

# Understanding culture

The purpose of this activity is for participants to think about the concept of culture and to try to put some parts of their culture into words.

## Activity 20

**Time:** 45 minutes – 1 hour.

**Materials:** Copies of *The iceberg* resource, page 89, to use as a handout, large pieces of paper and marker pens. The handout can also be turned into an overhead transparency / slide.

1. Have a brief discussion with the whole group on the concept of 'culture' (see notes below). Note the main points on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.
2. Break into smaller groups of similar cultural background; an individual can work alone.
3. Give each group a copy of the handout and ask the participants to write some examples of easily recognised aspects of their own culture above the water line (customs such as food, clothing, language) and less visible aspects below (values, beliefs, etc).
4. Allow the participants time to discuss the questions on the handout in their groups.
5. Optional: in groups discuss briefly how the items below the line relate to items above it.
6. Give out extra copies of the handout so that there is one for each person. Explain that they will each be working with a member of another group. Allow time for them to copy their group's notes if they wish. Pair members of different groups together so they can share their observations.

## Notes

### Definitions of Culture:

A culture is a lifestyle shared by a large group of people. A culture is also what a large group teaches to its members. A more specific description is that a culture is a distinctive set of:

- customs – including language,
- traditions – knowledge, history, myths values and beliefs,
- arts – such as literature, music, carving, painting, crafts.

### Other features of culture:

- any culture is changing all the time,
- it is usually easier for people to describe

another culture (because their own just seems like the normal way of doing things),

- individuals within a culture don't always agree with the beliefs and / or practices of their culture so are different from each other,
- individuals are members of several cultural groups (in relation to their age, gender, sexual orientation, religion and nationality, as well as ethnicity); sometimes the different groups they are part of give them conflicting messages as to what they should do or think.

**Ethnicity** is a loose cultural category that usually relates to cultures based on race, religion and / or nationality. Some government departments in New Zealand today are using 'ethnic group' to refer only to those who are not Pākehā / European or Māori or from the Pacific. However, everyone belongs to at least one ethnicity or ethnic group, including Pākehā.

**The iceberg model** (Lambert and Myers, 1994) shows the tip of the iceberg as the part of other peoples' cultures that we see easily. Under the surface of the water, the iceberg is much bigger and deeper than the tip that is showing. These aspects of a culture are usually more hidden and difficult to get to know, but it is necessary to understand them to make sense of some of the things above the surface.

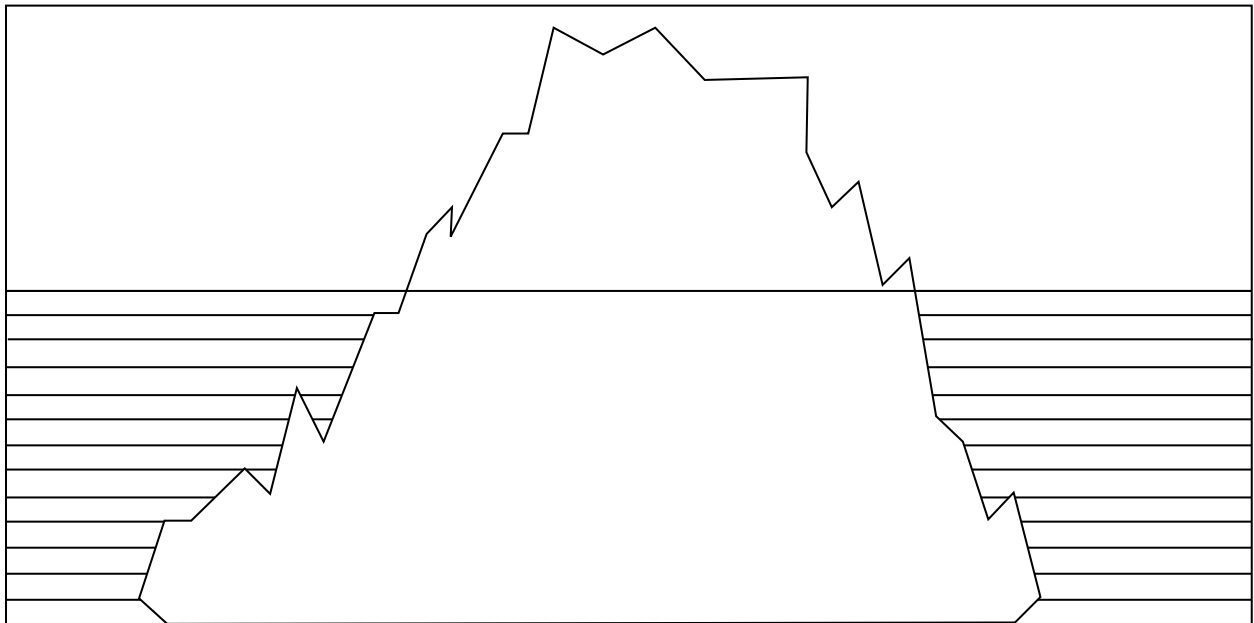
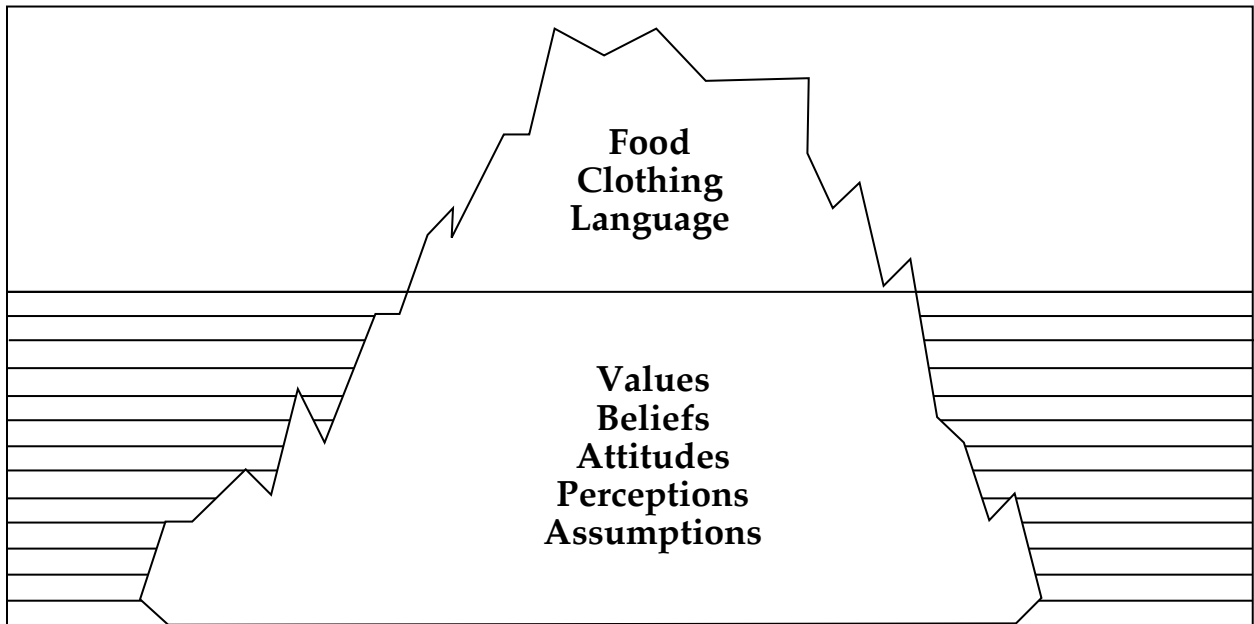
### Note for ESOL groups

The words below the line of the iceberg may be difficult for ESOL participants to understand. In this case, you will need to allow time to discuss the meanings of these words. The blank iceberg could be used by each group to write a translation of the words above. Let participants discuss the definitions in their own language(s).

### Note for Pākehā participants

Encourage any Pākehā participants to take an active part in this activity even though they may find it difficult to analyse their culture because they are in the majority. It can be hard to see how you do things if it just seems like the 'normal' way of doing things (because your culture is the dominant one).

# The iceberg



## Discussion questions:

1. Is it easier to explain the things above the line or below it? Why / Why not?
2. Would it be easier for you to change the things above the line or below the line? Why / Why not?