One Night, Three Lenses

Compare three sociological views of culture

S.2.8 "Explain how functionalists, interactionists, and conflict theorists differ in their view of culture."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB In each paragraph, underline a sentence that shows what the theorist focuses on, then circle one Culture Night detail that helps explain that view.

What Does Culture Night Show?

1. At Riverside High, Culture Night fills the gym with music, food, and stories from students' families. A functionalist asks how this shared event helps the school work as a group. Practicing performances teaches students to cooperate, while familiar routines, such as welcoming guests together, can build a sense of belonging. The event also passes traditions to younger students, who may learn why neighbors value certain celebrations. From this view, culture includes shared practices that connect people and guide behavior. A functionalist might also notice a problem: students who cannot stay after school may miss the chance to take part.

2. An interactionist looks closely at what people do and say during Culture Night. A student calls a handmade bracelet a sign of welcome, but a visitor thinks it is only a decoration. Their conversation gives the bracelet a shared meaning that neither person could assume in advance. Students also decide whether a greeting feels respectful by watching faces, hearing tone, and responding to one another. In this view, culture is created and changed through everyday interactions and the meanings people attach to symbols. Instead of asking mainly what the whole event does for the school, an interactionist studies these small exchanges.

3. A conflict theorist asks who has the power to shape Culture Night and whose interests the event serves. Suppose a small planning committee chooses the acts and gives its own friends the longest time onstage. Students whose families work late may have no way to attend meetings, so their traditions receive less attention. The event may look welcoming while unequal access to decisions keeps some voices quiet. From this view, culture can reflect struggles over resources, recognition, and influence. A conflict theorist would ask who controls the schedule and what might change if more students helped make it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How would a functionalist and an interactionist explain students welcoming guests at Culture Night differently?

2. How would a functionalist and a conflict theorist view students' unequal chances to take part?

3. How does an interactionist's view of the bracelet differ from a conflict theorist's view of the performance schedule?

4. If someone calls Culture Night welcoming, what would each of the three theorists look at to examine that claim?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine your school starts a student-designed mural project. In 4 to 6 sentences, explain how a functionalist, an interactionist, and a conflict theorist might each view it. Include a concrete mural-project detail for each view.

ANSWER KEY

One Night, Three Lenses

HIGH SCHOOL · S.2.8

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

In each paragraph, underline a sentence that shows what the theorist focuses on, then circle one Culture Night detail that helps explain that view. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How would a functionalist and an interactionist explain students welcoming guests at Culture Night differently?	**A functionalist would focus on how welcoming guests builds belonging in the school. An interactionist would focus on how people use faces, tone, and responses to decide what a greeting means.**
2	How would a functionalist and a conflict theorist view students' unequal chances to take part?	**A functionalist might see missing the event as a problem for students' participation in a shared practice. A conflict theorist would examine how meeting times limit some students' influence over whose traditions appear.**
3	How does an interactionist's view of the bracelet differ from a conflict theorist's view of the performance schedule?	**An interactionist would study how conversation gives the bracelet a shared meaning. A conflict theorist would study who controls the schedule and who receives more time onstage.**
4	If someone calls Culture Night welcoming, what would each of the three theorists look at to examine that claim?	**A functionalist would look for cooperation and belonging. An interactionist would examine how people interpret greetings and other symbols. A conflict theorist would look at who can help make decisions and whose traditions receive attention.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A functionalist might say the mural project gives students a shared goal as they paint together. An interactionist might study how students come to see a painted tree as a symbol of belonging after discussing it. A conflict theorist might ask who chooses the design and whether students who cannot attend afternoon meetings get a voice. If only club officers decide, their interests could shape what the mural shows. These views focus on shared benefits, created meanings, and unequal power in the same project.

Accept other passage-supported details when students clearly distinguish shared functions, meanings formed through interaction, and unequal power. For the mural task, accept varied examples if each perspective is applied to a concrete detail.