

Cultural Connections (CC) Overview and Guidelines: An introduction for guest presenters, moderators, and artistic directors

CC Goals and Objectives

Cultural Connections is a partnership between The Field Museum and ethnic community-based museums and centers that strives towards achieving the following goals and objectives:

1) To foster cultural understanding through multicultural civic dialogue

We achieve this goal by...

- a. Developing educational programs and activities for the public that utilize the anthropological tools of cross-cultural comparison, participant observation and the guiding framework of *Common Concerns, Different Responses*
- b. Providing the context to help understand changes in cultural practices over time and space
- c. Targeting educators and parents as key disseminators

2) To promote partner institutions as community assets in Chicago

We achieve this goal by...

- a. Coordinating collaborative programs that increase awareness of partner institutions among diverse audiences
- b. Building capacity of partner institutions through facilitating the internal sharing of resources and a dialogue among partners that results in the development of best practices

In fostering cultural understanding through multicultural civic dialogue, the *Cultural Connections* program aims to 1) **Recognize the value of cultural difference** and 2) **Learn the reasons why difference exists**. Specifically we explore cultural difference through collaborative events of the CC partners in which **presentations are about aspects of the annual theme, guided by the Anthropological Framework, and follow a dialogue format**.

CC Theme for 2005 – 2006

The preliminary title of this year's *Cultural Connections* theme is ***Body Language: the messages of appearance***.¹ The common concern at the heart of this year's theme can actually be summed up in one word: image. Image is the messages about someone conveyed through their appearance. Clothing, jewelry, accessories, tattoos, hairstyle, gestures or postures, and even the forms of our bodies convey messages about who we are. Some of the important messages that people of all cultures read from appearance are a person's values (or at least some of them), group and community memberships, preferences, social status, gender, and age.

CC staff recommend that event presentations be about a specific type of concern with image. So for example you might present on any one of the following: 1) Ideals of beauty, 2) Gender representations, 3) Sending and receiving messages of availability (for marriage, dating, etc), 4) Group membership or affiliation (including ethnic identification, profession, clubs, church, school, military, sports team (fan or player), etc.), 5) Status/rank/office/ or social role (e.g. displaying wealth, political office or power, civic authority, leadership qualities), 6) Showing piety or virtue, 7) Showing solidarity with a cause/purpose/set of values, 8) Displaying age or generation. Check with the CC partner representative that invited your participation for the event topic you will address.

¹ This is a preliminary title for this year's theme pending further consideration by CC staff and partners.

The Anthropological Framework: *Common Concerns, Different Responses*

Common Concerns, Different Responses sums up the fact that as human beings we share certain universal concerns we all must address to survive and experience well being, but people of different communities respond to these concerns in different ways - giving rise to the range of cultural differences popularly referred to as cultural diversity. Cultural diversity comes about because people have different resources and knowledge to creatively draw on to meet their common concerns.

Programs organized by the framework 1) explore an aspect of a common concern (this year the common concern of Image expressed in the annual theme), 2) illustrate the fit between the common concern and partner community responses and 3) tell some of the story of how each community came to its responses. For example addressing number three might take the form of an exploration of how the material resources of a region and the prior knowledge and institutions of its people shape their contemporary responses. Alternately, personal accounts by community members of how they came to respond to the common concern usually illustrate not only the resources and community's body of knowledge they draw upon, but also reveal first hand the creative component of adapting responses to particular circumstances.

We use the *Common Concerns, Different Responses* framework to explain cultural diversity because when we understand why we do the things we do, and the need for human cultural diversity, we become less inclined to project negative meanings onto others' actions that are different from our own. Using the anthropological framework leads to the realization that a one-size-fits-all approach to "correct" human behavior is unrealistic and unlikely to meet human needs under divergent circumstances. We then grasp that cultural diversity is essential to the future survival of human kind.

The Dialogue Format

In its broadest sense, the entire Cultural Connections program is based upon the benefits of dialogue - the idea of exchanging points of view and sharing experiences so that we can learn more about each other.

Dialogue takes place at three levels in the Core Program: 1) between partners in planning and staging their events, 2) between presenting partners and those attending events, and 3) among attendees, anthropologists, and community members over food after the main presentation. **To align points of comparison and deepen the collaborative process, we do ask that partners literally engage in some form of back and forth exchange as the format of their presentation.**

Cultural Connections' utilizes similarities as a comfortable foundation for starting dialogue, making it possible to move into understanding differences. Creating a safe space of inter-group understanding, where people will listen to viewpoints that differ from their own, also requires:

1. **honoring all experience including not putting down others experience**
2. **avoiding pejorative language or otherwise sexist, racist, classist, etc. terms**
3. **avoiding overly provocative language that shuts down some people's willingness or ability to listen and engage in dialogue. By not using the term "sweat shop" in their exhibit on the garment industry, the East Side Tenement Museum was able to create dialogue among people with divergent views on the acceptability of the industry's working conditions.**
4. **using the 1st voice - this means speaking from your own experience. The converse of letting others speak for their own motives, thoughts, and experience also holds true.**