Engaging with anthropology

IB DP Social and Cultural Anthropology Engaging with anthropology full package

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- ask each of the nine key concepts as a question about real social life;
- explain **participant observation**, ethnography and the **emic** and **etic** views;
- explain ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, reflexivity and comparison;

Engaging with anthropology (2)

- use **Fei Xiaotong**'s ideas on **social relations** in rural China as an example;
- plan a Paper 1 answer on an unseen text and a **big question**.

The nine key concepts

- The course uses nine **key concepts** .
- Each is a question you can ask of any social situation:
- An answer never names a concept alone: it uses the concept to explain real material (the passage, or an ethnography you have studied).

Participant observation and ethnography

- the **emic** view: how members of the group understand their own world, in their own words;
- the **etic** view: the outsider's analysis, which compares the group with others.

Thinking like an anthropologist

- **Ethnocentrism** : judging other cultures by the standards of your own, as Miner's readers did before they saw the joke.
- **Cultural relativism** : trying to understand a practice within its own cultural context before you judge it. (Understanding is not the same as approving.)
- **Reflexivity** : thinking about how your own background (age, gender, nationality, class) shapes what you see and what people tell you.
- **Comparison** : anthropology compares many societies, so that assumptions that seem natural in one place become visible.

Answering Paper 1

- Paper 1 gives you an unseen text: an extract from an ethnography.
- The first questions ask you to identify and explain what the text shows; the last asks one of the course's big questions, such as the IB's sample: *How are we the same as and different from each other?
- Discuss with references to at least two sources of ethnographic material and examples from the passage.*
- 1.

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Social and Cultural Anthropology guide* (first assessment 2019).
- H. Miner, "Body Ritual among the Nacirema", *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956).
- B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), introduction on method.

Sources for this lesson (2)

- R. L. Gold, "Roles in Sociological Field Observations", *Social Forces* (1958).
- **Fei Xiaotong**, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese **Society*** (1947; English translation 1992).

Common errors

- Judging another group's customs by your own (**ethnocentrism**) instead of asking what they mean to the people who practise them.
- Treating **cultural relativism** as "anything goes"; it is a method for understanding, not a rule that every practice is good.
- Writing about a concept in general without anchoring it in the text or an ethnographic example.

Common errors (2)

- Confusing **emic** (the insiders' own view) and **etic** (the outside analyst's view).
- Leaving the anthropologist out: who did the research, when and in what position matters to what was seen.
- Answering a **big question** with opinion and no ethnographic evidence.

Key terms

- **Anthropology**: the study of how people live together: their beliefs, livelihoods, families, **power** and change.
- **Participant observation**: living with and taking part in the life of the people studied, while observing and recording it.
- **Ethnography**: a detailed written account of a group's way of life based on fieldwork.

Key terms (2)

- **Emic view**: the insiders' own understanding of their practices.
- **Ethnocentrism**: judging other cultures by the standards of one's own.
- **Cultural relativism**: trying to understand a practice in terms of the **culture** it belongs to.
- **Reflexivity**: thinking about how one's own position and background shape the research.

Check yourself

- 1.
- What point did Horace Miner make with the "Nacirema"? 2.
- Name four of the nine key concepts and ask each as a question about a Chinese New Year meal. 3.
- What is **participant observation**, and who made it the central method of anthropology? 4.