

### IN CLASS SCAFFOLD EXERCISE/ACTIVITY: FIELDNOTE GUIDE

After showing a brief 3-minute video, you will be asked to write down your observations using this as a guide. I use this exercise to help prepare you for the observations you will make of a public event of your choice. First you will practice “field jottings” which are meant to be quick notes and key words. These are written quickly while in the field as you are doing your observations and are used later to help jog your memory as you write your “fieldnotes”. “Fieldnotes” are written at home with more details and descriptions.

#### Field Jottings worksheet (Written while observing – quick notes /key words to expand on later)

<p>1. <b>Time and Space:</b> Describe the season of the event and or the time of day in which the event takes place. Describe the space, such as the building or neighborhood in which the event takes place. (Date, Time, Location)</p>	
<p>2. <b>Language or Discourse:</b> Describe the language(s) at the event. (songs, the chants, or ritual statements, written documents). What did you hear?</p>	
<p>3. <b>Gestures or Body Language:</b> Describe the way people move at the event (Inc. dance).</p>	
<p>4. <b>Clothes or Body Ornaments:</b> Describe what people are wearing. What type of clothes (formal, informal),</p>	
<p>5. <b>Symbolism:</b> Each culture may have their own cultural symbols, and one way to find them is if you see them everywhere, over and over. Can you identify symbols in the display?          a. Repeated <b>Colors</b>          b. Repeated patterns or images</p>	
<p>6. <b>Material Objects:</b> What type of <i>things</i> do you see at the event? (food, tools, artwork, etc.)</p>	
<p>7. <b>Emotions:</b> Does the display depict a particular feeling or emotion? (happy, sad, scared, angry, etc.). How did you feel? How did the participants appear to be feeling?</p>	
<p>8. <b>Describe Microcultural factors:</b> Such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, religion. Consider general forms of identity (see below for more detailed explanation).</p>	
<p>9. <b>Explicit or Implicit Rules and Norms:</b> Are there official rules at the event? Perhaps there is an unstated moral code. Are there “taboos.”?</p>	

Key Verbatim Quotations (can expand on back of page):

Questions to clarify later:

Brainstorm ideas, creative insights:

### **FOR YOUR OBSERVATION PAPER:**

#### **1. Plan your visit:**

Before going to your chosen “fieldsite,” think about where it is located and how you will get there. Plan what you will use to document the information (a note pad, your phone, camera, etc.). This means making sure batteries are charged and that you have backup plans in case you cannot use your equipment. Try to pick an event where you can observe a group of people in person and that is of personal interest to yourself (a parade, a concert, a sporting event, a mass, a holiday event, etc.).

#### **2. How to Observe:**

Take a close look at the event you selected. This is the “scientific” section where you are looking to categorize, collect, and create data.

- a. **Look:** Take a look around -- look up, down, to the left and right, look at what is placed in front or back. Look around to see what other people are visiting this event today (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.). Look at the *space* in which the event takes place (the room, the building style, the neighborhood, etc.). Consider the *time* in which the event takes place (season, time of day, etc.)
- b. **Read:** Read things associated with the event such as signs, documents, flyers, books, or brochures. (You might want to take a photo of this with your phone to refer back to later).
- c. **Document:** Do a quick sketch of the figures and artifacts (on the back of this paper), and/or take a picture with your cell phone so you can refer back to the display later. (Make sure it is ethical to take any photographs, get informed consent, obey the rules of the venue).

#### **3. How to Describe (Note taking – “fieldjottings”):**

Make a note of particular topics (you can use the same worksheet above). This is the preliminary “narrative” section where you start to structure your data by seeing it in terms of particular themes or topics, such as:

- a. **Time and Space:** Describe the season of the event and or the time of day in which the event takes place. Describe the space, such as the building or neighborhood in which the event takes place.
- b. **Language or Discourse:** Describe the language(s) at the event. Language may be expressed in the songs, the chants, or ritual statements. There may be documents written in various languages. *Discourse* refers to forms of communication, but anthropologists are often interested in “patterns,” and what it can say about a culture. The manner and form in which people communicate could tell an underlying story such as show the way knowledge/information is constructed, and perhaps show underlying power inequalities. What did you hear?
- c. **Gestures or Body Language:** Describe the way people move in the event. This can be expressed in dance such as waving arms in the air or twirling around, or for example, when someone prays they might kneel on the ground.
- d. **Clothes or Body Ornaments:** Describe what people are wearing. What type of clothes (formal, informal), are they wearing costumes? What type of make-up or jewelry are they wearing?
- e. **Symbolism:** Each culture may have their own cultural symbols, and one way to find them is if you see them everywhere, over and over. Can you identify symbols in the display?
  - i. Repeated **Colors**
  - ii. Repeated patterns or images
- f. **Material Objects:** What type of *things* do you see at the event?
  - i. What type of food is at the event? Consider describing the texture, smell or taste of the food. Does the food inspire a personal memory?
  - ii. Tools, utensils, musical instruments, etc.
  - iii. Clothing or body ornaments/jewelry
  - iv. Statues, paintings, or other forms of artwork
  - v. *Consider the Shape and Form of the objects:* look at the texture of the item. Is it smooth or rough? What is the shape of the object? How does this impact your reaction to the material object?
- g. **Emotions:** Does the display depict a particular feeling or emotion? (happy, sad, scared, angry, etc.). How did you feel? How did the participants appear to be feeling?
- h. **Describe Microcultural factors:** Such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, class, religion. Consider general forms of identity:
  - i. **Gender** : Are there male or female figures? How are they positioned at the event? Perhaps there are items associated with gender – what kind of items and how are they displayed?
  - ii. **Race:** Though “race” may be defined in terms of biological differences (skin color, hair texture, genetics, etc.), anthropologists believe race is a social construct, and in many ways an event may mirror cultural interpretations of race. Do you observe the way race may be depicted in the event?
  - iii. **Ethnicity:** Ethnicity refers more to a particular cultural group with a common language/dialect, foods, a common history, a shared religious or moral background. How is ethnicity depicted at the event?
  - iv. **Age:** Are there different age groups at the event? Do they behave differently from one another? Are they separated from one another?
  - v. **Class:** Social class can be difficult to define, but it often refers to social divisions of peoples that can be based on income differences, educational differences, occupational differences. It can overlap with ethnic differences. Do you see indications of class differences in the display?

- vi. **Religion/Belief systems:** people may define themselves in terms of their religious beliefs, and/or cultural belief systems. Does the event reflect a particular form of religion? Perhaps it depicts a particular “world view”?
  - vii. **General Forms of Identity:** There are a variety of ways people create or express identity. As opposed to individual identity anthropologists are often more interested in group affiliations, the collective identity. “Identity” can take many forms (ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious identity, etc.). Is there a particular identity expressed in the event and why might this be important?
- i. **Explicit or Implicit Rules and Norms:** Are there official rules at the event? Perhaps there is an unstated moral code (implicit rules/norms). Are there “taboos.”?

⇒ WRITE: Use the above prompts for inspiration, but feel free to discuss other topics of interest. Write a brief description of what you saw (or type on your phone). I suggest you handwrite your description at the event while it is in front of you, and while it is fresh, but this should be retyped at home. These are your rough “fieldjottings” that will be cleaned up and further developed into fieldnotes for your observation description.

#### 4.How to Interpret (Note making- fieldnotes):

After you have had time to observe, and take notes of what you saw, you will need to interpret what you saw.

- a. First, what is your overall “gut” reaction to what you observed? How does it make you feel? Does it inspire any personal memories or experiences?
- b. Based on what you observed and described, how might you interpret what you saw? There are particular themes that anthropologists tend to focus on, such as power, symbolic connections, identity, or the silent gaps. Sometimes these topics may overlap. Can you interpret what you saw in terms of these themes?
  - i. **Power:** In what ways is power reflected in the display.
    - 1. Are certain figures (people) at the event more prominent than others? What gives you this impression?
    - 2. Think about the context in which this event takes place, for example, if you are observing an immigrant community, think about that it is taking place within New York City USA. Does the event mirror or reflect the tensions of a dominate culture and a possible oppressed culture?
    - 3. Are there symbolic indications of social inequities? (Class, gender, race, age, etc.). What gives you this impression?
  - ii. **Symbolic connections:** Sometimes rituals may serve to connect people together as a group. Do you see this event as a way for people to create social bonds with one another? Why would this be important? Does it reflect possible power inequities?
  - iii. **Expressions of Cultural Identity:** Related to symbolic connections, may be the ways in which groups assert their cultural identity and heritage. How does the event create this feeling of identity in terms of race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, etc.?
  - iv. **The silences:** What is missing or not visible at the event? Anthropologists are often interested in what is ignored or forgotten, and why this might have happened.
  - v. **Textual Analysis:** Think of the event as a kind of “text,” like a story from a book that can be analyzed. What is the “story” that the event is telling? Can you tell if there is a

biased perspective – for instance, who do you think “told” or arranged the story? (Male/female? Young/old? Class? Ethnicity? Etc.). Usually these events are arranged with a particular audience in mind – can you tell what audience this event was made for? Given your own background and perspective, do you believe you are part the target audience? Would you tell a different story?

⇒ WRITE FIELDNOTES: Use one or more of the above prompts (power, symbolic connections, cultural identity, silence, textual analysis) to write your overall interpretation of what you observed. Fieldnotes are written away from field/in private. Based on the rough field jottings, expand to write a full detailed narrative. The one-page sketch above may end up translating to 3- 10 typed written pages.

- Include a paragraph of self-reflection.
- Include a description of how the details that you find support or change your research argument.
- Write what new questions you would include the next time.

**Coding fieldnotes:** Anthropologists look for “cultural patterns,” which are cultural practices that seem to be regularly repeated. From these patterns, anthropologists try to understand what makes up a cultural group of people. While on the one hand, there is a range of diversity in any group of people, yet there are elements that can be associated with a particular culture or group. After reviewing your fieldnotes, to code them, look for cultural patterns or themes. Highlight key words or short phrases related to a theme. Typical themes might include:

- What people do.
- How do they do it.
- How do they understand what is going on (emic).
- How do I understand what is going on (etic)
- Create codes related patterns or themes that are repeated.
- Create codes related to your research or analysis interests (Gender, identity, etc.)

After coding your fieldnotes, write a description of your findings. Your short paper relies heavily on using your developed fieldnotes to describe your observations. Your final paper looks back at this material and picks a cultural pattern or theme to develop into a thesis.

Sources that might be helpful:

[http://www.gpgrieve.org/PDF/How\\_to\\_write\\_Field\\_Notes.pdf](http://www.gpgrieve.org/PDF/How_to_write_Field_Notes.pdf)

<https://anthroyogini.wordpress.com/2007/08/16/field-notes-what-how-why/>

<http://www.pacificdiscovery.org/credit/SEareadings/Robert%20et.al.%20-%20Writing%20Ethnographic%20Fieldnotes.pdf>