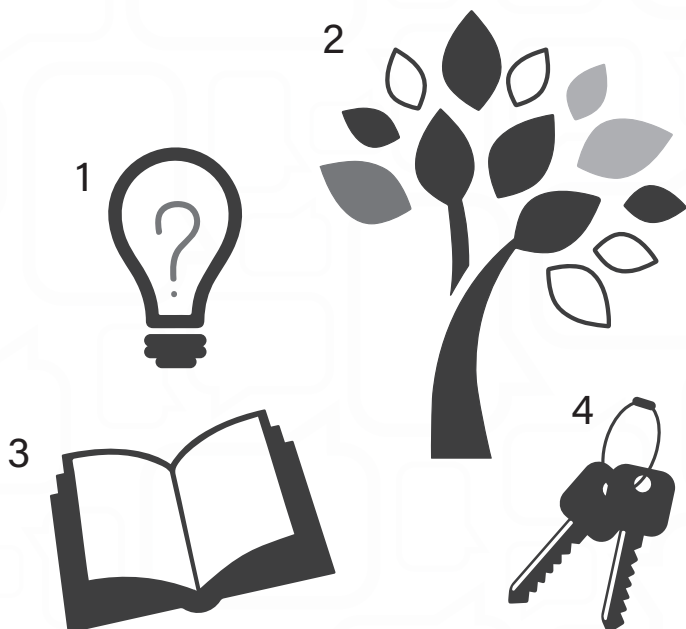


CULTURAL SELF-AWARENESS

Our Wesleyan theology calls us to engage with the world around us with three simple rules in mind: Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.

Cultural Self-Awareness is the first step in engaging differences with the greatest potential to 'do no harm.' Why? Because we tend to judge others based on the values and behaviors we learned from our own cultural community. By studying the depth of our own acculturation, we can begin to understand that other cultures have as much depth and nuance as our own. This learning helps us to suspend judgment of others and to cultivate curiosity or even delight in cultural differences.



INGREDIENTS

1. **Curiosity** about one's self and others
2. Study of one's **heritage** and migration history
3. Recall and **analysis of the stories**, proverbs and lessons that illustrate how one is to 'be' in the world
4. Acknowledgement and **ownership** of our judgments of behaviors, perceptions and values different from our own

1. Describe your cultural influences.

Going back as many generations as you know, diagram the countries of origin and the migration history of your family.

- For how many generations has your family lived in the USA?
- From what countries did your family migrate?
- In what regions of the USA has your family lived?
- What foods remain important to you from the family's history?
- What artifacts have been retained in physical or story form and why?

2. Think about the values you live by and their origins.

List three key values that are important to you, such as respect or hospitality. For each value:

- Describe the behaviors you associate with this value.
- Search your memory for family stories or experiences that reinforce this value or illustrate the behaviors you associate with it.
- List the ways in which you have transmitted this value to another generation (if you are a parent or significant adult in a younger person's life).

3. Observe or read about other cultures with interest in your own reactions to differences.

Find a couple of key ways in which you can observe cultural differences (reading news reports or novels written by authors from different cultures; watching films produced in other countries or by other cultures).

- Record the behaviors or values that you find different or odd.
- Contrast them with the behaviors and values from your own cultural community.
- Evaluate each, being careful to record both the positive and negative aspects of your own and the alternative values or behaviors you observe.
- Research the history of these behaviors or values in your own culture and other cultures.

4. Cultivate cultural interpreters.

Remembering the instruction to 'do no harm,' ask if persons with whom you have cultivated cross-cultural friendships or colleague-ships might be willing to help you understand cultural contrasts. Be aware of any power dynamics in the relationship that may prevent the other person from being honest with you, or declining the invitation. If the person is willing:

- Be sure you can describe how your culture interprets a certain value, perception or behavior.
- Identify what you have observed as differences and ask, with humility, how the person's culture conceives of this value or behavior.
- Be open and curious about the answer, and be willing to hear if the question was in any way offensive.

This is hard and sometimes emotional work! But diving deeply into our own culture makes explicit the learned and shared values, beliefs and behaviors upon which we make large and small decisions daily. It is work, but it is good and productive work. Stay with it! It will pay dividends over time.