**Elements of Culture**

**Culture** is the total of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors shared by and passed on by the members of a specific group. Culture involves factors such as food and shelter, education, religion, security/protection, relationships with family members, and political and social systems. Below are 7 important elements that define a culture.

**Social Organization**

Social organization involves organizing people into small groups to meet basic needs. Family is the most important unit of social organization and it is through the family that children learn how they are expected to act and what to believe.

**Customs and Traditions**

Customs and traditions are the rules of behavior that enforce ideas of right and wrong. They can be customs, traditions, rules, or written laws. For example, Brazil has numerous traditions, from sports to dance. Capoeira, a Brazilian martial art, is based on self-defense practices created by African slaves. This art is practiced by many in Brazil as well as other countries.

**Religion**

An aspect of culture that has a great deal of influence on people’s lives is religion. Religionis the belief in a supernatural power or higher being. Religions establish beliefs and values that define how people worship the higher being and how they behave toward each other. Religions are mostly categorized as either **monotheistic,** which means belief in one god, or **polytheistic,** the belief in many gods.

**Language**

Language is the foundation of culture. Language is one of the most important aspects of culture because it allows the people within a culture to communicate with each other.

**Arts and Literature**

All cultures have ways of expressing themselves creatively. Cultures produce performing arts, visual arts, and literature. Performing arts created by a culture often include music, dance, theater, and film. Visual arts include architecture, painting, sculpture, and textiles. Oral and written literature, such as poems, folk tales, and stories, often show features of the culture such as attitudes, behaviors, and environment.

**Government Systems**

People form governments, or a society’s laws and political institutions, to provide for their common needs, keep order within society, and protect their society from outside threats. For example, the United States has a democratic form of government. A democratic government (or democracy) is a system of government in which power is given to the people who rule either directly or through elected representatives.

**Economic Systems**

An economic system describes how people use limited resources to satisfy their wants and needs and answers the basic economic questions:  what to produce, how to produce it, and for whom. There are 3 different types of economic systems:

* Traditional economy—people produce most of what they need to survive (hunting, gathering, farming, herding cattle, make own clothes/tools).
* Market Economy—buying and selling goods and services
* Command Economy—government controls what/how goods are produced and what they cost.   Individuals have little economic power

Reading adapted from *The Elements of Culture*, World History