

On the Job: Looking at Work Culture

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There is mystery in every job, even those of students, whose jobs are to study and contribute to school, family, and community life. How do we learn the secrets of doing a good job at our work? Folklife! Occupational culture is one of the dynamic areas of Folklore Studies. By closely observing work spaces and interviewing people about their work culture, we make fascinating discoveries. A lot of the learning for any job is informal, picked up from others, repeated practice, and shared tricks of the trade. Here you will find a decoder to understand any job, the Occupational Culture Survey. During the global pandemic, many have lost their jobs or are working from home, while those who have essential jobs are still at work.

Supplies Pencil, paper, Occupational Culture Survey, Venn Diagram Worksheet

Directions

1. Brainstorm about the word “job.” Make a list of jobs, all kinds. Are there jobs you want to learn about? What jobs do people you know have? Choose someone to interview about their job in person, on the phone, or virtually. Option: Email or snail mail the survey for someone to complete and then have a conversation about their answers.
2. To prepare, study the Occupational Culture Survey. What questions are you most curious to ask? Let your interviewee know that you’ll be asking about work.
3. During the interview, take notes and ask follow-up questions. You may want to record the interview so that you can study responses. Interview others to compare different types of work.
4. What answers surprised you? Compile your findings by writing, drawing, or creating a webpage. Thank your interviewees and share your work with them.
5. Then and Now. The pandemic changed work globally. Use the Venn Diagram Worksheet to ask what is different and the same about work. In the first space on the left, list what is new. In the last space on the right, list what has gone away. In the middle space, list what is the same. Analyze your data and write your conclusions on the lines below the diagram.

Bonus Activities

- Learn lots more about occupational folklife in *Louisiana Voices* “The Worlds of Work and Play,” available in French. www.louisianavoices.org/Unit8/edu_unit8.html.
- Explore occupational folklife collections of the American Folklife Center. www.loc.gov/collections/occupational-folklife-project
- What job would like to have? Use the Occupational Folklife Survey to interview someone who has this job. Are you still interested?