

[Teacher's Notes]

Ethnocentrism & Cultural Relativism

- This works well in a course that has covered cross-cultural issues in depth.
- While doing the topic of Intercultural Studies I have used this task with advanced Reading/ Writing ELLs and with higher level Listening/Speaking ELLs,
- By applying the concepts, they don't need to give their own views (depersonalization)
Option:
- You could delete the question "How would an ethnocentric person and a cultural relativist respond to this issue?"
- Instead, just ask them for their own opinion.

The ELLs must understand these 2 concepts since they are applying them to the situations.

For Students:

Ethnocentrism is based on the idea that your own cultural group is better than any other. An ethnocentric person judges others through this standard.

Adjective form: **an ethnocentric person**

Culture: the beliefs, behaviors and values that are shared in a specific group.

Cultural relativism is based on the idea that cultural behaviors in one ethnic group cannot be judged by the standards of another ethnic group.

Adjective Form: **a cultural relativist**

Points of View: Ethnocentrism & Cultural Relativism

- Each of these scenarios is a dilemma.
- In your group, decide how an **ethnocentric person** and then how a **cultural relativist** would view the situation.

Group 1/ After Sikh males are 15, they are allowed to join the *khalsa*, the community of Sikhs. The 5 symbols they wear to show that they belong include *kesh* (uncut hair), *kangha* (a small comb for hair), *kirpan* (a dagger to remind to fight for what is right), *kara* (bracelet to remind them of their commitment) and *kacchera* (special underwear). To keep their hair in place, they wear a turban.

One Sikh man trained to be a Canadian police officer, a noble profession in his community. However, he wants to wear his turban at work, but the police rules do not allow long hair (for safety) and officers must wear a standard hat. He also wanted to be on the motorcycle squad, but a motorcycle helmet does not fit over his turban.

- How would an ethnocentric person and a cultural relativist respond to this issue?

Group 2/ A non-Islamic writer wanted to hire artists to draw pictures of Muhammad in his children's book. Three artists declined, so the writer thought this was an example of self-censorship. This topic was discussed in the local newspapers. Later, a journalist drew some sketches with Muhammad in them in a newspaper. In the past, he had published sketches of other religious leaders. However, some Islam followers were upset because pictures of living things (humans, animals and especially prophets) are prohibited in their religion. If one looks at Islamic art, Muhammad usually has a blank face or his face is hidden.

Some Islamic followers in many countries were so upset that they burned buildings and some non-Islamic people were killed in violent riots.

- How would an ethnocentric person and a cultural relativist respond to this issue?

Group 3/ A Christian female student met a Jewish male student at university in Canada. They were both from the same country, and shared many interests and truly loved each other. They felt they could overcome their religious differences. However, both sets of parents forbade them to get married. The Christian parents knew that followers of Judaism did not believe the same things about Jesus, who they felt was the most important person in Christian history. The Jewish parents did not trust the Christians.

- How would an ethnocentric person and a cultural relativist respond to this issue?

Group 4/ A Hindu woman had a very close Christian female friend. She often had a Hindu pundit (leader/teacher) come to her home to hold a special prayer ceremony for important occasions. She invited her Christian friend to attend a prayer time to bless her daughter's upcoming school year. However, the Christian's husband would not allow her to attend a prayer ceremony to a different god.

- How would an ethnocentric person and a cultural relativist respond to this issue?