

Cultural Connections Without Cultural Appropriation

We are building Girl Scouts of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place. To do that, we must first provide a space that is inclusive, equitable, and accessible for Girl Scouts of all backgrounds. Part of this responsibility entails teaching about cultural diversity accurately and respectfully.

You may have heard of **cultural appropriation**, but what does it mean? Cultural appropriation is the misuse of customs, practices, ideas, art, and more by a member of a different culture in a way that is disrespectful or inappropriate. Cultural appropriation does not give proper credit to the original creators and/or is for personal gain. Cultural appropriation can be harmful, even if unintentional. When elements of a particular culture are adopted by a dominant group, the original meaning and purpose of these ideas and practices often get lost. Cultural practices are often sacred and signal peoples' diverse identities, and borrowing from these cultures without proper care can lead to misrepresentation, exploitation, and trivialization.



However, appreciating and understanding different cultures is an integral part of the Girl Scout experience. Girl Scouts can create positive change in the world by learning about people, ideas, and places outside their familiarity or comfort zone. There are many ways to appreciate cultures different than your own respectfully. **Cultural appreciation** means learning about a culture through customs, practices, ideas, art, and more. It requires gaining knowledge about the culture you are sharing and an explanation of the cultural and historical roots of what you are appreciating. It can help to gain knowledge from an expert, like someone with lived experience of that culture, or online resources.

Tips and Guidelines for Adding Cultural Connections

Learn before you share. As you bring cultural connections to badges and journeys, spend time learning about the connection you are making, using resources written or created by members of that community. This will give you the background information and context you need to share with the Girl Scouts.

Learn from the community. Use sources and seek guidance written or created by members of the community for the culture you wish to share. This minimizes the risk of appropriating a culture and the risk of learning and repeating stereotypes. Bringing in members of the community you're learning about can also be incredibly helpful—there are a variety of organizations within the council that can provide this kind of support.

Learn the origin and purpose. Keep in mind that items, patterns, music, and stories may look like fun crafts, art, or decorations from an outside perspective but fulfill a culturally significant role as elements of ceremonies, celebrations, or religions. Research will help you determine if art-based activities are appropriate. Wearing other cultures as a costume is always inappropriate, such as wearing blackface and Native American headdresses. You can still talk about items and cultural connections that you can't recreate but find a different hands-on activity to accompany the lesson.

Appreciate, don't appropriate. The goal of cultural activities should be to shed light on the cultures, histories, and identities of our communities. When Girl Scouts learn accurate information about other cultures, they will be better equipped to respect diverse voices and see the value in cultural diversity.



Do's and Don'ts for Planning Girl Scouts Programming About Cultural Diversity

Do:

- Encourage your Girl Scouts to learn about and appreciate other cultures!
- Provide background information to connect the activity to the culture it comes from.
- Choose books, music, art, and food that originate from and accurately represent specific cultures instead of showing an outsider's perspective.
- Incorporate cultural expertise with voices from the culture you share through guest speakers, books, videos, or movies.
- When studying other cultures, take the time to learn how to correctly pronounce the names of people and places.
- Ask questions! It's okay to say that you don't have the answers now, but you'll find out.

Don't:

- Use activities only for entertainment—although everything should be fun, it should also be educational.
- Create activities around customs or practices considered sacred (i.e., the funeral/religious rites of any culture).
- Use terms from other cultures, such as calling your friends your “tribe” or saying you have a “spirit animal.”
- Support the profit of cultural appropriation by purchasing culturally themed items from businesses outside of that culture.



Examples of Culturally Appropriate Activities

- Eat at a local ethnic restaurant, supporting local businesses. Or make the food on your own!
- Attend a cultural festival in your area.
- Listen to music from other cultures.
- Find out about a new holiday from another culture.
- Learn about world geography.

Discover art from diverse cultures through learning and creating crafts (making sure the art is not culturally sacred, such as Native American headdresses).

FAQ

What if I say or do the wrong thing?

The most crucial step to take when you've appropriated from another culture is genuinely apologizing and using the experience to avoid similar missteps in the future. When apologizing, make sure not to make the situation about you and instead empathize with what the other person or group might be feeling. Mistakes can be tremendous growth opportunities. And remember not to be too hard on yourself since everyone makes mistakes.

Where do I learn accurate information about varying cultures that I can share with Girl Scouts?

There are a variety of resources on the Internet that can help you learn. The best thing you can do is listen to members of that culture or community.

Why is it so important to understand and accurately represent different cultures?

By learning and understanding different cultures, you can understand more clearly why people do things the way they do and identify and empathize with many different points of view. Girl Scouts who are exposed to a wide range of cultures and ideas gain confidence since they can get along with more diverse groups of people. This is especially important for Girl Scouts since learning about the diversity in the world allows Girl Scouts to take action and make the world a better place.

Other Resources

[Google Arts and Culture](#)—You can explore art, games, and museums from cultures across the world without having the travel through this interactive website.

[National Geographic Kids](#)—This kid-accessible website is an excellent place for Girl Scouts to learn independently!

[Facing History](#)—This resource is great for older Girl Scouts to learn about history and cultural diversity.

[Cultural Appropriation Examples](#)—If you're looking for some examples of cultural appropriation, look no further!