

# UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION & HALLOWEEN

## HALLOWEEN - FUN FOR SOME, FRIGHT FOR OTHERS

Halloween on a college campus can be a time for spooky fun and celebration. However, this holiday can also give rise to behaviors that have negative long-lasting impacts for some. One of the major areas of concern includes behaviors that fall under the term "cultural appropriation."

Cultural appropriation occurs when cultural imagery and materials (ex: ways of dress or music) are removed from their cultural context and used in ways they were never intended. For example, dressing up as a person with a disability that you do not have or wearing a sombrero as part of a "Mexican" costume.



A related behavior we see some people engaging in around Halloween is blackface (see also: "yellowface" and "brownface"). This involves altering one's physical features to mimic distorted racialized stereotypes of what people of color look like (ex: coloring the skin darker, using makeup to make your eyes seem slanted, etc.).

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Though the ways people engage in appropriation may result in different degrees of impact, it is particularly of concern when those from historically dominant groups appropriate the cultural practices and artifacts from those who are members of historically marginalized communities. The differences in social and institutional power result in reinforcement of already-existing inequality.

Whether racial harm is intentional or not, the result is the same. Under the guise of supposed edginess or humor, people conjure up histories of racial stereotyping, humiliation, and violence against marginalized groups. Minoritized communities experience heightened anxiety and tension as they also encounter these stereotypes in the media, classrooms, and social settings.

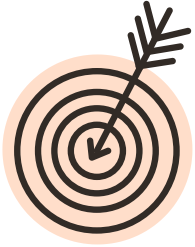


## WHAT CAN WE DO TO RESPOND?

See the back of this page for help discussing this topic in class, at home, or with peers.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO UNPACK CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

## Defining Culture



- What does “culture” mean to you?
- What do you know about other cultures outside of your own? Where did you get that knowledge? Can your knowledge of other cultures be applied to everyone in that culture? Whose experiences factor into your understanding of cultural appropriation?
- What symbols of different cultures have you witnessed in the media (television, magazines, music, etc.)? Are these representations accurate?

## Understanding Appropriation & Its Impact



- What is the original meaning of the imagery or costuming in use? Is that meaning represented when used as a Halloween costume? Is it lost, demeaned, or made fun of? Did people from the other culture endure negative experiences that people from your culture have not? What are the consequences of generalizing people based on their culture?
- Who should determine the level of harm someone might experience when cultural appropriation occurs? Have you *directly* asked people from the culture in question how they feel when others engage in their cultural practices or use their cultural symbols?

## Cultural Appropriation vs. Cultural Appreciation



- Do you feel that you can appreciate a culture you are not part of? How or why?
- What does it look like to meaningfully engage the *differing* perspectives of people of the culture in question, including perspectives you agree with and don't agree with?
- What are the power dynamics between the cultural groups involved? Is there a way to show appreciation for this culture that does not reinforce unequal power dynamics?
- How are people within that culture treated for using or wearing certain cultural artifacts? Is this different from how you might be treated?
- What does it look like when someone thinks an artifact from a culture is “cool,” but not the people from that culture?

## Responding to Cultural Appropriation



- If you saw someone wearing or doing something that was culturally offensive, what are ways you could intervene?
- What does intervening look like if no one from that culture is around?
- When observing others responses to cultural appropriation, consider what is being prioritized: the intentions of people outside of that culture or the impact on people within the culture in question? What are the consequences of focusing on one versus the other?