

# Beyond the Mountain: Joining Hands with the People of Haiti

## Workshop 3: A Taste of Haitian Culture

**Total time:** two hours

**Theme:** culture

### **Objective**

Learn about various elements of Haitian culture and explore how these elements influence the lives of the Haitian people.



## Opening (3 minutes)

### Materials needed

- Optional: chalice, candle, and lighter

### Description

If you choose, light a chalice. Share this opening reading by Camille Paglia: "All objects, all phases of culture are alive. They have voices. They speak of their history and interrelatedness. And they are all talking at once!"

## Activity 1: Customs, Traditions, and Folklore (15 minutes)

### Summary

This activity will define seven cultural elements of Haitian society, many of which will be explored in additional activities.

### Objective

Briefly explain seven elements of culture in Haiti.

### Materials needed

- "Culture Word Scramble" handout

### Description

Say, in your own words: "Today we are going to talk about the culture of Haiti. We cannot adequately cover all or even most of a country's culture in two hours, but we will touch upon aspects of the Haitian culture to help you appreciate and understand the Haitian people a bit more."

Invite participants to form groups of two or three. Distribute the "Culture Word Scramble" handout and ask them to unscramble the words that represent what are commonly called the "seven elements of culture." You may stop the activity after the first team unscrambles all the words, or you may let all teams finish before proceeding.

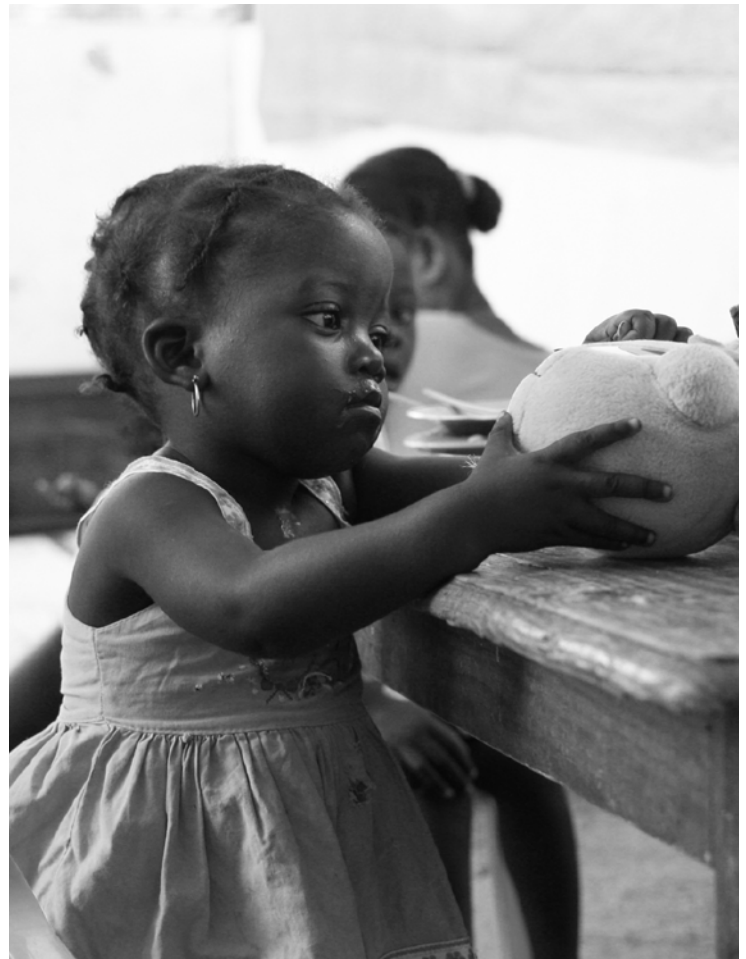
Afterward, confirm that the seven elements are as follows: social organization, form of government, economic system, customs and traditions, religion, language, and arts.

Tell the group that the workshop will explore a few of these elements in more depth than the others. Build upon what participants already know. When discussing the elements below, let participants supply as much information as possible before telling them about each element.

- **Social organization:** This refers to the structure of both family and society. Though extended families and tightly connected villages were once the norm in Haiti, most people now live in nuclear-family homes; however, some extended families still live together. Since the earthquake, more households contain extended families out of necessity. The population is about 9,900,000. The majority of Haitians are rural farmers or peasants, as they prefer to be called. Though the country has many examples of extreme poverty, there are also business people, property owners, and wealthy Haitians.
- **Form of government:** Haiti is a republic, with executive,

legislative, and judicial branches. The president is elected, and the prime minister is appointed. The current president is Michel Martelly, who took office in May 2011. The country consists of 10 "departments", which are like provinces.

- **Economic system:** Haiti is a capitalist country. The service industry and agriculture are the primary sources of income, along with international aid. Haiti exports mangoes, leather goods, seafood, and some coffee and sugar cane.
- **Customs and traditions:** Too many to name, but one popular tradition is storytelling. Many people of African ancestry, including African Americans, are strong in the oral tradition. Passing along history, information, and culture orally was important because slaves were commonly not taught to read or write. [Tell participants if you will do the alternate activity on storytelling.]
- **Religion:** About half of the population is Catholic. Protestant religions are growing in popularity. Many residents also practice *voudou* (voodoo). It is not uncommon for people to practice both a Christian religion and *voudou*.
- **Language:** Haiti has two official languages: *Kreyol* (Creole) is spoken by everyone; about 10 percent of the population is fluent in French, the second language, which is typically used by the more elite sectors of the population. The adult literacy rate is about 56 percent.
- **Arts:** Art abounds in Haiti. Music and the visual arts are particularly popular. These will be explored more later in the workshop.\*



\*Much of the information in this section came from U.S. Department of State "Background Note: Haiti"





## Activity 2: Music (10 minutes)

### Summary

Participants experience Haitian culture through music.

### Objective

Experience Haitian music.

### Materials needed

- Computer with Internet access, to play Haitian music samples
- Optional: portable speakers

### Preparation

Decide which music samples to play. A few options include the following:

- Listen to world music from several stations, including Radio One Haiti at [live365.com/index.live](http://live365.com/index.live).
- Listen to *konpa* (also *kompas*) music on [heritagekonpa.com](http://heritagekonpa.com).
- Purchase and download tracks from albums at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). A search for Haitian music will turn up several possibilities, from modern kompa to jazz to classical. A well-known Haitian musician is Wyclef Jean, who is part of the Haitian diaspora. You can find his *Greatest Hits* album on Amazon. You can also find the lyrics to many of his songs online, including "Earthquake," recorded after the 2010 tragedy, which includes an expression of his desire to run for president.
- Use any search engine to search for "listen to Haitian music."

Check your equipment.

### Description

Ask if anyone is familiar with any Haitian musicians or musical forms. Wyclef Jean is well known. If he is named and you have a sample of his music, play it. Share the lyrics, if you have them. One song you might play is "Earthquake." The lyrics can be found in the link under "Preparation." Wyclef Jean was disqualified for running for president because he has been out of the country for more than five years.

Tell the group that music is very popular in Haiti and that Haitians have enjoyed many different musical forms in the country's history, from big band to hip-hop. Some people consider *konpa* Haiti's most authentic and important contribution to music. *Konpa* (also referred to as *kompas* or *compas*) is dance music that is upbeat with strong percussions. Listen to [heritagekonpa.com](http://heritagekonpa.com) or Radio One Haiti to hear *konpa* music. The older style of *konpa* grew from the storytelling tradition, and it was not unusual for songs to be 20–30

minutes long, telling a rambling story that often contained humor and a moral.

Much of the music you hear on these two stations makes many people instinctively want to dance. Dancing is very popular in Haiti.

Listen to as many styles as possible. Can participants distinguish African elements in the music? Caribbean elements? European? American? Music is also strongly associated with the *voudou* religion.

## Activity 3: Language (15 minutes)

### Summary

Participants experience Haitian culture through language and discuss language complexities in Haiti and the United States.

### Objective

Explore the complexities of how language reflects culture.

### Description

Say, in your own words: "Another of the seven elements of culture is language. We have our own language issues here in the United States. Can anyone think of tensions over language in our country?" If participants do not volunteer the following, make sure to mention media attention over Ebonics, the debate over whether to provide driver's license tests in Spanish, and people who want to make English the official national language.

Tell the group that you will present background on the languages of Haiti.

Give the background information with your co-facilitator exactly as written below:

"Ethay anguagelay ofway ethay eoplepay inway Aitihay isway Eyolkray. Eyolkray isway away uniqueway ixturemay ofway Enchfray andway Africanway anguageslay. ["The language of the people in Haiti is *Kreyol*. *Kreyol* is a unique mixture of French and African languages."]

Ask participants, "Oday anyway onway ouyay owknay anyway ordsway inway Eyolkray?" ["Do any of you know any words in *Kreyol*?"] Await an answer.

Say, "Idday ouyay understandway emay? ["Did you understand me?" Pig Latin translation from [users.snowcrest.net/donnely/piglatin.html](http://users.snowcrest.net/donnely/piglatin.html).]

Say, "Eske ou te konprann mwen? ["Did you understand me?" in *Kreyol*. Hear the pronunciation on Google Translator.]

Say, "Avez-vous me comprenez?" ["Did you understand me?" in French, via Google Translator.]

Say, "Did you understand me?"

Expect mixed reactions from the group, including giggling, frustration, confusion, and possible responses in Pig Latin.

Ask if anyone in the room understands French. Ask if anyone understands *Kreyol*. Now say, "The most common language spoken in Haiti is *Kreyol* (Creole). Even though *Kreyol* is derived

from French and various African languages, it does not mean that a Haitian will understand you if you speak to them in French any more than all of you may have understood the Pig Latin we used in our first explanation.

Share the following information with participants:

If you do not understand French clearly, but you do know it is the language of your one-time oppressor, the people who enslaved your ancestors, how might you feel about someone approaching you and presuming you understand French? This is why we recommend that if you need to communicate in Haiti without an interpreter or knowledge of *Kreyol* but with knowledge of French, you might first acknowledge that French is not the native language, but ask if your partner minds conversing in French.

The way Haitians feel about French is not based solely on what happened in the past: it is also about what is happening right now. Many months after the earthquake, U.N. cluster meetings, meetings with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and many meetings about providing aid and re-creating the infrastructure of the country were conducted in French or English, with no *Kreyol* translation. How do you think this affected the average Haitian? Rifts were created between grassroots organizations and the international community because of language. Many Haitians have called it a new wave of colonization. Lack of use of the language of the people renders the average Haitian invisible.

It gets more complicated, as language issues frequently do. French is taught in Haitian schools, but 80–90 percent of Haitian schools have fees. The fees often amount to several hundred dollars a year per child — more than the average per capita income of the country.\* Therefore, Haitians who speak French are more likely to be from the middle or upper classes. As we mentioned previously, only about 10 percent of the population is fluent in French. Economic disparities are evident in what languages one does — and does not — speak in Haiti.

Ask participants, “Does anyone have any reflections or responses to what we’ve discussed so far?”

*Kreyol*, as we mentioned, is a mixture of several West African languages, such as Wolof, Fon, and Ewe, and French. Some *Kreyol* — and English — words came from the Taino, the first known inhabitants of the island. From the Taino, we have the words “tobacco” and “hammock.”

In language, as in most aspects of Haitian culture, there exists a mixture of influences from indigenous people, the French and Spanish conquerors, and the slaves brought from West African countries, such as Ghana, Togo, Benin, Senegal, Nigeria, and Sierra-Leone.

Finish the discussion by asking, “How does this mixed heritage parallel the language we speak as Americans?”

## Activity 4: Religion (15 minutes)

### Summary

Participants experience Haitian culture through its indigenous religion of *voudou*.

### Objective

Understand the basic beliefs of *voudou*.

### Description

*Voudou* (voodoo) is a popular religion in Haiti, though sometimes practiced underground. Many faithful practitioners and believers also identify as Catholic or Protestant. The Haitians see nothing irregular about this.

This religion is often misrepresented in the media as bloodthirsty devil worship. Here are some basic facts about *voudou*:

There is one God, Bondye. Bondye is too great, too omnipotent to be approached directly. He manifests himself primarily through lesser spirits, the *loa*, who control specific areas of daily life.

Rites and ceremonies are conducted by priests (*houngans*) and priestesses (*mambos*).

*Voudou* rites are used in curing illness, communicating with dead family members, and creating potions. *Voudou* ceremonies celebrate holy days and honor the spirits of *loa* or deceased ancestors. The ceremonies involve much music and dancing. Sometimes animals are sacrificed in these ceremonies. The sacrificing is done quickly; the goal is not to have animals suffer. The ultimate goal of the sacrifice is to release the life of the animal to refresh the tired *loa* in appreciation and acknowledgement of the work you are asking of the *loa*.

Ask participants to discuss the following:

- The original *loas* came from Africa on the boats with slaves. Now most of them are also identified with Catholic saints. How does this reflect a common feature of Haitian culture? Where else have we witnessed cultural elements that are a mix of different influences?
- Evangelical and Protestant forms of Christianity, which are fairly new to Haiti, are frequently hostile toward practices of *voudou*. The Catholic Church has been more accepting. Why do you think this might be the case?
- The very religious believe the *loa* control all aspects of their daily lives. Some people believe this leads many Haitians to a fatalistic worldview. Have you encountered fatalism in any of the exploration of Haiti in this workshop so far? What about your previous experience with Haiti or Haitians — what have you experienced firsthand, heard, or read?
- Why do you think the media commonly portrays *voudou* as primitive, barbaric, and involving devil worship? Why is it important for us, as Unitarian Universalists, to understand the true nature of the *voudou* religion?

\*Much of the information in this section came from U.S. Department of State “Background Note: Haiti.”

## Activity 5: Art (15 minutes)

### Summary

Participants experience Haitian culture through the visual arts.

### Objective

Be familiar with popular Haitian visual art forms.

### Materials

- Computer with Internet access, projector, and screen or UUSC's *Beyond the Mountain* DVD and television.

### Description

Haiti is known for its distinct visual art, including a painting style known as magic realism and metal art.

Access the "Haitian Art" PowerPoint presentation online at [uusc.org/beyondthemountain](http://uusc.org/beyondthemountain) on the *Beyond the Mountain* DVD.

Share with participants the following information:

Haitian painting was "discovered" and labeled by the French as "naïf" ("naïve" in English) and "primitif." Haitian painters at first accepted these labels but have come to reject them as condescending. Now they recognize and honor an indigenous style of art that is all their own. Haitian painters today prefer to describe their art as magic realism, which they view as a more respectful and accurate term. Elements of the Haitian style of magic realism have their roots in the indigenous Taino people's religion of animism and nature worship. In the paintings, nature is larger than life and depicted with brilliant colors and forms that reflect its vividness and energy. The magical landscape of Haitian landscapes comes alive and dances across the canvas. Common ingredients are mountains, villages, cultivated fields, jungles, banana plantations, tropical fruits, fertile fields, and spiritual beings.

Taino spiritual elements appear, as do *voudou* spirits, symbols of West African religions, and images associated with Catholicism. African jungle animals appear, and people or spirits lurk in the background, peeking out to watch the "real" world in the foreground. Utopian visions of villages and people living in close community are common. People are viewed as living in harmony with nature and as part of the greater web of existence, much like our seventh principle. This art is both hopeful and utopian.

The Haitian painters are world renowned and a point of pride for all Haitians. The youth painting projects of the Association for the Promotion of Integral Family Healthcare (APROSIFA), one of UUSC's partners you will hear more about shortly, are helping Haitian youth heal from the trauma of the earthquake and its aftermath. The art training they receive will help them build a sustainable career for the future. There is a very active worldwide market for Haitian post-earthquake art.

After sharing the above information, ask participants the following questions for discussion:

- What do you see in these works of art that reflect aspects of Haitian culture?
- Why would metal art be popular in an impoverished country?

Novelist Walker Percy was once asked why the southern United States has produced so many great writers. He answered, "Because we lost the war." How does this quote relate to the creation of great Haitian art?

Tell the group that later we will create our own art.



## Activity 6: Spotlight on Partners — APROSIFA (45 minutes)

### Summary

Participants will study the Association for the Promotion of Integral Family Healthcare (in *Kreyol*: Association Pour la Promotion de la Sante Integrale de la Famille; known by the acronym APROSIFA) and its work with families and young people. Participants will also create a mural depicting how their cultures inspire them.

### Objective

Witness the work of an eye-to-eye partnership with APROSIFA, which focuses on the needs of families and youth.

### Materials

- A computer with Internet access, projector, and screen
- Art supplies, including a roll of butcher paper, crayons, markers, pastels, and pencils
- Painter's tape to display the artwork

### Description

#### Part 1 (20 minutes)

Remind participants that UUSC works through eye-to-eye partnerships. Make sure that the group understands that UUSC seeks partnerships with grassroots organizations composed of people who decide for themselves what is best for their community. The organization communicates the kind of support they need, and UUSC communicates how it can best give such support. It is a collaborative model of working *with*, not *for*, the people of Haiti.

Go to the video "APROSIFA," available online as part of the Haiti Curriculum: Beyond the Mountain playlist at [youtube.com/uusc4all](http://youtube.com/uusc4all) or on UUSC's *Beyond the Mountain* DVD.



Say, in your own words: "In every workshop, we will meet one of UUSC's partners in Haiti. Each of UUSC's partners are seeking justice for at least one marginalized community. Previously we have talked about the increased vulnerability of women and peasants in the rural areas of Haiti. Haitian youth represent another group whose vulnerability has increased since the earthquake. Today, you will hear from a partner that not only supports women and families but also has specific programs to support youth."

View the short video together.

Ask the following questions one at a time, allowing a few minutes for each answer:

- What did the video tell us about the lives of women and children in the camps?
- How is APROSIFA working to help youth meet their needs and recover from the effects of the earthquake? What roles does art play in this?
- What do you know about the lives of some Haitians that you did not know before?
- What inspired you about the work of APROSIFA?
- What did you hear in APROSIFA's story that relates to what we have discussed about Haitian culture?

Invite any other reflections.

## Part 2 (25 minutes)

In your own words, share the following with participants: "How UUs view Haitians and the Haiti that we take home in our hearts are central elements in these workshops. We are bombarded with negative news in the mainstream media about Haiti that threatens to leave an impression that things are hopeless. The same negative reporting also occurred regarding the people of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. As in New Orleans, the mainstream media paints a picture of a people out of control and unable to take their future into their own hands.

"As we have seen in these few workshops, nothing could be further from the truth! As UUs, we respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We look deeper to see the good and the better narrative for Haiti that our UUSC partners are creating for themselves. The culture of post-earthquake Haiti is one of hope, resiliency, and working together to create a better future. A Haitian proverb says, 'Men anpil chay pa lou,' which translates, 'Many hands make the load lighter.' UUSC believes this, too. Their logo includes two hands and their motto reads, 'Advancing human rights is the work of many joining hands.'

"What about *your* culture? Think about the seven elements of culture (social organization, customs and traditions, language, arts, religion, form of government, and economic system). Is there an object in your culture that you use as inspiration for creating a better world? It could be one of the Seven Principles (religion), an inspiring movie (art), your belief in democracy (form of government), or the support of your extended family (social organization)."

Invite participants to create a mural that illustrates some of the cultural elements that inspire them. Or, if they prefer to use another art form, they may create a song or write a poem, either individually or in small groups. If working on the mural, suggest they work in a style similar to magic realism. This is a grassroots style of painting that is very appropriate in creating art about

UUSC's grassroots partners. However, participants should use objects found in their world, not Haiti, to make the artwork authentic. Participants can share and discuss their inspirational element while creating the mural.

## Closing (2 minutes)

### Materials

- Optional: chalice, candle, and candle snuffer

### Description

If applicable, extinguish the chalice. Share this closing quote by Albert Camus: "Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future."

## Alternate activities

### Activity 1: Storytelling (15 minutes)

#### Objective

Identify cultural traditions in a Haitian folktale.

#### Description

Tell the group that a common tradition in Haiti, especially prevalent as entertainment in rural areas, is storytelling. When someone has a story to tell, they say, "Krik." If the audience wishes to hear the story, they reply, "Krak."

Tell the following folktale from Haiti in your best storytelling style or invite a storyteller from the congregation to present the story.

Krik. [Wait for the response of "krak" before proceeding.]

One day, a woman was walking to market. Upon her head, she carried a large calabash filled with sweet molasses, as she had turned all her sugar-cane crop into molasses to get a better price at market. As she walked, she was dreaming of what lovely things she would buy with the money from her sales, when she stumbled over a branch.

Crash! Down tumbled the gourd, which broke and spilled all her molasses upon the ground.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "What misery! Why did Papa God give me so much misery!" She ran home, in tears.

A monkey in a nearby tree overheard the woman. "What is misery?" he wondered. He jumped down to investigate the sticky mess she left in her wake. He dipped in a finger and brought the finger to his mouth. Mmm, this was delicious! Monkey had no idea misery tasted so swell. He ate more and more. The more he ate, the more he desired, until he had eaten the entire pot. Oh, Monkey loved misery! He must have more! He remembered that the woman said Papa God gave her the misery.

Monkey ran off to the place where Papa God dwells. "Papa God, why have you never given me any misery?"

"Haven't I? I'm sure that I have," replied Papa God.

"No, you have not, and I feel deprived. I beseech you! Please give me misery!"

"You want misery?"

"Yes! As much misery as you can dish out!"

"Are you sure it is misery that you want?"

"Oh, yes. I crave it. I must have misery of my very own."

"Very well," said Papa God. "Take the bag over there and walk until you come to a place with no trees. Then open the bag." Monkey took the bag Papa God pointed to, squealed, "Thank you, Papa God!" and ran off.

"Remember," shouted Papa God, "Do not open it until you are in a place where there is not a single tree."

Monkey was anxious to have his misery, but he followed Papa God's directions. He ran for a long time before reaching a big clearing, with no trees in sight. Then he opened his bag.

To his great surprise and dismay, out jumped four large dogs. They were foaming at the mouth, and they looked hungry. They immediately started chasing Monkey. Poor Monkey ran away, with all the speed he could muster. He ran and ran until he was almost exhausted. "Surely the dogs will catch me and eat me!" He was in such misery.

Just then, a tree appeared. Monkey gratefully ran up the tree and stayed there until the hungry dogs grew tired and wandered off.

Who sent the tree? Why, Papa God, of course. Because even a monkey can only take so much misery.

Follow the storytelling with a few questions:

- What is this story's moral?
- What in the folktale do you think of as elements of Haitian culture? [The sugar cane, women carrying goods on their heads, women selling produce at markets, Papa God, the humor, an attitude that bad times will not last forever.]
- What in the folktale reminds you of the Haitians' African roots? [The monkey, women carrying goods to the market on their heads, calabashes, Papa God, and folktales with talking animals.]
- This story or similar versions have been heard among other people of African descent. Why would this be a popular folktale in Haiti? What would the storyteller hope to pass on to the listener by the telling of this story?

### Activity 3: Language (30 minutes)

#### Objective

Explore the complexities of how language reflects culture.

#### Description

Say to participants: "Another of the seven elements of culture is language. We have our own language issues here in the United States. Can anyone think of tensions over language in our country?" [If participants do not volunteer the following, make sure to

mention media attention over Ebonics, the debate over whether to provide driver's license tests in Spanish, and those who want to make English the official national language.]

Tell the group that you will present background on the languages of Haiti.

Give the background information with your co-facilitator exactly as written below:

"Ethay anguagelay ofway ethay eoplepay inway Aitihay isway Eyolkray. Eyolkray isway away uniqueway ixturemay ofway Enchfray andway Africanway anguageslay. ["The language of the people in Haiti is *Kreyol*. *Kreyol* is a unique mixture of French and African languages.]"

Ask participants, "Oday anyway onway ouyay owknay anyway ordsway inway Eyolkray?" ["Do any of you know any words in *Kreyol*?"] Await an answer.

Say, "Idday ouyay understandway emay? ["Did you understand me?" Pig Latin translation from [users.snowcrest.net/donnely/piglatin.html](http://users.snowcrest.net/donnely/piglatin.html).]"

Say, "Eske ou te konprann mwen? ["Did you understand me?" in *Kreyol*. Hear the pronunciation on Google Translator.]

Say, "Avez-vous me comprenez?" ["Did you understand me?" in French via Google Translator]

Say, "Did you understand me?"

Expect mixed reactions from the group, including giggling, frustration, confusion, and possible responses in Pig Latin. Ask if anyone in the room understands French. Ask if anyone understands *Kreyol*.

Now share the following information with participants:

The most common language spoken in Haiti is *Kreyol* (Creole). Even though *Kreyol* is derived from French and various African languages, it does not mean that a Haitian will understand you if you speak to them in French any more than all of you may have understood the Pig Latin we used in our first explanation.

If you do not understand French clearly but know it is the language of your one-time oppressor, the people who enslaved your ancestors, how might you feel about someone approaching you and presuming you understand French? This is why we recommend that if you need to communicate in Haiti without an interpreter or knowledge of *Kreyol* but with knowledge of French, you might first acknowledge that French is not the native language but ask if your partner minds conversing in French.

The way Haitians feel about French is not based solely on what happened in the past, it is also about what is happening right now. Many months after the earthquake, U.N. cluster meetings, meetings with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and many meetings about providing aid and re-creating the infrastructure of the country were conducted in French or English, with no *Kreyol* translation. How do you think this affected the average Haitian? Rifts were created between grassroots organizations and the international community because of language. Many Haitians

have called it a new wave of colonization. What do you think it feels like to have your native language disrespected and ignored?

It gets more complicated, as language issues frequently do. Remember the language issues we discussed at the beginning of this activity. French is taught in Haitian schools. But 80–90 percent of Haitian schools have fees that often amount to several hundred dollars a year per child — more than the average per capita income of the country.\* Therefore, Haitians who speak French are more likely to be from the middle or upper classes. Only about 10 percent of the population is fluent in French. Economic disparities are evident in what languages you do and do not speak in Haiti.

Remember the literacy rate of 56 percent? What does this mean for the well-intentioned aid worker who comes to Haiti with printed material, even material printed in *Kreyol*?

There has also been a lot of contention around the Spanish language, because of the sometimes volatile relationship between Haitians and Dominicans. Ask participants what they know or have heard about the relationship of these neighbors.

Display a map of the two countries, while sharing the following:

Haiti shares an island with the Dominican Republic. If you remember the history from Workshop 2, the Spanish first colonized the island. However, by 1697, the French had possession of one side of the island. During and after the slave revolt that led to Haiti's independence, several black leaders tried to unite the two countries as one Haiti. But eventually, part of the island fell back under Spanish rule. The Spanish did not establish as many large sugar plantations and therefore imported fewer slaves, leading many Dominicans to think of themselves more as white or Latino rather than of African descent. Politicians have played the "race card," using fear of the "darkening" of Dominica to increase anti-Haitian sentiment. The two cultures are adamant about their differences.

In more modern times, many Haitians desperate for work have crossed over into the Dominican Republic to work as poorly paid and poorly treated migrant workers. Nationalist feelings on both sides, mixed with anti-immigrant feelings, have, at times, become explosive. In the 1930s, the Dominicans massacred as many as 25,000 Haitians in one day. It is said that the river that represents the border between the two countries ran red with blood of Haitians trying to flee. Haitian author Edwidge Danticat wrote a great book, *Farming of Bones*, about this period. People whose nationality was uncertain were tested in their ability to say "parsley" in Spanish; if they could not, they would be hacked to death with a machete.

Because of this, for many years there was sensitivity around speaking Spanish in Haiti, but gradually the wounds have healed. Many of the agronomists of the Papaye Peasant Movement (a partner spotlighted in Workshop 2) have been trained in Cuba, Mexico, or the Dominican Republic and have learned Spanish. After the earthquake, many Dominicans rushed to the aid of their Haitian neighbors. Reconciliation and forgiveness is happening.

Ask participants, "Do you see any connection between Haiti's languages issues and our issues in the United States?"

\*Much of the information in this section came from U.S. Department of State "Background Note: Haiti."

Take a few responses.

*Kreyol*, as we mentioned, is a mixture of several West African languages, such as Wolof, Fon, and Ewe, and French. Some *Kreyol* — and English — words came from the Taino, the first known inhabitants of the island. From the Taino, we have the words "tobacco" and "hammock."

In language, as in most aspects of Haitian culture, there exists a mixture of influences from indigenous people, the French and Spanish conquerors, and the slaves brought from West African countries, such as Ghana, Togo, Benin, Senegal, Nigeria, and Sierra-Leone. How does this parallel the language we speak as Americans?

What can be said, in summary, about how language reflects a country's culture? Take as many comments from the group as time allows.

## Children's activity: Haitian Culture (60 minutes)

### Objectives

Experience aspects of Haitian culture.

### Materials

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Computer with Internet access
- Optional: portable speakers
- The song "Activity" from *Many Hands: Family Music of Haiti* (It can be purchased from Amazon. You may use other music, if you like, but make sure it is suitable and performed and/or written by Haitian artists.)
- Art supplies, including paper, crayons, markers, and pencils
- Painter's tape to display the artwork
- Computer with Internet access, projector, and screen or UUSC's *Beyond the Mountain* DVD and television

### Preparation

Check your equipment.

### Introduction (10 minutes)

If appropriate, start the workshop with a simple chalice lighting the children know by heart.

Introduce the workshop by reminding participants that we are talking about UUSC's work with its partners in the country of Haiti.

Show a map of Haiti, either from UUSC's website or another source. Explain that Haiti makes up half of an island. The other half is the Dominican Republic. These are two separate countries, with different histories and separate cultures, though they also share some cultural similarities. Today, we will experience some of the culture of Haiti.

Ask if anyone can tell you what is meant when we talk about "culture." Affirm their answers that are not incorrect and give them the following definition: "Culture can be defined as the attitudes,



feelings, values, and behavior that characterize and inform society as a whole or any social group within it.”

This is not the only definition for culture, but it works for what we are discussing today. So this definition means there is an American culture, a Chinese culture, and a Haitian culture. But groups within the larger society have a culture, too. So within the United States, African Americans have a culture, Midwesterners have a culture, UUs have a culture — even your school has a culture! Sociologists talk about seven elements of a culture: social organization, form of government, economic system, customs and traditions, religion, language, and arts.

Tell the group that the workshop will explore a few of these elements in more depth than the others. Build upon what participants already know. When discussing the elements below, let participants supply any information they may have before telling them about each element. Write the elements on newsprint as you introduce them.

- **Social organization:** This refers to the structure of both family and society. Though extended families and tightly connected villages were once the norm in Haiti, most people now live in nuclear-family homes. Some extended families still live together, however. Since the earthquake, more households contain extended families out of necessity. The population is about 9,900,000. The majority of Haitians are rural farmers or peasants, as they prefer to be called. Though the country has many examples of extreme poverty, there are also business people, property owners, and wealthy Haitians.
- **Form of government:** Haiti is a republic, with executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The president is elected and the prime minister is appointed. The current president is Michel Martelly, who took office in May 2011. The country consists of 10 departments, which are like provinces.
- **Economic system:** Haiti is a capitalist country. The service industry and agriculture are their primary source of income, along with international aid. Haiti exports mangoes, leather goods, seafood, and some coffee and sugarcane.
- **Customs and traditions:** Too many to name, but one popular tradition is storytelling. Many people of African ancestry, including African Americans, are strong in the oral tradition. Passing along history, information, and culture orally was important because slaves were commonly not taught to read or write. Participants will hear a folktale from Haiti in the next activity.
- **Religion:** About half of the population is Catholic. Protestant religions are growing in popularity. Many residents also practice *voudou* (voodoo). It is not uncommon for people to practice both a Christian religion and *voudou*.
- **Language:** Haiti has two official languages: *Kreyol* (Creole) is spoken by everyone; about 10 percent of the population is fluent in French, the second language, which is typically used by the more elite sectors of the population. The adult literacy rate is about 56 percent.
- **Arts:** Art abounds in Haiti. Music and the visual arts are particularly popular. These will be explored more later in the workshop.\*

## Part 1: Storytelling (10 minutes)

Tell the group that a common tradition in Haiti, especially prevalent as entertainment in rural areas, is storytelling. When someone has a story to tell they say, “Krik.” If the audience wishes to hear the story, they reply, “KraK.”

Tell the following folktale from Haiti in your best storytelling style or invite a storyteller from the congregation to present the story.

Krik. [Wait for the response of “kraK” before proceeding.]

One day, a woman was walking to market. Upon her head, she carried a large calabash filled with sweet molasses, as she had turned all her sugar-cane crop into molasses to get a better price at market. As she walked, she was dreaming of what lovely things she would buy with the money from her sales, when she stumbled over a branch.

Crash! Down tumbled the gourd, which broke and spilled all her molasses upon the ground.

“Oh, no!” she cried. “What misery! Why did Papa God give me so much misery!” She ran home, in tears.

A monkey in a nearby tree overheard the woman. “What is misery?” he wondered. He jumped down to investigate the sticky mess she left in her wake. He dipped in a finger and brought the finger to his mouth. Mmm, this was delicious! Monkey had no idea misery tasted so swell. He ate more and more. The more he ate, the more he desired, until he had eaten the entire pot. Monkey thought the molasses was misery! Oh, Monkey loved misery! He must have more! He remembered that the woman said Papa God gave her the misery. Monkey ran off to the place where Papa God dwells.

“Papa God, why have you never given me any misery?”

“Haven’t I? I’m sure that I have,” replied Papa God.

“No, you have not, and I feel deprived. I beseech you! Please give me misery!”

“You want misery?”

“Yes! As much misery as you can dish out!”

“Are you sure it is misery that you want?”

“Oh, yes. I crave it. I must have misery of my very own.”

“Very well,” said Papa God. “Take the bag over there and walk until you come to a place with no trees. Then open the bag.” Monkey took the bag Papa God pointed to, squealed, “Thank you, Papa God!” and ran off.

“Remember,” shouted Papa God, “Do not open it until you are in a place where there is not a single tree.”

Monkey was anxious to have his misery, but he followed Papa God’s directions. He ran for a long time before reaching a big clearing, with no trees in sight. Then he opened his bag.

\*Much of the information in this section came from U.S. Department of State “Background Note: Haiti.”

To his great surprise and dismay, out jumped four large dogs. They were foaming at the mouth, and they looked hungry. They immediately started chasing Monkey. Poor Monkey ran away, with all the speed he could muster. He ran and ran until he was almost exhausted. "Surely the dogs will catch me and eat me!" He was in such misery.

Just then, a tree appeared. Monkey gratefully ran up the tree and stayed there until the hungry dogs grew tired and wandered off.

Who sent the tree? Why, Papa God, of course. Because even a monkey can only take so much misery.

Ask the following questions:

- What is the moral of this story?
- Is that moral only something meaningful to Haitians or is it meaningful for us, too?
- What in the folktale do you think of as pertaining to Haitian culture? [The sugar cane, women carrying goods on their heads, women selling produce at markets, Papa God, the humor, an attitude that bad times will not last forever.]

### Part 2: Music and dance (10 minutes)

Tell the group that they will hear an example of Haitian music. Play "Activity" by Bonga & the Vodou Drums of Haiti (or another song), if you desire. See the "Materials" section for more information. Invite the children to dance to the music if they like. Say that Haitian music is often very upbeat, with lots of percussion, and fun to dance to because the Haitians love to dance. If the group enjoys the dancing, play the song again and invite children to take turns choreographing dances to passages in the song.

### Part 3: Visual art (30 minutes)

Haiti is known for its distinctive visual art, including a painting style known as magic realism and metal art.

Access the "Haitian Art" PowerPoint presentation online at [uusc.org/beyondthemountain](http://uusc.org/beyondthemountain).

Haitian painting was labeled by the French as naive and primitive. Haitian painters at first accepted these labels, but have come to reject them as condescending. Now they recognize and honor an indigenous style of art that is all their own. Haitian painters today prefer to describe their art as magic realism, which they view as a more respectful and accurate term. Elements of the Haitian style of magic realism have their roots in the Taino, the native people who lived on the island before the European settlers.

The Taino felt a close connection to the earth. In the paintings of magic realism, nature is larger than life and depicted with brilliant colors and forms that reflect nature's vividness and energy. The magical landscape of Haitian landscapes comes alive and dances across the canvas. Common ingredients are mountains, villages, cultivated fields, jungles, banana plantations, tropical fruits, fertile fields, and spiritual beings. People are viewed as living in harmony with nature and as part of the greater web of existence, much like our seventh principle. This art is hopeful and visionary.

After sharing the above information, ask participants the following questions for discussion:

- What do you see in these works of art that you might see in Haiti?

- How do these paintings make you feel?

Let's make our own pictures in the style of magic realism. We will not copy the Haitian art. Instead we will draw from our own world. If you were going to draw the things in nature you love or the day-to-day activities that make you feel happy to be alive, what would you draw?

Brainstorm for a few minutes, then encourage children to create their own artwork, either separately or as part of a mural. Consider playing Haitian music in the background as they draw. Let this continue for 15 minutes before inviting them to share for 10 minutes. Ask them how they felt while creating the paintings. Say that joy and a love of life are just as much a part of the life of Haitians as it is for them.

Display the art.

If appropriate, extinguish the chalice together.

### Want to know more?



Read the following:

- APROSIFA's website
- An interview with Roseanne Auguste, one of the founders of APROSIFA, on the Ornamental Foxes website
- Information about Haitian music at Haitian Music Billboard and National Geographic World Music
- A CNN report "Haiti struggles to educate its children," which talks about issues in the educational system
- A Smithsonian article on the post-earthquake Haitian art market

Listen to the following:

- A UUSC conversation with Haitian author Edwidge Danticat
- *Many Hands*, a compilation album put together by children's music show Spare The Rock, Spoil The Child, to benefit victims of the 2010 Haiti earthquake (The song "Activity" used in the children's activity is from this compilation. Purchase the album, play it for your family, dance, and have fun!)



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## Handout: Culture Word Scramble

Unscramble these terms, often identified as the seven elements of every culture.

1. coslia zoationnirag
2. mofr fo germontevn
3. igoilern
4. star
5. cocomien stemys
6. ageuganl
7. muctoss dan tridionats