



EduTrend Contents

W4C · CULTURAL STUDIES & ANTHROPOLOGY · HIGH SCHOOL

Rites of Passage

Analyse rituals with anthropological theory

Ages 15–18

Level: Advanced

75 minutes

Teams of 3

Activity 05

Inside: activity at a glance · step-by-step session plan · facilitator notes · 3 student worksheets · assessment checklist

ACTIVITY 05 · AT A GLANCE

Rites of Passage

Students learn van Gennep's three-stage model of rites of passage and Turner's idea of liminality. They analyse familiar rituals, such as graduations, sporting initiations or coming-of-age ceremonies, compare examples from different cultures and write a short analysis using theory and evidence.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- explain van Gennep's stages of separation, transition and incorporation;
- apply the concept of liminality to real rituals;
- compare rituals across cultures while avoiding ethnocentrism;
- write an analysis that links theory to ethnographic evidence.

KEY WORDS

ritual · rite of passage · separation · liminality · incorporation · symbol · ethnocentrism · cultural relativism

CURRICULUM LINKS

Anthropology and sociology: ritual, symbol and theory. English: analytical writing. C3 Framework, Dimensions 2 and 3.

1

WONDER

What do people do?

2

OBSERVE

Look and listen

3

ASK

Hear their view

4

COMPARE

Same and different

5

INTERPRET

What does it mean?

6

REFLECT

What about us?

Materials (per team)

- Summary of van Gennep's and Turner's ideas
- Case study cards describing rituals from several cultures (from reputable ethnographic sources)
- Photos of a graduation ceremony
- Analysis template
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Prepare balanced, respectful case studies from reputable ethnographic sources.
- Include rituals from the students' own society, not only distant ones.
- Prepare a model analysis of a graduation ceremony.
- Plan how to handle discussion of religious rituals respectfully.

SAFETY

Discuss rituals with respect. Students share personal or religious experiences only if they wish.

ACTIVITY 05 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

Start with the students' own rituals. Applying theory to familiar events avoids exoticising others.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Hook	Show a graduation photo. What changes for the person, and how does the ceremony mark it?	<i>"Why do we need a ceremony at all?"</i>
10–20 min Theory	Introduce van Gennep's stages and Turner's liminality.	<i>"What happens in the in-between stage?"</i>
20–40 min Apply	Teams analyse two case studies with the model.	<i>"Which symbols mark each stage?"</i>
40–50 min Compare	Teams compare rituals and discuss cultural relativism.	<i>"How do we avoid judging others by our own norms?"</i>
50–75 min Write	Students write a short analysis of one ritual.	<i>"Does the model fit perfectly? Where does it not?"</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Analyse a rite of passage using van Gennep's model and the idea of liminality, compare it with a ritual from another culture and evaluate how well the theory fits.

ACTIVITY 05 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The anthropology in brief

In 1909 Arnold van Gennep described rites of passage as having three stages: separation from a previous status, a transitional or liminal stage, and incorporation into a new status. Victor Turner later developed the idea of liminality, the in-between state where normal rules are suspended and participants often share a strong sense of community.

Anthropologists try to understand rituals in their own context, an approach called cultural relativism, and avoid ethnocentrism, judging other cultures by the standards of one's own. Theories are tools: they highlight patterns but must be tested against evidence, and some rituals fit models better than others.

Common ideas to listen for

- “Rituals are only religious.” Many secular events, such as graduations, are rituals.
- “Other cultures have strange rituals; ours are normal.” All societies have rituals that can look strange from outside.
- “A theory explains everything.” Theories must be tested and can be limited.

Adapting the activity

Support

Provide a partly completed analysis grid and one case study.

Stretch

Read an extract from an ethnography and evaluate how the author uses ritual theory.

WORKSHEET 1

Applying the model

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Analyse one ritual with van Gennep’s stages.

Stages

Stage	What happens	Symbols and actions
Separation		
Transition (liminal)		
Incorporation		

WORKSHEET 2

Comparison

Compare two rituals.

Comparison

Feature	Ritual A	Ritual B
Status change		
Liminal features		
Key symbols		
Community role		

Avoiding ethnocentrism

WORKSHEET 3

Analysis

Write a short anthropological analysis.

Argument

Where the model fits and where it does not

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

Use during the session. One sheet covers up to eight students; copy as needed.

Student	Applies theory accurately	Compares with cultural relativism	Evaluates the model with evidence

Suggested codes: W = working towards · E = expected · G = greater depth

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Rites of Passage is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents W4C Cultural Studies & Anthropology programme (high school, level: advanced). Every activity in the programme follows the same format: a practical challenge, a clear session plan, facilitator notes and ready-to-print worksheets, so that teachers, club leaders and parents can run it without extra preparation.

Full 15-, 20- and 32-week programmes are available from EduStore at edutrend.org.

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