

Part Two: Layers of Culture

"It is in folklore that folk groups are defined." --Alan Dundes

Fieldworkers investigate the cultural landscape, the larger picture of how a culture functions: its rituals, its rules, its traditions, and its behaviors. And they poke around the edges at the stories people tell, the items people collect and value, and the materials people use to go about their daily living. By learning from people in a culture what it is like to be part of their world, Fieldworkers discover a culture's ways of being, knowing, and understanding. (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein 3-4)

The second section of your ethnography will present deeper information about the group you are researching. A large component of this may be based on or drawn from interviews, and you should also rely heavily on description and analysis of other data you discover in your research and observation of your group. The above passages are to remind you that your ethnographic study should be an attempt to look at the *everyday elements of the culture and site* you are studying. Yes, you want to *talk with* your informants to determine their own perspective on their beliefs, actions, and values, but you also want to scrutinize the *literacy events, literacy artifacts and language of their culture*.

One place to begin with this "second phase" is to look back at your fieldnotes and Entry Narrative to find mention of behaviors, artifacts, language and/or stories with which you are **unfamiliar** (or would be if you were an outsider). If there is something you have observed, heard, or even sensed that seems unusual to you, investigate it. This investigation might require that you interview informants and it might require that you try again to observe a situation similar to the one that sparked your curiosity. In addition to looking for the unfamiliar in your site or group's behavior, look for instances of tension and unity (patterns) as potential areas for further exploration. (And don't let your focus on "unfamiliar" distract you from keeping your eye out on the "everyday" aspects of group life. Those terms aren't necessarily contradictions.)

THE INTERVIEW

Assuming that most of you are going to include some **interviewing** as part of this investigation, you will need to prepare questions to ask. Because you are investigating, you will probably want to get a body of data about the same issue(s) from each of your informants. That will enable you to compare their responses and draw conclusions based on the responses. For the interview, you will need to prepare and ask both closed questions and open questions to get the most informative responses (see *FieldWorking*, 239-240, for explanation of these types). Work on drafting these questions with the help of your classmates, writing group and me. **It is of vital importance that you include the actual voices of your informants**, so be sure to tape-record the interview; if you absolutely cannot tape-record it, have someone else go along with you to take notes. **You must record informant language accurately**. (Again, see *FieldWorking* for pointers on this process.)

ADDITIONAL SECTIONS TO ILLUSTRATE THE CULTURE

In addition to--or in some cases instead of--information you gain from interviewing, you should also include description and analysis of specific literacy practices (jokes, stories, vocabulary, evidence of "code shifting"), literacy artifacts, and behaviors. Of course, your Entry Narrative may include a thorough description of group behavior, but you also want to look for additional behaviors--rituals, traditions, activities--performed by the group. Single these out and write about them in their own sections (for example, a description and analysis of an initiation ritual might require its own section to highlight it as a "high context" event, something which has significant markers and activities that set it apart from everyday behavior).

Look to these Box Assignments for further information: Box 13; Boxes 24-27.

Also, consider approaches and focuses that appear in the work of the authors of your group books as ways to think about and uncover the layers of culture within the group you are observing and writing about.