

The Nacirema

Learning Objective

To enhance cultural sensitivity and increase awareness of how individuals and their culture can be understood.

In the 1956 edition of *American Anthropologist* an article was written by Miner titled “Body Ritual among the Nacirema”, a tribe that Miner had observed. The article describes the magical beliefs and practices of this tribe in great detail and expresses concern about several slightly masochistic tendencies of this group of people. Some of the Nacirema customs include: scraping and lacerating the face or legs with a sharp instrument; piercing the skin with sharp instruments and then taking great care to keep the holes from closing again; ceremonial painting of the body; and insertion and ritualistic movement of a bundle of hog hairs in the mouth several times a day. The people of this tribe seek out the assistance of medicine men many times during the course of a year to treat physical ailments, release them from the power of devils that have lodged in their heads, and gouge holes in their teeth. The Nacirema gather in large numbers to watch clans within the tribe enact small battles, often with many physical injuries, and to observe individual tribal members fight to unconsciousness.

- List at least 10 adjectives to describe this tribe’s customs. How many were positive? Negative? Neutral?

- When you are a teacher, how would you deal with Nacirema children in your classroom who insisted on maintaining their tribal customs?