

Introduction: What is culture?

We would not have society today as we know it without culture. Culture developed as early human beings began to share. Small, often related, groups of people started by sharing work that helped them survive. This shared work might have been hunting and gathering food, caring for the young and the impaired, crafting tools, or building shelters from the cold. This led to sharing words, plans, ideas, technology, habits, oral traditions, and spiritual beliefs—all which define culture. In their travels, these developing communities often confronted other groups with their own budding culture. The groups would have to find ways to relate to each other. Those that were successful developed the complex societies of advanced technology, art, doctrines, divisions of labor, knowledge, law, science, institutions, and healthcare that we know today across the world.

In the story, “Mammoth meat,” archaeologist Dr. Alice Kehoe uses evidence from a prehistoric site on Lake Michigan to speculate on the early culture of Paleoindians that lived 13,500 years ago. What aspects of culture do you see developing in this story?