

Cultural Analysis: SPICE Themes

When studying World History it is easier to organize the multitude of information through using overarching themes that serve as unifying threads that will appear throughout the course. This technique will help students relate what is particular about each topic or society to the “big picture” of history. The themes also provide a way to organize comparisons, analyze change and continuity over time, and understand connections. When reading and recording information, as well as writing essays and participating in class discussions, students should always refer back to these themes by using a “SPICE” acronym to make sense of the material at hand. It is highly recommended that you have this sheet handy while recording information both in and outside of class.

Social: How does the group relate to one another? How do people communicate? What do people do together? How is the group organized? What are the family and gender relations? Are there social classes? How do they live? Are there inequalities?

Political (State-building, Expansion, and Conflict): Who is in charge? On what is power based? Who gives that person or group power? Is there a contract? What is the government structure? Are there significant wars, treaties, courts, or laws? Did political boundaries change? Did the political power shift?

Interaction (Interaction Between Humans and the Environment): How does civilization interact with other groups? Through trade, war, migration, and/or diplomatic alliances? In what geographic region is the culture/civilization located? What geographic landscape makes up the region? What are the demographic and settlement patterns? How are the people/events affected by the geography? How do the people interact with their environment? How does the environment define the culture/civilization? Is the civilization urbanized? Is it mainly urban or rural? What technology/innovations are developed?

Culture (Development and Interaction of Cultures): What is the meaning of life for people living in this society? What happens when they die? Who talks to god(s)? How do they spend their lives? What are the basic religious beliefs? Are there leaders or documents that define religion? Who are the thinkers? What groups are given the chance to learn? How do people learn? Do the people have any form of philosophy, math, or science? How do they express themselves? What technology or resources are given to art? Do the people have any significant achievements in the arts/architecture, music, writing, or literature?

Economic (Creation, Expansion, and Interaction of Economic Systems): How do people earn their food? Is it based on agriculture, commerce, small trades or professions, or industry, like manufacturing or technology? Where's the money? What are the valued and traded commodities? What technologies or industries define culture?

Keep this sheet in your binder to reference while taking notes and recording information