



The Myth of Pure Culture

Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

When you eat **tomatoes** in Italy, drink **coffee** in Japan, or add chili peppers to Thai food, you are tasting history. Each of these foods traveled thousands of miles before it arrived in your bowl. For most of human history, **civilizations** were **isolated** from each other — like separate islands in a vast ocean. This is one of the central arguments in Yuval Noah Harari's famous book, **Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind**. Harari argues that the concept of a "pure" culture or **ethnicity** is a modern **myth**.

Before 1492, the world was divided into what Harari calls distinct bubbles of civilization. The Americas had developed entirely separately from Europe and Asia for more than 10,000 years. **Indigenous** people in North and South America had never seen a horse. Europeans had never tasted a potato. Information and goods traveled slowly along **trade routes** like the Silk Road — connections that were real but extremely thin compared to today.

Everything changed with the **Columbian Exchange** — the massive **diffusion** of plants, animals, and diseases between the Old World and the Americas after 1492. Within a century, tomatoes became central to Italian cooking. Chili peppers transformed the cuisines of India, Thailand, and Korea. Horses returned to the Americas after a 10,000-year absence. And tragically, diseases like smallpox killed up to 90% of **indigenous** populations in some regions.

These facts reveal a surprising truth. Many things we consider **traditional** actually came from elsewhere. The potato — central to Irish identity until the great famine of the 1840s — came from Peru. Coffee, associated with Arab culture, is indigenous to Ethiopia. The Swiss make chocolate from cacao that only grows in tropical America. **Authenticity** does not require isolation from outside influence. Every culture is a mosaic of borrowed ingredients.

Harari's key concept here is what he calls an "**imagined order**" — a shared belief system that only exists because people believe in it. The idea of a pure, **unchanged** culture is one such imagined order. Every language, religion, food, and fashion style we have today is the result of centuries of borrowing, blending, and **convergence**. Rather than weakening cultures, this constant exchange is exactly what makes them rich.



A. Vocabulary Matching

1. **isolated**
 2. **indigenous**
 3. **diffusion**
 4. **myth**
 5. **imagined order**
- a. originally from a particular place; native to that region
 - b. cut off from contact with others; separated from the outside world
 - c. Harari's term for a shared belief system that exists only because people accept it as real
 - d. the spread of ideas, plants, or practices from one place to another
 - e. a widely believed idea that is actually false or misleading



B. True or False

1. T F Before 1492, the Americas were largely isolated from Europe and Asia.
2. T F Indigenous people in the Americas had domesticated horses before Columbus arrived.
3. T F The Columbian Exchange refers to a stock market in Colombia founded in 1492.
4. T F Chili peppers originally came from South America, not Asia.
5. T F The Irish potato that caused the Great Famine of the 1840s originally came from Peru.
6. T F Coffee is indigenous to Ethiopia.
7. T F Yuval Noah Harari wrote a book called Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.
8. T F According to the article, cultural authenticity requires isolation from outside influence.
9. T F An "imagined order" is a belief system that only exists because people collectively believe in it.



C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: isolated indigenous diffusion myth convergence

1. The idea that any culture is completely "pure" is a _____ — history shows all cultures borrow from others.

2. Before 1492, the Americas were largely _____ from the rest of the world for thousands of years.

3. Coffee, which is _____ to Ethiopia, is now enjoyed on every continent.

4. The _____ of chili peppers from the Americas transformed the cuisines of India, Thailand, and Korea.

5. The constant _____ of different cultural traditions over centuries is what makes cultures rich, not weak.

D. Comprehension Questions

1. According to Harari, what did the world look like before the age of exploration? Use your own words.

2. What was the Columbian Exchange? Name TWO specific examples of foods or animals that moved between the Old World and the Americas.

3. What does Harari mean by the phrase "imagined order"? How does this concept apply to the idea of cultural purity?

E. Discussion Questions

1. The article argues that cultural authenticity does not require isolation from other cultures. Do you agree? Can something borrowed from another culture still feel genuinely "yours"? Give an example.

2. Harari says we all live inside "imagined orders." What other ideas do we accept as natural that might actually be shared beliefs invented by society? (Examples could include money, borders, or social roles.)



Answer Key

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A. Vocabulary

1-b, 2-a, 3-d, 4-e, 5-c

B. True or False

1-T, 2-F, 3-F, 4-T, 5-T, 6-T, 7-T, 8-F, 9-T

C. Fill in the Blanks

1-myth, 2-isolated, 3-indigenous, 4-diffusion, 5-convergence

D. Comprehension Questions

1. Harari describes the ancient world as a series of isolated "bubbles" of civilization — distinct regions (the Americas, Europe, Asia, Oceania) that had little or no contact with each other. People in each region developed their own plants, animals, foods, and cultures independently.
2. The Columbian Exchange was the massive transfer of plants, animals, and diseases between the Americas and the Old World after 1492. Examples include: horses returning to the Americas (extinct there for 10,000 years) / tomatoes traveling from the Americas to become central to Italian cooking / chili peppers moving to Asia / diseases like smallpox killing indigenous populations.
3. An "imagined order" is Harari's term for a belief system that only exists and functions because large numbers of people accept it as real. The idea of cultural purity is an imagined order because, as the article shows, no culture has ever developed completely in isolation — all cultures are mixtures of borrowed elements that people have come to identify as uniquely "their own."