

Lesson – Whose perspective? Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman

Knowledge framework

Scope



Perspective

Methods and tools

Ethics

<p>Context/purpose</p>	<p>To explore how knowledge claims are shaped by different cultural and social perspectives. This lesson links to the element of <i>perspective</i> in the knowledge framework. It also addresses almost all of the 12 concepts central to TOK, especially that of <i>culture</i>, as well as <i>point of view</i> in the TOK assessment instrument.</p>
<p>Links to areas of knowledge and optional themes</p>	<p>AOK: natural sciences</p> <p>Optional theme: indigenous societies</p>
<p>Essential understandings</p>	<p>That knowledge may be constructed through socially acquired, but often unexamined, assumptions and ideas (perspectives) about reality and <i>what causes what</i> in the world.</p> <p>That the concept of culture goes beyond race, nationality, gender, ethnicity, language, or other comparable distinctions.</p> <p>Greater awareness of how difficult it is to accept another’s perspective as equal to one’s own.</p>
<p>Knowledge questions</p>	<p>Is it possible to believe two competing perspectives or explanations?</p> <p>What is the difference between theories and myths as forms of explanation?</p> <p>How does a cultural context influence explanations of natural phenomena?</p> <p>What do you make of Standpoint Theory, a theoretical perspective that argues that knowledge production stems from social position?</p> <p>What are the implications of this view for the objectivity of science?</p> <p>Are the models and theories of the natural sciences true descriptions of the natural world, or primarily interpretations, useful for prediction, explanation, and control of the natural world?</p> <p>How is it possible to think of disciplines or AOKs as cultures?</p> <p>What are the necessary commonalities of a culture?</p>

	<p>Does what is seen to constitute ‘good evidence’ vary from discipline to discipline, and culture to culture?</p> <p>Is an understanding of the perspective of other knowers essential in the pursuit of knowledge?</p> <p>Do you need to have been in an earthquake to have knowledge of earthquakes? If you have been in an earthquake, does this mean you have more knowledge of earthquakes than someone who has not experienced an earthquake? Explain.</p> <p>What is the ethical dimension of forcing your paradigm on someone else? What ethical considerations are intertwined in earthquake prediction?</p>
<p>Activity</p>	<p>After reading the excerpt below from <i>Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman</i>, divide the class into two groups. One group should take the role of the Indian Judge, the other group should take the role of the Small Man. Ask each group to establish, step-by-step, the knowledge claims of their group, noting their strengths and weaknesses. Then each group should select someone to role-play the way the conversation might go between the two protagonists.</p> <p>From the text: The Indian Judge writes:</p> <p><i>‘Now I can tell you a little more of some of my work up here, which may perhaps be of interest to you. And first and most formidable of all, behold our local Snake. He dwells in a cleft up here on the mountainside, in a large fissure that was caused by an earthquake. For I must tell you, this part of the world is very prone to earthquakes and for this reason, very sensibly, no brick building must be of more than three feet high. After that your edifices must all be composed of wood or of plaster and laths so that he who gets fallen upon by his house in an earthquake is not fallen upon too much. Now you and I may have our private ideas as to the causes of earthquakes, but that makes no difference to the small unlettered man in the country about here, because, you see, he knows. And what he knows is that the earthquakes come because the Snake has been allowed to get angry and then through the earth he goes, and confides his troubles to the spirits that sit within the earth and then the spirits get angry as well, and then, pouf, down come all our houses upon our heads. The small man in the village knows this, just as he knows that anything we may say to him to the contrary proves only our ignorance or that we have some private axe to grind. Do not suppose that it is ever by its Rulers and enlightened men a country is really governed. It is by the small men in the villages, who know. Another thing the small man knows is just how to placate this angry Snake. The way it is done is as follows. Once yearly you must make chapattis [bread] mixed with the best of flour and ghee [butter], all welded together with human blood. It is useless trying to palm off goat’s blood upon this very intelligent Snake. He knows what he wants.’</i></p>

	<p>Discussion questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do the Indian Judge and the Small Man belong to the same ‘culture’? How do they belong to different cultures?• How do the Indian Judge and the English Gentlewoman belong to the same culture? How do they belong to different cultures?• Which culture do you find yourself closest to? In what way(s)?• Do you tend to use ‘culture’ as a generic term that assumes a homogeneous group?• What is the logic of each: the Indian Judge and the Small Man?• Do their explanations differ in logic, or in premise, or in facts?• What do their explanations have in common?• What would a ‘Person from Mars’ think about both explanations? Compelling? Interesting? Convincing? Absurd?
<p>Resources</p>	<p><u>Animated Life: Pangea, Wegener, and Continental Drift</u></p>  <p>Black, D. (anonymously) (1934) <i>Letters of an Indian Judge to an English Gentlewoman</i>. London: Lovat Dickson. ISBN 0708813356</p> <p><u>Earthquake folklore</u></p> 

Wider connections

Look at the IB mission statement and think about the last sentence. The IB encourages ‘compassionate and lifelong learners **who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right**’.

What is the meaning of ‘one man’s hypothesis is another man’s dogma’?

What do you make of an Italian court sentencing several scientists to jail (later exonerated) for not accurately predicting the earthquake of 2009?

- The town of L’Aquila was struck by the quake, which measured 6.3 on the Richter scale
- Hundreds were killed and thousands were left homeless in the disaster.
- Scientists visited town days before but concluded there was little risk.
- **Appeals court overturns manslaughter convictions of six earthquake scientists**



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Credits for Whose Perspective?

Peter Davies: Arvind Nehra, Letters Of An Indian Judge To An English Gentlewoman, © 1934, Peter Davies.