



## *I Want to be an Ambassador!*

### **What Does It Mean to be Culturally Curious?**

Science shows it's common to for humans to fear what we do not understand. But an understanding of, and respect for, other cultures and diverse viewpoints is the key to collaborating and solving problems that benefit all of society. Educators from the World Affairs Council and Global Minds, both in Pittsburgh, PA, help teens understand what it means to be "culturally curious." They also explain easy-to-understand methods for teens to explore and appreciate cultural traditions, viewpoints, and practices that differ from their own.

### **TRANSCRIPT**

#### **Kathleen Newell, World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh:**

The more I travel, and the more I learned about other people, sure you learn about the cultural differences that exists but you also learn that a lot of the issues that exist are similar everywhere you go. When I've worked with youth from other countries, you know they have the same concerns about school, about tests, about finding a job, about what they're going to major in in college or getting into college. And some of the challenges that each culture faces is unique, but I think that all the youth that I've worked with have always shown me that young people are really interested in working together, and understand the importance of working together to be able to achieve something greater than maybe has been done in the past.

It's important to develop these skills, these diplomatic skills, these cross cultural skills, because the world is increasingly interconnected. And so you're going to find yourself in cross-cultural spaces all the time. This isn't something that you have to leave your community to experience.

There's many cultures that exist, there are regional cultures that exist within the U.S., there are school culture, there is faith culture, there's LGBTQ plus culture, so culture really exists around the shared attitudes, values, beliefs of any group and their culture grows out of that.

And there's a lot of intentional ways that you can go about being culturally curious and developing these skills on your own."

And also being culturally curious and taking the time to understand other people is really what drives out fear and ignorance that exists in our society. It's going to enable young people to connect with each other in genuine ways to understand each other, and together to find really innovative and effective solutions to the world's problems.

When I think about the word diplomacy, a lot of what shapes my thinking around it is my past experience working for the Peace Corps. And so when I think of the word diplomacy I define it thinking about relationships and also about understanding.

In South Africa, I lived with a Zulu tribe. And there is an Ubuntu saying that goes, "*Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*," which means, 'a person is a person through other people.' And it's a recognition that our humanity is tied together."

And so when we think about our future and the world's future and all the challenges that we face, we have to be able to see each other for who we are and accept each other for who we are, to be able to work together and find these solutions.

Think of culture as an iceberg. When you think of an iceberg, about 10% of an iceberg lies above the surface, and that's very much like culture, where there's a small part of culture that is visible. And the parts of culture that are visible are things like food, music, ceremonies or holiday customs.

But a majority of an iceberg, about 90%, lies below the water surface, and this is similar to culture as well, and that the majority of what makes up culture lies below the surface are things that are not visible. So they're this underlying set of attitudes, values, beliefs, general worldview that make up culture and lead to these expressions, these visible expressions of culture. And so when we talk about being culturally curious what we're talking about mostly is really the idea of taking this deep dive to understand the parts of culture that aren't readily visible.

It's so important to understand what's below the iceberg because that's a lot of what makes us human and is part of, sort of, our common humanity.

Don't stereotype, don't make assumptions, but really think about what's driving these expressions and try to understand these attitudes, values, beliefs of other cultures and how they're similar and different than our own.

### **Suad Yusuf, Program Dir., Global Minds Initiative:**

Global Minds Initiative is a for-youth-by-youth organization, and it was created as a way to combat the issues of cultural intolerance and discrimination through an after-school tutoring program.

It was started by Payton Klein who at the time was a ninth grade student at Allderdice High School and she recognized that there was this culture of intolerance that was happening in the broader social context, but she saw it also occurring in her school.

### **Peyton Klein, Founder, Global Minds Initiative:**

I'm Peyton, and my project is the Global Minds Initiative.

One morning I was sitting in my class and I realized I knew everybody's name except for the girl sitting behind me. And I realized that I believed in these values of diversity and inclusivity and welcoming but I wasn't actually living by those values. So I went up to this girl and I learned her name was Khala and we became great friends. We shared in so many different things and

eventually she told me about her story and how she was a Syrian refugee and she opened my mind to so many things, and one of those things was the challenges that she faced in high school that I didn't have to.

### **Suad Yusuf, Program Dir., Global Minds Initiative:**

In my opinion, positive change doesn't have to be anything that is a large scale and grand. Positive change starts really from being kind. And that in itself is a change, it might be small, but it's a change that has ripple effects and can change the whole dynamics of the school environment.

In our program, we use the term 'courageous conversation' and courageous conversation requires young people to have dialogue and conversations that are below the surface. And that allows students to peel back the layers and get to the core of who they are as individuals and as human beings.

In 2017, I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a master's in social work and international development and I was really keen on working in a global context.

And so I took a job in Somaliland which is a semi-autonomous region in Somalia, and this was my first time in the country. My country of origin is Somalia, and I speak a little bit of Somalia and so I thought I would come into that space with an advantage, with an understanding of the culture that maybe other people did not have. But what I realized very quickly, was that even in a country where I looked like everybody else, and I spoke a little bit of the language, I still was an outsider in a lot of ways and I still have a lot of learning to do. And so I was really forced to humble myself and to learn from people and their experiences and to ask a lot of questions.

I think in order to be a diplomatic individual, you have to be able to communicate effectively and communicating effectively requires that you don't shy away from the tough questions. As young people especially, there is a power dynamic in your schools and your homes where you're often told, "Well you can't ask these type of questions because you're, you're young and you don't know yet and you have to leave this to the adults," but I think that the 21st century requires young people who have communication skills that require them to push back and you can't always accept the status quo. You have to sometimes be able to be in a space and demand that your voice also be heard.

### **Kathleen Newell, World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh:**

You have to be intentional about trying to understand each other, and you have to recognize that cultural curiosity is rooted in lifelong learning.

The one thing I've learned, the more that I have practiced learning about other people is, I recognize and I'm more and more aware of how much there is to learn and I think that's such an important mindset to have, because the more I learn and the more curious I am, the more I choose to explore and understand other people."

**Learn more about *I Want to be an Ambassador!*  
and other Luminari camps for teens at [www.luminari.org](http://www.luminari.org)**