese painter Katsushika Hokusai are also an example of this type of art. They express a love of nature's beauty, simplicity, and power.

Other art forms also gain worldwide appreciation. For example, literature such as *The Lord of the Rings* contains a universal theme of a hero's search for truth, goodness, and honor. Blues music is another example. Derived from African American work songs and spirituals in the American South, blues songs express feelings of sadness and struggle in the face of great challenges.

READING CHECK Describing What are the main types of cultural expressions?

Science and Technology

All people use technology to shape and control their environments, and they use science to try and understand it. **Technology** refers to the use of knowledge, tools, and skills to solve problems. **Science** is a way of understanding the world through observation and the testing of ideas.

Factors Shaping Technology Use

Historically, the type of technology a culture developed has been strongly tied to environmental factors. Not only were tools and technology made from local resources, they were also designed to solve specific problems posed by nature. For example, farmers might build dams to prevent rivers from flooding and destroying their crops.

Other factors such as belief systems, political decisions, and economic factors can influence technology use, too. Some religious groups, like the Amish people of the United States, selectively use technology. They readily use gas and horse-drawn buggies. However, they reject technology they think will undermine their traditions, including cars and computers.



Nature's awesome power is a universal theme in the paintings of boats at sea created by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (at left) and English artist Joseph Mallord William Turner (below).



Government decisions also affect technology use. North Korea, for example, restricts Internet use. To use the Internet, a North Korean must have special permission and may only use it for government purposes. Worldwide, however, the primary barrier between people and technology is economic. New technologies are simply too expensive for many of the world's people to access them.

Impact of Technology

Throughout time, advances in science and technology have made life easier. Some discoveries even changed the world.

Consider, for example, the work of French scientist Louis Pasteur. His work revolutionized health and medicine. In 1870 Pasteur discovered that germs caused infections. To prevent the spread of disease, he urged people to wash their hands. He also developed vaccines to prevent deadly diseases and a process for removing bacteria from food. Today most milk, cheese, and juice on our grocery shelves has been sterilized, or made germ-free, through pasteurization.

Inventors, too, change the world. For example, in 1879, Thomas Edison developed an affordable and practical light bulb. At the time, the invention caused a sensation. People no longer had to burn candles and oil lamps for light at night. Over time, electricity has transformed daily life and work for many of the world's people.

Today, scientists and inventors continue to identify and solve problems. They often work in groups to make discoveries or invent new devices or products that will benefit future generations. This involves careful thinking about the future and making predictions about the social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental impact of their work.

READING CHECK **Generalizing** What are the basic purposes of technology and science?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW In this section you learned about the features that make cultures similar. Next you will learn how globalization is shaping world culture.

Section 3 Assessment

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ONLINE QUIZ

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

- a. Identify and Explain** What are five basic **social institutions**? What purposes do they serve?

b. Analyze What efforts and activities are most important for a religious institution to last over time? Explain.
- a. Explain** What is the relationship that exists between religious ideas, philosophical ideas, and cultures?

b. Describe What forces influence cultural expressions?

c. Identify List and explain examples of art, music, and literature with **universal themes**.
- a. Explain** How can factors related to belief systems, government, and economics affect technology use?

b. Make Inferences How might a resource such as river water affect how farmers use technology?

c. Explain Give an example of a scientific discovery and an example of a technological innovation that have changed the world. Discuss the role of scientists and inventors in making the discovery and innovation.

Critical Thinking

- Comparing** Draw a chart like the one here to organize your notes on the features of culture that all people share.

Social Institutions	Cultural Expressions	Science and Technology

FOCUS ON WRITING



- Describing Cultural Similarities** What kind of images could you use to show that all cultures have social institutions, cultural expressions, and science and technology?