

KULA RING REVIEW SESSION

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The purpose of this in-class exercise is to review course material and contents in preparation for an exam. It is based on the principles of the Trobriand “Kula Ring,” with necklaces moving clockwise and armbands moving counter-clockwise in a system of exchange. It can also be used solely to discuss the Kula Ring as a system of exchange and circulation of goods and ideas.

The exercise, as written below, will take about 60 minutes. It is best used in a class of 20 to 30 students, though it can accommodate more if there is room in your classroom for groups to congregate. Since the Kula Ring is traditionally taught in both four-field introductory anthropology and introductory cultural anthropology classes, both a review for an exam and a review of the Kula Ring can be done at the same time. The exercise can be modified to take a shorter (or longer) time as appropriate. One suggestion for shortening the time required is to assign students to bring a prepared exam question to class so that they do not have to spend time in class thinking of one. Another suggestion is to shorten the time given for each exchange – particularly after the first or second round, once students are familiar with the procedures.

Preparation

- Purchase enough necklaces and bracelets from your local Dollar Store so that each group has one to exchange.
- Divide the class into an even number of groups (up to 10 groups total; two to three in a group).
- Groups should be distributed in a circle around the room. Photocopy and pass out the “Necklace” and “Armband” question sheets (see Appendix A and B). Every other group in the circle should get a “Necklace” sheet; the others should get “Armbands” sheets.
- Each group must come up with an exam question from the course materials to be tested on in an upcoming exam. Give the students about 10 minutes to write out their question (or the students can be assigned to bring a question to class). Be sure to tell students to write a question in the style appropriate for your class.

Round 1 of the Kula

- After the questions are prepared, have the “Necklace” groups move clockwise in the circle to join the nearest “Armband” group.
- The students now have 5 to 10 minutes to physically exchange their Necklaces and Armbands (and information or a “story about them”). Adjust the time per question as appropriate. The Necklace group reads out their question. The group with the Armband answers the question, while the Necklace group writes down their answer in the first box under the question. After five

minutes, tell the students to “Switch.” The Armband group then reads their question, the Necklace group gives an answer, which the Armband group writes down.

- After ten minutes, the groups exchange their Necklaces and Armbands along with the question papers accompanying the exchange items. The Necklace groups go back to where they started.

Round 2 of the Kula

- Repeat the steps above, but note that since the groups who wrote “Necklaces” now physically have Armbands and *vice versa*, the groups that did not move in the last round will move in this round. Repeat all the steps in round 1 until the students are back to their original position.

Further Rounds of the Kula

- Continue to repeat until the Necklaces and Armbands along with the questions have gone all the way around (or earlier, depending on time available).
- After all rounds are completed, have the students review the “Necklaces” and “Armbands” question sheets they have in their possession. Call on groups to read the questions, answers, and discuss them with the entire class.

Note: In this exercise, similar to the real Kula Ring, groups interact only with those on either side of them. Groups on opposite sides of the room never interact directly. But they still interact indirectly in a larger system of (information) exchange. The necklaces and armbands circulate all the way around the room acquiring “stories” and value along the way.

APPENDIX A: NECKLACE QUESTION SHEET

NECKLACE # _____

QUESTION:

ANSWER 1.
ANSWER 2.
ANSWER 3.
ANSWER 4.
ANSWER 5.

APPENDIX B: ARMBAND QUESTION SHEET

ARMBAND # _____

QUESTION:

ANSWER 1.

ANSWER 2.

ANSWER 3.

ANSWER 4.

ANSWER 5.