

Activity: Menu Critique



TIME ESTIMATE
35 minutes



MATERIALS
Sheets of paper and writing materials for all participants

PURPOSE

To examine the differences between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation through selected examples.

DESCRIPTION

Participants will be prompted to define what qualifies as cultural appropriation. They will then be asked to critically review restaurant menus, conduct brief research and discuss how certain menu items qualify as either cultural appropriation and appreciation in relation to their cultures of origin and the people preparing and serving them.

FACILITATOR NOTE

This activity is best complemented with Activity: *Which One of These Is Not Like The Others?* where participants examine the difference between race, ethnicity and culture. It is also important to emphasize the open-ended nature of this activity. Our definitions of culture are dynamic and there is no one fixed set of criteria for cultural appropriation.

STEPS

- 1 Introduce the activity by defining what is culture as a class.**
 - What is culture?
 - How is culture expressed?
 - How does culture influence the consumption and preparation of certain foods?
- 2 Divide participants into small groups of 3-5 people. Provide each group with a menu to analyze. Depending on where you are facilitating, pick menus from your local area.**
 - Vancouver, BC, Canada:
 - [The Naam](#)
 - [Bao Bei Spring Menu](#)
 - [The Eatery](#)
- 3 Provide the following set of prompts and assign a notetaker for each group.**
 - At first glance, what culture(s) is/are the menu based on?
 - Define cultural appropriation and establish a list of criteria.
 - Based off the menu, do you think the restaurant is appropriating another culture(s)? Why or why not?
 - Conduct more research and find out more about the restaurant. Does this change your perception of them?
 - Is this cultural appropriation? Why or why not? When does appreciation shift to appropriation?
 - How does a dominant culture allow for certain discourses of appropriation to be normalized?
 - Why does it seem acceptable for certain groups to appropriate another group's culture even if it is not?

Facilitator Note

You may opt to display the definition and criteria provided below using a screen projector or writing them on a whiteboard. This may offer some starting points but participants should be encouraged to develop their own definitions and broaden the list of criteria.

MODULE 3: DIASPORIC FOODWAYS

- 4 Regroup as a class. 1 to 2 participants from each small group will take turns to summarize and share what was discussed.
- 5 Debrief the activity by inviting participants to share what they observed from the activity.
 - What were some feelings that came up for you and your group during the discussion?
 - What were the similarities and differences in how cultural appropriation was defined?
 - How does power operate in relationship to cultural appropriation?

DEFINITIONS

Culture: A social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication.

Cultural appropriation: The theft of cultural elements for one's own use, commodification, or profit — including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. — often without understanding, acknowledgement, or respect for its value in the original culture. Results from the assumption of a dominant (i.e. white) culture's right to take other cultural elements.

Potential criteria for defining cultural appropriation:

- Who owns the restaurant?
- Who is preparing the food? Who is consuming it?
- Who benefits? How do they benefit? (money, status, etc)
- Who approves?
- Who/what is celebrated?
- How much does it cost? Does it make it inaccessible for certain social groups that wasn't the case prior?
- Who holds the power?

Source: [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#) (n.d.)

ASSESSMENT: WRITTEN REFLECTION

Write a journal entry reflecting on this activity. Feel free to bring in elements from the materials (lectures, activities, and readings) or from your own experience. Questions to consider:

- What led you and/or your group to arrive at your definition of cultural appropriation and set of criteria? What was the decision making process like? (If you do not agree with your group's decision, why?)
- How does cultural appropriation exploit a group's culture and cause harm? Can you bring in any real life examples?
- Based off the menu, do you think the restaurant is appropriating another culture(s)? If no, why? If yes, why? How would you rewrite the menu?
- To what extent does the culture and power have an impact on the food consumption process?

These reflections can be picked up at the end of the class as an 'exit ticket', where learners submit their short reflection before leaving the class or workshop, or assigned as a take-home exercise.