

COLLECTION OF ACTIVITIES FOR CONDUCTING WORKSHOPS ON ETHICAL COMMUNICATION

for volunteer camp leaders and youth workers



Introduction

Welcome!

This activity package was developed by Comhlámh (Ireland), INEX SDA (Czech Republic), Humanitas - Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation (Slovenia) and Voluntariat (Slovenia) as part of the “ET(r)ick your mind” project.

The package has been prepared for volunteer work camp leaders and the global education workshops that they run for youth. However, the activities have a wide application and may be adapted for other learning settings.

Inspiration for this activity package comes from E-TICK, an online course on ethical communication developed by the 4 project partners in 2021, and newly updated in 2024.

E-TICK is a free-to-use, online course and can be accessed here: www.ethicalcommunication.org

In addition to this activity package, you may be interested in our second activity package for educators, prepared by project partner Humanitas.

We also offer a Facilitator’s Handbook. The handbook provides tips for facilitating E-TICK topics which can, at times, be challenging for learners.

You can find links to these resources on our organisational websites. Links to these resources are also available on www.ethicalcommunication.org.

We would welcome feedback on these E-TICK publications and the online course itself at any time. You can reach out to us on admin@ethicalcommunication.org.

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THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT

A RETELLING USING AI

In recent years it has become easier and easier to crop out information to fit a certain narrative or story. In parallel, it has become more important to search for other perspectives when judging something whether it be online or offline. This method offers an innovative way to work with John G. Saxe's version of *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. Using AI, facilitators can create a visual retelling of this fable, highlighting the importance of considering the big picture, questioning perspectives, and integrating other points of view as we seek to make sense of the world around us.



SUMMARY

With its power to create visual representations based on prompts, this method uses AI to show how perspective can limit one's view about a topic, story or - in this case - an elephant. In this activity, AI will be fed the singular descriptions made by each of the six blind men. Images far from the truth will appear, promoting discussion around the limitations of "the singular perspective". This discussion may extend to exploring limitations of AI also.

AGE

16+

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

5–20

DURATION

70 min

MATERIALS

A stable connection to the internet, computer and projector or TV, copies of Annex 1.

*You can opt to use the "pre-made" images in Annex 1, display them on PowerPoint or print them out.

INSTRUCTIONS PREPARATION

Before the start of the activity open [Adobe Firefly](#) and create a free account. If it's the case that you are using the pre-made images, open PowerPoint or have the printed images set aside.

STEP 1 (15 MIN)

Open a discussion about the impact that different perspectives can have on a narrative. Some examples of questions that can help open the topic include:

- Why is it important to listen to everyone's side of a story before making up your mind?
- How does the inclusion of diverse perspectives change the way a story is told and received by its audience?
- What can we learn from hearing a story told by different people?
- How can a single detail being left out change the whole narrative? And with which intentions do these omissions happen?

STEP 2 (20 MIN)

Begin by reading out loud the fable [The Blind Men and the Elephant](#) by John Godfrey Saxe. After every description made by the blind men, you will feed the line to AI (or show the relevant pre-made image).

Blind Men and the Elephant A Poem by John Godfrey Saxe

*It was six men of Indostan,
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.*

*The First approach'd the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"*

↳ Write in the AI prompt: *An animal with a broad and sturdy side, like a wall.*

*The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, -"Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear,
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"*

↳ Write in the AI prompt: *An animal very round and smooth and sharp, like a spear.*

*The Third approach'd the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," -quoth he- "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"*

↳ Write in the AI prompt: *An animal with a squirming trunk, like a snake.*

*The Fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee:*

*"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," -quoth he,-
"Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"*

↳ Write in the AI prompt: *A plain animal, like a tree.*

*The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said- "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"*

↳ Write in the AI prompt: *An animal much like a fan.*

*The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," -quoth he,- "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"*

↳ Write in the AI prompt: *An animal with a swinging tail, like a rope.*

*And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!*

Lastly, write the full description, with the perspectives of all the blind men and see the AI come up with its image: *An animal with a broad and sturdy side, like a wall, round and smooth and sharp tusk, like a spear, a squirming trunk, like a snake. With a plain knee, like a tree, ears like a fan and a swinging tail.*

STEP 3 (20 MIN)

Firstly, ask the participants what they think happened with the story and AI. Secondly, ask them what they think the fable is trying to say. Thirdly, move on to discuss the bigger picture. This fable describes 6 blind men describing an elephant. In this instance, no harm was done by misrepresenting the animal, but how about the real world? Can you think of instances where holding a singular perspective on a situation could be harmful?

STEP 4 (15 MIN)

Ask the participants what measures they could take or already do take (online and offline) to ensure they are keeping a big picture view of a situation, and considering different perspectives on a single topic. Hear from them first before sharing the examples below. You can also suggest some further, and more detailed information, listed in "Further information".

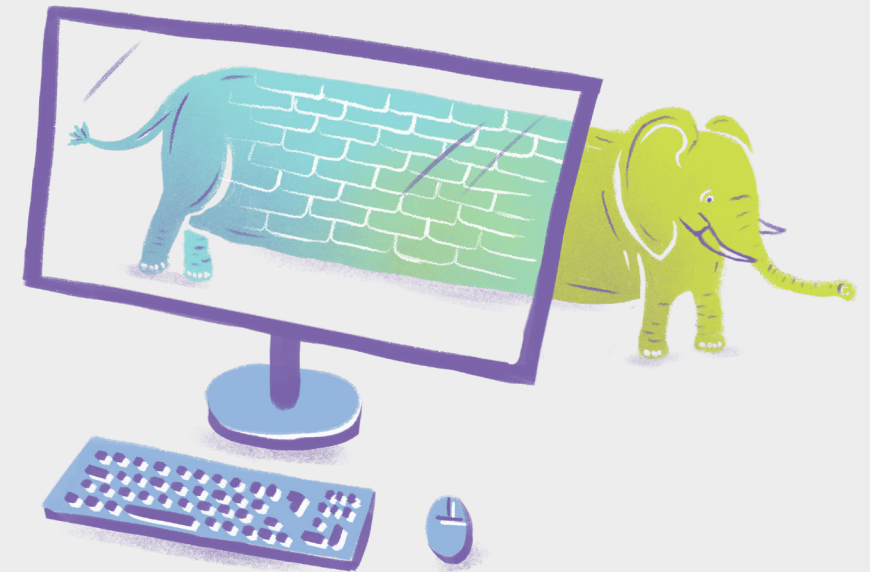
- *When it comes to a new story, check more than one news source.*
- *Question the intent behind a narrative. Does it want to convince you to agree with a certain point of view or do you think it's being objective?*
- *Does the information/story offer evidence to back its perspective?*
- *Is the medium (smart phone, radio, tv) that this narrative reached me through, reliable?*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [The Guardian's 1986 'Points of view' advert](#)
- [How to See Things From Another Point of View](#)
- [3 counter-intuitive ways to take on another person's point of view](#)
- [Fact-checking and information credibility](#)

SOURCES

- E-Tick 2024 (Online Course on Ethical Communication) - Session "Shifting Perspectives"
- [Blind Men and the Elephant – A Poem by John Godfrey Saxe](#)



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ANNEX 1: THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT
IMAGES GENERATED BY AI (ADOBE FIREFLY)



An animal with a broad and sturdy side, like a wall.



An animal very round and smooth and sharp, like a spear.



An animal with a squirming trunk, like a snake.



A plain animal, like a tree.



Adobe Firefly

An animal much like a fan.

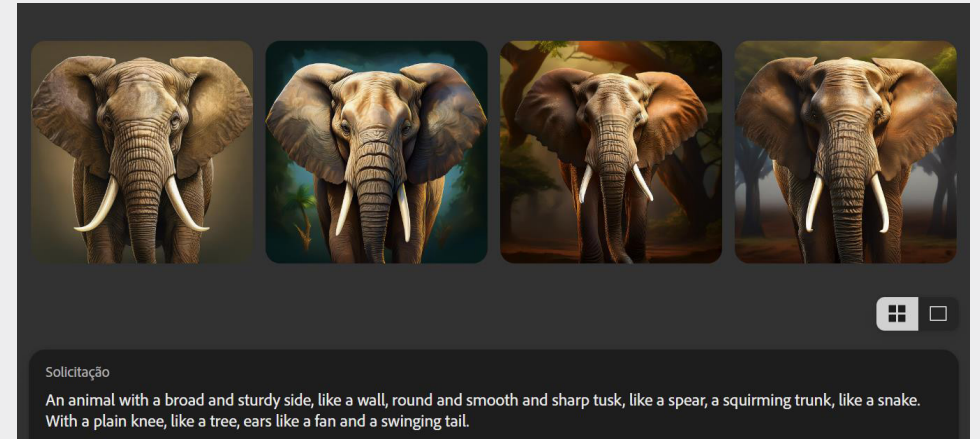


Adobe Firefly

An animal with a swinging tail, like a rope.



An animal with a broad and sturdy side, like a wall, round and smooth and sharp tusk, like a spear, a squirming trunk, like a snake. With a plain knee, like a tree, ears like a fan and a swinging tail.



Solicitação

An animal with a broad and sturdy side, like a wall, round and smooth and sharp tusk, like a spear, a squirming trunk, like a snake. With a plain knee, like a tree, ears like a fan and a swinging tail.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

This activity focuses on understanding stereotypes and their implications for how we perceive and relate to others. Through guided discussions, participants will explore how stereotypes can shape attitudes and behaviours, and consider the importance of examining and challenging underlying assumptions to foster greater inclusivity and understanding.



SUMMARY

Participants will examine a series of images depicting various individuals, discussing the stereotypes that may be associated with each image. Through group discussions, they will explore how these stereotypes can affect perceptions and interactions in real life.

AGE

16+

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

At least 3

DURATION

45 min

MATERIALS

A stable connection to the internet, computer or projector or TV, sheets of paper and pens.

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1 (5 MIN)

Start by stating that the exercise is about exploring the first impressions we can reach based on our upbringing and background. With this in mind, participants should try - as far as they can - to work from the first thing that comes to their mind during the activity, and to not fear judgement.

STEP 2 (5 MIN)

Ask each participant to select one picture from the subsection *What Do You Think Their Story Is?* of the E-TICK Course and to write a short story about the person. Make clear that there will be an individual reflection and group discussion, but that they will not have to share the story they come up with, unless they want to. This will encourage them to write their stories without fear of others' judgments. After they have finished their story they can rest their pens.

STEP 3 (15 MIN)

At this point, open a discussion on what stereotypes are and what kind of stereotypes exist, maybe also a short definition, some examples and a quick review of the importance of challenging stereotypes, like: *Stereotypes are oversimplified and generalized beliefs or ideas about a particular group of people. These assumptions are often based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, occupation, or other traits. Stereotypes can lead to misperceptions and reinforce societal biases.*

EXAMPLES OF STEREOTYPES

- **Gender Stereotypes:** The belief that women are more emotional and nurturing, while men are assertive and strong. For example, assuming a woman will take on caregiving roles at work.

- **Racial Stereotypes:** The notion that certain racial groups possess inherent traits, such as the stereotype that Asian individuals are exceptionally good at mathematics.
- **Age Stereotypes:** The assumption that older adults are resistant to change or incapable of learning new technologies.

IMPORTANCE OF CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES

- **Promotes Individuality:** Stereotypes reduce individuals to simplistic labels, overshadowing their unique qualities and experiences. By challenging these assumptions, we can appreciate the diversity within groups.
- **Reduces Prejudice and Discrimination:** Stereotypes often fuel biases that lead to unfair treatment. Addressing these assumptions can help create a more equitable society.
- **Fosters Empathy and Understanding:** Engaging in discussions that challenge stereotypes encourages listening to others' experiences, enhancing our empathy and understanding of diverse perspectives.
- **Encourages Critical Thinking:** Questioning stereotypes cultivates critical thinking skills, prompting individuals to examine their beliefs and the influences behind them.

STEP 4 (15 MIN)

Flip the images and read out loud their real story, and prompt the participants with these questions:

- *In your stories, how close or far away were you from the actual stories?*
- *Did the photo appearances influence the stories you formulated? In what ways did they influence you?*
- *Through this exercise, did you discover anything new about your own upbringing and background?*
- *How much of your stories were based on avoiding stereotypes?*

STEP 5 (15 MIN)

Conclude with a brief explanation of *critical literacy*, an approach that encourages us to question texts, media, and other forms of communication to uncover hidden biases, power dynamics, and perspectives. Critical literacy moves beyond simply understanding a message; it teaches us to ask questions like "Who created this?" "Who benefits?" and "Whose perspectives are left out?" This approach helps us understand the deeper social and cultural factors that shape our beliefs and attitudes.

- *How do stereotypes affect our understanding of others?*
- *What are the consequences of relying on stereotypes in our daily lives?*
- *In what ways can we actively work to address stereotypes in our own perspectives and actions?*
- *What steps can we take to question the stereotypes we encounter, especially in online and media content?*

Wrap up by emphasizing how critical literacy can be a valuable tool in recognizing and challenging stereotypes. It encourages deeper, more thoughtful engagement with information, helping us to see beyond initial impressions and to approach others with empathy and understanding.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Understanding and Challenging Stereotypes](#)
- [Challenge stereotypes](#)

SOURCES

- E-Tick 2024 (Online Course on Ethical Communication) - Session »Shifting Perspectives«.



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CAN THIS VOLUNTEERING HARM? VOLUNTOURISM

This activity guides participants to reflect on the impact of volunteering and to consider how well-intentioned actions can lead to unintended harm. By examining a range of scenarios, participants will gain a deeper understanding of (un) ethical volunteering practice and comprehend why volunteering cannot only be based on good intentions, but needs critical thinking and knowledge.



SUMMARY

Through scenarios, group discussions, and a reflective exercise, participants will explore the potential harms of volunteering, especially voluntourism, and develop a more nuanced approach based in solidarity and ethical relating.

AGE

16+

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

8–20 (can be adapted for larger groups by forming smaller discussion groups)

DURATION

80 min

MATERIALS

Scenario descriptions (printed or projected), paper and pens for notes

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1 (5 MIN)

Open the discussion by posing the question - Can you imagine a situation where volunteering would harm? If yes, how?

STEP 2 (20 MIN)

Introduce the concept of voluntourism and how it differs from other forms of volunteering. *Voluntourism, a blend of "volunteer" and "tourism," involves travellers participating in short-term service projects abroad, aiming to contribute to communities while also experiencing travel and cultural immersion. While often well-intentioned, voluntourism can unintentionally have negative effects. For instance, short-term orphanage volunteering can create cycles of attachment and abandonment*

for children, as transient volunteers disrupt their stability. Similarly, short-term projects may shift focus from sustainable, community-driven efforts to donor-dependent initiatives, which can reinforce dependency rather than empower communities (Wearing & McGehee, 2013*). Ethical issues arise particularly in healthcare voluntourism, where untrained volunteers can undermine local healthcare standards. Given these potential issues, voluntourism requires careful consideration, prioritizing long-term, community-led solutions over temporary aid and superficial cultural exchange.

*Wearing, S., & McGehee, N. G. (2013). *Volunteer tourism: A review*. *Tourism Management*, 38, 120-130.

*You can find more materials about voluntourism in the Further Information section.

You can ask the participants some of the following questions to start the discussion:

- What motivates people to engage in voluntourism?
- They carry good intentions for sure. What else do they carry (perspectives, assumptions). What kinds of things would you say they might need to consider and why?
- In what ways might voluntourism have different impacts in a community compared to long-term presence of for e.g. community workers?
- What might the benefits be of voluntourism for either the volunteer or the community? Who benefits?
- What are the potential harms - especially those that the volunteers might not initially see?
- Is it possible for volunteers in this kind of instance to truly support, rather than unintentionally harm, the communities they spend time in?

This discussion will set the stage for examining potential harms in the following steps.

STEP 3 (20 MIN)

Create groups of 3-4 participants. Give each group approximately 3 scenarios. Suggest that they write down key ideas to present later.

- **Scenario 1: Charity donations**
A charity organization offers funding to a small village in a structurally disadvantaged

region for clean water systems but only if they agree to adopt certain religious teachings in their education system.

- **Scenario 2: Corporate Philanthropy**
A large corporation announces a major donation to a disaster-stricken region. However, it was later revealed that the company exploits local labour in that region and uses donations as a marketing tool.
- **Scenario 3: Disaster Relief**
After a natural disaster, an international relief organization arrives to provide food and shelter. They bypass local aid organizations and the government, assuming their resources and expertise are superior. As a result, local efforts are disrupted, and aid is distributed inefficiently.
- **Scenario 4: Fundraising Campaign**
An NGO creates a flashy video campaign to raise funds using images of starving children and dilapidated homes. They argue this will generate more donations from wealthy countries.
- **Scenario 5: Medical Volunteers**
A group of medical students from a wealthy country travels to a low resource setting to volunteer. They bring lots of money with them. However, the students are not yet qualified, lack knowledge of the local culture, language, and health practices. Without consulting local health workers, they begin to set up their own medical project.
- **Scenario 6: Climate Change Solutions**
A group of climate experts is invited to a coastal region in the global South to address the impacts of climate change. They begin to roll out their own models, neglecting to engage with local communities who have lived with climate risks for generations and who have their own coping strategies based on adaptation.
- **Scenario 7: Orphanage Volunteering**
A group of volunteers visits an orphanage for a short-term volunteer experience. They spend time playing with the children, taking pictures, and posting about their experience on social media to raise awareness. None of these volunteers are trained in child care, and their brief visits create emotional attachment issues for the children, who have experienced loss and trauma.

Ask each group to read and discuss their assigned scenarios. Taking each scenario in turn, they should consider the following:

- *What happened in this scenario?*
- *How did the scenario make you feel - what feelings were present in your group while reading?*
- *In this scenario, what kinds of assumptions do the volunteers/experts/aid workers/campaigners make?*
- *Where do you see power in this scenario - and what kind of power?*

STEP 4 (15 MIN)

Bring the participants back together. Have each group share a summary of their scenarios and key insights from their discussion. Use the following questions to guide the meta-reflection:

- *What were some common assumptions across the scenarios?*
- *Can you imagine the volunteers/experts/aid workers/campaigners in these scenarios doing differently, or making different choices? Why/why not?*
- *How might we better understand the context and real needs of a community before getting involved?*
- *How to amplify the voices within local communities? How to amplify community involvement for e.g. in defining and leading volunteer projects?*

STEP 5 (15 MIN)

Invite participants to individually reflect on their own experiences with volunteering (if any) or their future motivations for volunteering. Give them 10 minutes to write or reflect in silence.

- *What motivates me to volunteer, and how could those motivations impact the way I approach work with a community on a given project?*
- *What else might be important to consider when it comes to volunteer projects overseas? Not only me as a prospective volunteer, but those that organise projects overseas? What should they be thinking about?*

You may ask the participants if they want to share some of their reflections with the conclusion of the exercise.

STEP 6 (5 MIN)

Conclude the session by asking participants to reflect on the following question:

- *Did this exercise change your perspective on / approach to volunteering and volunteer projects?*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Critical GCE: HEADS UP tool](#)
- [Hemispheric Institute: Community Activism](#)
- [The business of voluntourism: do western do-gooders actually do harm?](#)
- ['Orphanage Tourism' in Cambodia: When Residential Care Centres Become Tourist Attractions](#)
- [Volunteer tourism: A review](#)
- [The possible negative impacts of volunteer tourism](#)

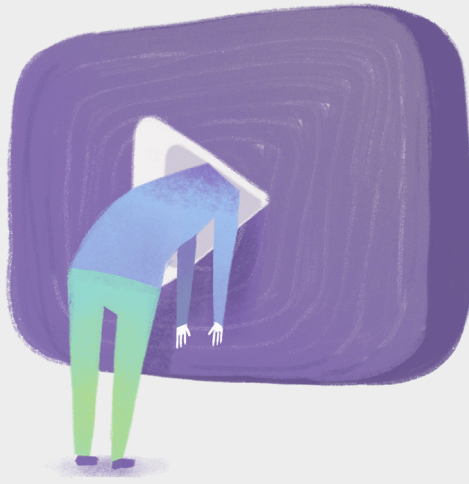
SOURCES

- E-Tick 2024 (Online Course on Ethical Communication) - Session "To Hell With Good Intentions".
- Wearing, S., & McGehee, N. G. (2013). *Volunteer tourism: A review*. *Tourism Management*, 38, 120-130.



THE POWER OF THE MUSIC VIDEO

Media has a crucial impact on our perspective of the world, and when certain appropriations are normalized in popular media it can be challenging to notice and critique them. This message calls attention to some of these “normalizations”, encouraging participants to develop a critical eye when relating to media, especially to music videos.



SUMMARY

This activity sets out to support lively discussion around a selection of music videos that may or may not appropriate aspects of other cultures for effect. By viewing these music videos with a critical eye, participants can grow their understanding of cultural appropriation and its prevalence in today's society.

AGE

16+

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

At least 9 (3 groups of 3)

DURATION

70 min

MATERIALS

A stable connection to the internet, computer and projector or TV, sheets of paper and pens (enough for each participant to have one)

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1 (10 MIN)

As an overview, share some background with participants. Western pop culture and advertising frequently references/borrows/takes from places, cultures and even political movements – all for aesthetic effect. It is easy to be swept away by the music and images and miss that this is going on. Through this activity, participants will have the chance to pay closer attention to some music videos and consider whether what they see is more appreciation or appropriation. In particular they should keep the following questions in mind:

- Whether the singer's appropriation of the locations/ symbols/ references feels okay to them.
- If it doesn't feel okay, can they say more about why?
- If it does, why do they consider the video an appreciation rather than an appropriation?

STEP 2 (25–30 MIN)

Share the three music videos available on the E-TICK platform - Jennifer Lopez - Ain't It Funny, Coldplay - Hymn For The Weekend and Taylor Swift - Wildest Dreams, stopping to read out the reflections and facts proposed by the course (with the *read more* tab). Motivate the participants to keep their ideas and opinions for later, writing them down on a piece of paper.

STEP 3 (15 MIN)

Create 3 groups of participants, one for each video clip. In their respective groups, they should discuss the questions raised in the introduction as well as the ones asked in the 'read more' sections that popped up during the videos. Advise them that group members do not need to come to a consensus. At the same time, invite them to be open to different opinions and to try to articulate thoughts beyond yes and no.

STEP 4 (15 MIN)

Bring all 3 groups together and invite them to share some final thoughts on the topic i.e. if they agreed on it or if someone raised some different and interesting points during the discussion.

STEP 5 (10 MIN)

Close the activity by asking the participants to share their thoughts on the appropriation of other cultures by Western media.

You can ask them some of the following questions:

- Do you know any other examples that helped you realize the underlying issue of cultural appropriation?
- Is it harmful to romanticise other cultures? If so, how does it harm?
- Can you think of examples where the media has simplified or distorted cultural traditions to make them more entertaining or 'exotic' for audiences?

- How do you imagine people from that culture might feel about their own traditions being shown in this way in the media?
- What do you think distinguishes these appropriations from appreciation?
- How might we connect to elements from other cultures in ways that are not harmful?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [The media has blurred the line between cultural appropriation and appreciation](#)
- [Cultural appropriation: everything is culture and it's all appropriated](#)

SOURCES

- E-Tick 2024 (Online Course on Ethical Communication) - Session "Cultural Appreciation or Cultural Appropriation"



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