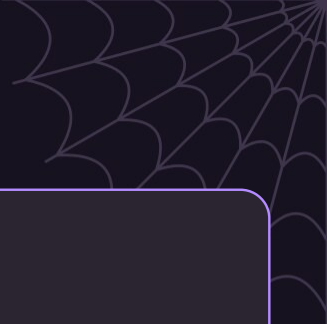


MY CULTURE IS NOT A COSTUME

*Deconstructing identity, stereotypes,
and cultural appropriation*



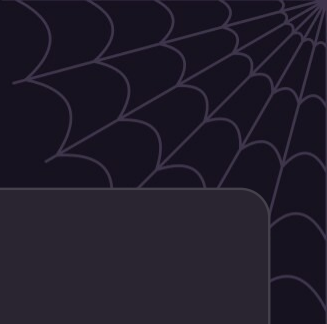
LEARNING OBJECTIVES



OBJECTIVES

- 1 Distinguish clearly between cultural appreciation, cultural exchange, and cultural appropriation.
- 2 Explain how stereotypes, power imbalances, and unconscious bias turn sacred traditions into caricatures.
- 3 Analyze costume case studies to evaluate what messages they send about marginalized communities.

KEY VOCABULARY



KEY WORDS: IDENTITY

The combination of traditions, heritage, beliefs, and personal experiences that define who a person or community is.

KEY WORDS: STEREOTYPE

An oversimplified, generalized, and often harmful belief or image applied to an entire group of people.

KEY WORDS: APPROPRIATION

Taking elements of a culture (especially sacred symbols or attire) without permission, understanding, or respect, often by a dominant group.

KEY WORDS: MICROAGGRESSION

An everyday comment, action, or visual insult that subtly expresses prejudice or bias toward a marginalized group.

I DO: THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Halloween invites imagination, storytelling, and play. But we must pause and ask:

“When does dressing up become dressing down someone else's identity?”

When a costume reduces living traditions, spiritual regalia, or marginalized people into disposable gags, it ceases to be innocent fun.



I DO: THREE WAYS WE ENGAGE CULTURE



APPRECIATION

Seeking to learn about another culture with genuine respect, humility, context, and permission.



EXCHANGE

A two-way sharing where people mutually celebrate and participate in traditions on equal terms.



APPROPRIATION

Borrowing or copying sacred symbols for profit or laughs, ignoring historical oppression and meaning.

I DO: SACRED REGALIA VS. COSTUMES

CONTEXT AND RESPECT MATTER

In Indigenous nations across North America, feathered headdresses (war bonnets) are not fashion items. They are earned, sacred honors bestowed on leaders for exceptional service.



Key Takeaway

Wearing a plastic imitation strips away centuries of spiritual honor and reduces a sovereign people to a prop.



WE DO: THE POWER TRIANGLE



1. HISTORICAL POWER IMBALANCE

Often, the group borrowing the item has historically oppressed the group whose traditions are being taken.

2. STEREOTYPES AND CARICATURES

The costume exaggerates accents, skin tone, or clothing, reinforcing false ideas that real people are exotic or savage.

3. PRIVILEGE OF TAKING IT OFF

A costume wearer can wash off makeup and remove the outfit at night. The marginalized community still faces daily prejudice.

4. EVERYDAY MICROAGGRESSIONS

Even if someone claims "it was just a joke," the visual punchline sends subtle signals that certain identities do not deserve respect.

WE DO: THE COST OF PUNCHLINES

Examining everyday impacts



HOW DO PUNCHLINES HURT REAL COMMUNITIES?

- **Erasure of Diversity:** It flattens hundreds of unique tribes, nations, or ethnicities into one cartoonish outfit.
- **Normalized Bullying:** When students see cultural dress treated as hilarious, peers from that culture get teased at school.
- **Silencing Voices:** It tells members of marginalized groups that their sacred heritage is only valuable as disposable amusement.

LISTENING: MAYA AND JORDAN

Listen to the audio and decide: true or false?



Costume Choices in the Hallway

Play audio

1 Jordan chose a costume intending to deliberately insult Mexican heritage.

True

False

2 Maya explains that turning cultural attire into a joke creates negative impact.

True

False

3 Jordan decides to switch his costume to a fictional superhero character.

True

False

LISTENING: MAYA AND JORDAN

Check your answers below



Costume Choices in the Hallway

Play audio

1

Jordan chose a costume intending to deliberately insult Mexican heritage.
Jordan stated his intent wasn't mean, but Maya explained intent doesn't erase impact.

False

2

Maya explains that turning cultural attire into a joke creates negative impact.
Maya points out that caricaturing living cultures hurts classmates and reinforces stereotypes.

True

3

Jordan decides to switch his costume to a fictional superhero character.
Jordan recognizes the impact and chooses a fictional character instead of an identity.

True

WE DO: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS



CASE A: DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS

Scenario: Wearing Calavera face paint to a party without knowing it honors deceased ancestors in Mexico.

Analysis: Sacred memorial ritual transformed into a spooky costume aesthetic.



CASE B: THE "GEISHA" WIG

Scenario: Buying a cheap kimono and fan to dress up as an exotic Japanese entertainer.

Analysis: Reduces skilled Japanese artists into an exotic stereotype while ignoring history.

PARTNER CASE STUDY



Evaluate:

Why is intent not enough to make a costume respectful? What question should they ask instead?

PARTNER CASE STUDY

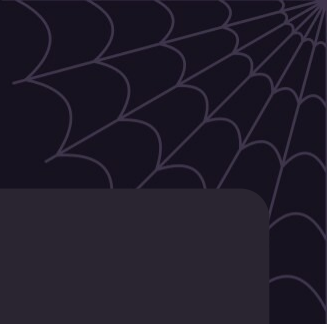
You might have said...

Intent is personal; impact is how the costume affects the community.

Ask: 'Does this represent a culture facing real discrimination?'

Ask: 'Am I honoring a character, or wearing a group as a costume?'

YOU DO: THE 3-STEP RESPECT FILTER



01

IS IT A HUMAN CULTURE?

If the costume represents a real racial, ethnic, or religious group of people, it is an identity, not a costume.

02

IS IT SACRED OR EARNED?

Does the item carry spiritual meaning, ceremonial honors, or symbols that must be earned within that community?

03

DOES IT RELY ON A TROPE?

Does it exaggerate physical traits, speech, or clothing for comedic effect? If yes, it is a harmful caricature.

YOU DO: IDENTITY IS NOT DISPOSABLE

Our identities are woven from lived experiences, family history, and deep cultural roots.



Your identity is not a joke. Your culture is not a trend. Your humanity is not a costume.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Write a 3-sentence exit ticket answering our central question: Why can living human identities and sacred traditions never be worn as entertainment? Include one vocabulary word from today.

