



EduTrend Contents

W4C · CULTURAL STUDIES & ANTHROPOLOGY · MIDDLE SCHOOL

Everyday Ethnographers

Observe your own community like an anthropologist

Ages 11–14

Level: Intermediate

60 minutes

Pairs · up to 30

Activity 03

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

ACTIVITY 03 · AT A GLANCE

Everyday Ethnographers

Students learn the basics of ethnography, then observe a familiar school space, such as the canteen or library, for 15 minutes. They write field notes, separate what they see from what they interpret, identify unwritten social rules and consider how an outsider might see the same scene.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the session students can:

- explain what ethnography and participant observation are;
- write field notes that separate description from interpretation;
- identify unwritten norms in a familiar setting;
- discuss ethical issues in observing people.

KEY WORDS

ethnography · fieldwork · field notes · participant observation · norm · insider · outsider · ethics · consent

CURRICULUM LINKS

Social sciences: research methods. English: descriptive writing. PSHE: respect and privacy. C3 Framework, Dimension 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 pair)

- Notebook and pen for field notes
- Observation guide with prompts (space, people, actions, talk, objects)
- Timer
- Example extract of ethnographic writing
- Worksheets 1, 2 and 3

Before the session

- Choose observation sites and agree with staff; avoid private spaces.
- Prepare an observation guide and an example of good field notes.
- Agree ethical rules: no names, no photos of people, no recording, observe public behaviour only.
- Brief staff in the observed spaces.

SAFETY

Observe only public behaviour in agreed spaces. No names, photos or recordings of people. Stay with your partner.

ACTIVITY 03 · SESSION PLAN

Step by step

The most useful learning is the difference between “I saw” and “I think”.

Time	What happens	Say or ask
0–10 min Hook	Read a short ethnographic extract. What kind of writing is it?	<i>“How did the writer find this out?”</i>
10–20 min Method	Teach field note techniques and ethics.	<i>“What must we not do when observing?”</i>
20–35 min Observe	Pairs observe a space for 15 minutes and write notes.	<i>“What would a visitor from another planet notice here?”</i>
35–50 min Analyse	Pairs highlight description and interpretation and list unwritten rules.	<i>“How do people know these rules?”</i>
50–60 min Reflect	Class discusses findings and ethical dilemmas.	<i>“Did observing change how you see the space?”</i>

CHALLENGE CARD (print or copy onto the board)

Observe a familiar space ethically, write detailed field notes and identify three unwritten rules that shape how people behave there.

ACTIVITY 03 · FACILITATOR NOTES

The anthropology in brief

Ethnography is the study of people's everyday lives through extended fieldwork. Anthropologists often use participant observation: taking part in daily life while observing carefully and writing field notes. Good notes describe what happened in detail before interpreting what it means.

Every group has unwritten rules, or norms, that members follow without thinking. Anthropologists try to “make the familiar strange” to notice them. Research ethics require respect, privacy, informed consent and avoiding harm; professional associations publish codes of ethics for fieldwork.

Common ideas to listen for

- “Anthropologists only study distant places.” Many study their own societies.
- “Observation is just watching.” It requires careful recording and reflection.
- “My interpretation is a fact.” Interpretations must be checked, often by asking participants.

Adapting the activity

Support

Provide a structured observation grid with prompts for each column.

Stretch

Interview a willing participant (with consent) to check one interpretation.

WORKSHEET 1

Field notes

Name: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Write what you see and hear. Keep interpretations in the right-hand column.

Notes

Time	What I saw or heard (description)	What I think it means (interpretation)

WORKSHEET 2

Unwritten rules

List norms you noticed.

Norms

Unwritten rule	Evidence	What happens if broken?
1		
2		
3		

WORKSHEET 3

Ethics and reflection

Think like an anthropologist.

An ethical issue in our observation

How an outsider might see this space

What I would ask participants

FOR THE TEACHER

Assessment checklist

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

Student	Writes descriptive field notes	Identifies norms with evidence	Considers research ethics

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

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Everyday Ethnographers is a sample activity from the EduTrend Contents W4C Cultural Studies & Anthropology programme (middle school, level: intermediate). 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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