

TIME ORIENTATION IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

[Here is some additional information in case you want to illustrate your students on the topic or you want to use it for some kind of activity].

Time holds different values and meanings in each culture.

Albert Einstein once wrote:

“People like us who believe in physics know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion. Time, in other words, he said, is an illusion.”

Many physicists since have shared this view, that true reality is timeless.

Some cultures, though, appear to have little or **no time orientation**, and tend to exhibit not so much a relaxed attitude to time as no attitude at all. The **Pirahã** tribe of the Amazon rainforest is often mentioned in this context. The Pirahã have an extremely limited language based on humming and whistling. They have no numbers, letters or art, no words for colours, no specific religious beliefs and no creation myth. They also appear to have no real concept of time. Their language has **no past tense**, and everything exists for them only in the present: when they can no longer perceive something, it effectively ceases to exist for them.

The peaceful **Hopi** tribe of Arizona, USA, as well as some other Native American tribes, also have a language that lacks verb tenses, and their language avoids all linear constructions in time. The closest the Hopi language comes to a sense of time are one word meaning “sooner” and another meaning “later”. The Hopi appear to have little or no sense of linear time as most of the Western world knows it, and it comes as no surprise to learn that their religious beliefs include a cyclic view of time, similar to ancient Hindu and Buddhist belief in the **“wheel of time”**.

Many primitive agricultural and **hunter-gatherer societies** have very different attitudes to time and work than the industrialized West. The **Kapauku** of Papua New Guinea, for example, do not like to work on two consecutive days. **The !Kung** bushmen of the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa work two-and-a-half days per week, typically six hours per day. In certain South Pacific islands, men typically work only four hours per day.

<http://www.exactlywhatistime.com/other-aspects-of-time/time-in-different-cultures/>

In a Buddhist culture (e.g., Thailand, Tibet), not only time but also life itself goes around in a circle. Whatever we plan, however we organize our particular world, generation follows generation; governments and rulers will succeed each other; crops will be harvested; monsoons, earthquakes and other catastrophes will recur; taxes will be

paid; the sun and moon will rise and set; stocks and shares will rise and fall. Even the Americans will not change such events, certainly not by rushing things.

In 2001 the government of **Nunavut** abandoned the efforts to operate the territory (which comprises one-fifth of the landmass of Canada) within a single time zone and returned to its previous three time zone arrangement. 85 % of the population is **Inuit**. Citizens of Nunavut resisted the project and several communities refused to comply. The result was that there was no single Nunavut time zone, and even within some individual communities there was no standard time. Objections to the single time zone ranged from difficulties created by having a different time from suppliers, business contacts and relatives outside of the territory to complaints that hunters found themselves working in less daylight and that children in some communities were forced to walk to and from school in the dark.