Culture is all the things that make up a people’s way of life. Culture is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. The characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time. Culture is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize a group. (Source: “Culture,” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition, 2005.)

**Definitions: Cultural Universals**

1. **Arts & Literature:** The conscious use of skill and creative imagination. *What forms of art do people value?* *What role do the arts play in people’s lives?* **Aesthetics:** An appreciation of the beautiful.
2. **Economic Systems & Commerce:** Methods dealing with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. How the culture deals with the problem of scarcity. *Who gets what and why? What is used as currency? What is owned by individuals? What is owned by the community? How do individuals contribute to society? What types of jobs do people do? Large corporations or small businesses owned by individuals?*
3. **Communication & Language:** The process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of spoken expression, symbols, signs, or behavior. *What language do people speak? How do people communicate?* *How do you display your status?*
4. **Customs & Traditions:** A binding custom or practice of a community. Rituals, games, holidays, greetings, important values, etc. *What are the important holidays? What values and traditions do these holidays celebrate? What rituals mark changing status (adolescent→adult, or student→graduate)*
5. **Forms of Government:** The organization through which a group exercises authority. *Who makes the laws? Who enforces the laws? How is power distributed? How do we decide who gets power? What are the most important rules and laws?* **Politics:** The art or science concerned with gaining power and influencing or controlling government.
6. **Religion:** The service and worship of a god or the supernatural. *How did the universe begin? Why do humans exist? What is the meaning of life? How should we live? What is right/wrong? What happens to us when we die?*
7. **Social Organization:** An established system of hierarchical relationships or status. Informal groups, families, types of relationships, etc. *How is status assigned? What economic and political groups can people belong to? What is the status of women/men?*
8. **Science and Technology:** Established systems of investigation, knowledge about, and manipulation and control of the natural world. This includes types of tools, weapons, shelter, agriculture, transportation, irrigation, and other methods of controlling and changing our environment. *How do people change their environment? What type of structures do people live in? What do people use technology for? What types of problems do people use technology to solve? What types of technology are considered important? How do people explain the workings of the natural world?*