

Guided Reading Questions for Miner's "Body Ritual of the Nacirema".

Miner, Horace. 1956. "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema." In *American Anthropologist*, 58, no. 3: 503--507. American Anthropological Association.

1. According to Miner, what functional beliefs underlie Nacirema body rituals? (What are the purposes for them?)

The main belief behind the Nacirema body rituals is tradition and faith placed in various types of doctors. The purpose of the rituals is to preserve one's health, even as Miner describes them as backward and unorthodox.

2. Some would say that Miner's analysis exoticizes the Nacirema and makes them seem mysterious and irrational.
 - a. What in his writing does this?

Miner's wacky and elaborate descriptions of these activities (which he refers to as "rituals") are as far removed from the common interpretation of them as possible. For example, he refers to brushing one's teeth as "inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth" (504).

- b. Does presenting customs as "religion" rather than as "science" or "medicine" inevitably make them seem irrational to people in our own culture?

I do not believe so because religion is a part of American culture that many do not see as irrational.

3. Who are the Nacirema? When did you discover the joke? What point do you think Miner is trying to make in this article?

The Nacirema are the American people. I discovered the joke when Miner referred to George Washington's crossing of the "Pa-To-Mac" river and that "Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy" (503). I feel that Miner is trying to portray American culture in the way that non-Americans would view it by equating many activities with rituals. By commonly referencing tradition, he is trying to say that other cultures view American culture in a similar way that Americans view Native American culture.

4. Is Miner's interpretation of Nacirema body rituals ethnocentric ("The tendency to judge another culture by the standards of our own, and the belief that our own culture is superior to another culture" p. 55 in the textbook)? Why or why not?

I believe that Miner's interpretation of Nacirema is not ethnocentric because he is making a somewhat satirical point about American culture at the time.

5. This reading was originally published in 1956, so it is quite dated. If you were to write an updated version, what "body rituals" might you include? Why?

I would include phone and electronic usage as a body ritual. Although these are not technically part of the body, the phone is often attached to one's hand and many people literally cannot live without electronics as they would not be able to work or communicate.

Two pages double-spaced. Don't forget your name and to include page numbers.