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CONSIDERING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

PAULINE UCHMANOWICZ

A Longman Topics Reader

Considering Cultural Difference

PAULINE UCHMANOWICZ
State University of New York, New Paltz



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PREFACE

Considering *Cultural Difference* is a concise thematic reader featuring multiethnic writing by contemporary American authors. Showcasing diverse subjects and genres, the selections illustrate how categories of race, class, gender, and nationality intersect and diverge in common places, both in society and in writing. These sites of “cultural difference” are represented in three main parts, each further subdivided into two chapters. A glance at the titles of the parts and of the corresponding chapters suggests the book’s overall theme.

Ritual: “Schooling” and “Sports”

Representation: “Media” and “Visibility”

Rights: “Language” and “Workplace”

Each chapter contains five to six reading selections, averaging ten per part.

Authored by writers of multiethnic descent and representing the lives, voices, and experiences of people of Arab, Asian, African, European, Latino, and Native American heritages, the mix of excerpts and full-length selections comes from scholarly books and journals, memoirs, general-interest magazines, news reporting, fiction, and poetry. Though the majority of readings originally were published between the mid-1990s and the present, a small number—such as “Students’ Right to Their Own Language,” a special edition of *College Composition and Communication* (1974), and “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1988) by Peggy McIntosh—are included to provide historical context for issues raised in *Considering Cultural Difference* as well as to illustrate their enduring appeal.

The thirty-three selections in *Considering Cultural Difference* illustrate a range of composing strategies similar to those required in a variety of first-year writing courses. Readers will find memoir, new journalism, and examples of creative nonfiction reflective of works published in *Harper’s*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and other literary magazines frequently anthologized in collections, such as *The Best American Essays* (Houghton Mifflin) series. In

addition to samples of expressive writing, students also will find informative writing, excerpted from such periodicals as *Newsweek*, the *Nation*, and *Z Magazine*. Examples of critical and academic writing likewise appear, culled from scholarly studies published by both mainstream and independent trade presses. Finally, two fiction and two poetry selections, as well as one visual (serving as an illustration), and a suggested interaction with one web site are included. These six selections encapsulate the fact that thematic concerns and stylistic devices originating in creative writing, visual culture, and electronic media have merged with other forms of writing in United States in recent years.

Thematically, the sections and subdivisions of this reader aim to render sites of U.S. culture commonly perceived as “shared” from the viewpoint and complexity of difference. For example, in Part I dealing with rituals, issues surrounding schooling (such as integration) and sports (including basketball and boxing) are examined through the lenses of ethnicity, class, and gender. Designed overall to broaden interest in the challenges and triumphs one encounters living in and representing a multicultural, multilingual society, *Considering Cultural Difference* aims to stimulate students to think critically, engage in classroom discussion, and write about issues of cultural identity and difference.

Considering Cultural Difference includes a brief introduction to each main part; this introduction offers a synopsis of the interrelationships among its respective chapters and individual selections. The selections within the chapters each begin with a head note, providing pertinent background on the text or visual and its author or creator. Intended to encourage students to embrace the reader’s prevailing themes, the prefatory materials also emphasize historical contexts. To further stimulate critical thinking as well as in-class conversations, five discussion questions called “Engaging the Text” follow each selection. Finally, at the end of each part students will find a list of prompts called “Responding in Writing,” which ask for synthesis between two or more readings or offer suggestions for further research.

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PAULINE UCHMANOWICZ

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"Well, <i>dear</i> , we need to speak to each other in standard English for the duration of this conference. I find the pidgin you children speak to be so limited in its ability to express fully what we need to cover today," says a schoolteacher in Hawaii.	
<i>Francisco Jiménez, The Circuit</i>	20
"It was Monday, the first week of November. The grape season was over and I could now go to school."	
<i>Naomi Shihab Nye, Biography of an Armenian Schoolgirl</i>	28
"What is the history of Europe to us if we cannot / choose our own husbands?"	
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