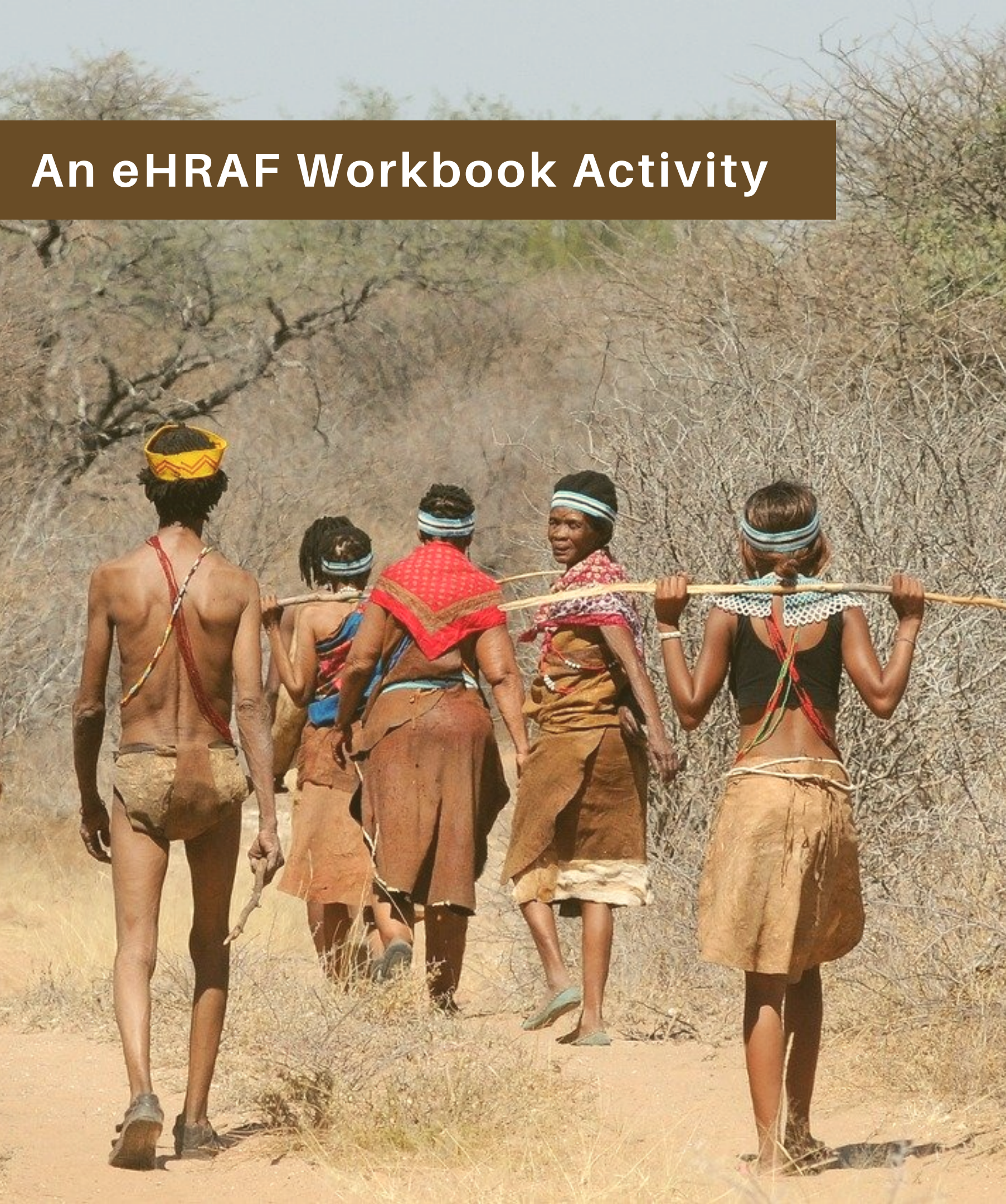


An eHRAF Workbook Activity



Hunter-Gatherer Societies

in eHRAF World Cultures

In this activity



Topics We'll Cover

- **Learn** about the hunter-gatherer way of life
- **Investigate and evaluate** cross-cultural findings
- **Compare and contrast** traits of hunter-gatherer societies
- **Analyze** your results



This workbook is based on the **Explaining Human Culture (EHC)** summary on **Hunter-Gatherers**

by Carol R. Ember

<https://hraf.yale.edu/ehc/summaries/hunter-gatherers>

You may wish to read the EHC summary to learn more about hunter-gatherers and foraging before you begin this activity. The data and cross-cultural research findings referenced throughout this workbook can be found there.



HUNTER-GATHERERS

How do foragers live?



Hunter-gatherers has become the commonly-used term for people who depend largely on food collection or **foraging for wild resources**.

The hunter-gatherer way of life is of great interest to anthropologists because of the widely held belief that knowledge of hunter-gatherer societies could open a window into understanding early human cultures since dependence on wild food resources was the way humans acquired food for the vast stretch of human history.

Foraging vs. Cultivation

Foraged wild resources are obtained by a variety of methods including gathering plants, collecting shellfish or other small fauna, hunting, scavenging, and fishing.

This is in contrast to food production, where people rely on cultivating domesticated plants and breeding and raising domesticated animals for food.



In fact, the term **hunter-gatherers** can be misleading. By emphasizing hunting, downplaying gathering, and entirely ignoring fishing, it obscures the reality that **fishing is the most common** subsistence activity in these societies, while hunting is less common.

Foragers is perhaps a fairer label, though “hunter-gatherers” is used more often.

A photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a green jacket, sitting in the driver's seat of a boat. The boat is on a body of water covered in ice and snow. In the background, there are rugged mountains with patches of snow under a clear blue sky. A dark brown rectangular box is overlaid on the image, containing the text "Did you know?".

Did you know?



Hunter-Gatherers

CROSS-CULTURALLY

questions and findings



Cross-Cultural Questions

Cross-cultural researchers focus on studying patterns across societies and try to answer questions such as:

- What are recent hunter-gatherers generally like?
- How do they differ from food producers?
- How do hunter-gatherer societies vary and what may explain their variability?

What can we infer about our distant ancestors by looking at well-known hunter-gatherer societies of recent times?

To draw reliable inferences about the distant past, we would need to believe that pockets of human society could exist unchanged over tens of thousands of years, and that hunter-gatherers did not learn, innovate, or adapt to changes in their natural and social environments over time.

Even a cursory look at the ethnographic record reveals that this is simply not the case.





Based on ethnographic data and cross-cultural comparisons, it is widely accepted that recent hunter-gatherer societies generally:

- are fully or semi-nomadic
- live in small communities with low population densities
- do not have political officials
- have little wealth differentiation
- are economically specialized only by age and gender
- divide labor by gender (with women gathering wild plants and men fishing and almost always doing the hunting)
- have animistic religions

The background of the entire image is a light-colored wooden surface with a vertical grain pattern. On the left side, there is a cluster of bright green, elongated leaves, possibly from a tulip or similar plant, arranged in a fan-like shape. A dark brown rectangular box is centered horizontally and partially overlaps the leaves on the left.

Hunter-Gatherers

WORKBOOK ACTIVITY

culture summaries



eHRAF World Cultures

Culture Summaries

A brief overview for societies in eHRAF World Cultures is provided in the form of **Culture Summaries**.

The format, general outline, and headings are the same for each summary. You will find a basic overview about the culture, such as its economy, history, environment and sociopolitical organization.

In this workbook activity, you will review culture summaries of hunter-gatherer societies to determine similarities, differences, or exceptions to common traits of foragers.

Read eHRAF Culture Summaries from 2-4 hunter-gatherer societies from this chart.

Based on the ethnographic data, report on how well the relevant aspects of these societies appear to align with the list of traits and patterns common to foragers presented above.

To find a culture summary, go to the **Browse Cultures** tab and enter the culture name into the box, then click on Culture Summary below the culture name to read it.

Workbook Activity

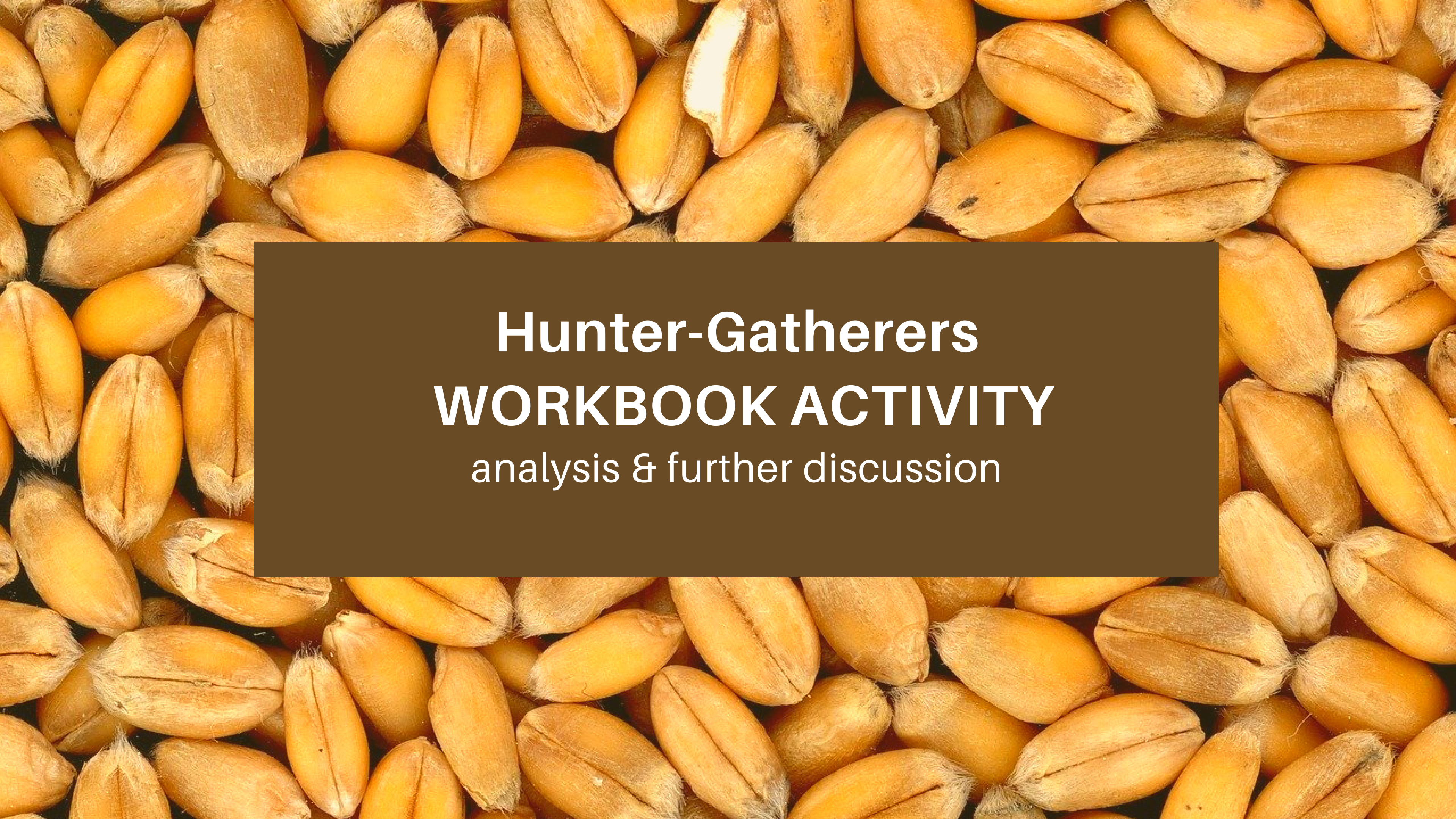
Culture Name	OWC	Subregion
Aranda	OI08	Australia
Blackfoot	NF06	Plains and Plateau
Bororo	SP08	Eastern South America
Copper Inuit	ND08	Arctic and Subarctic
Klamath	NR10	Plains and Plateau
Mbuti	FO04	Central Africa
Ojibwa	NG06	Arctic and Subarctic
Ona	SH04	Southern South America
Tlingit	NA12	Northwest Coast and California

Workbook Activity

While researching in the eHRAF Culture Summaries, use a table like the one below to keep track of your results. Then, write a summary of your findings. How many fit the model presented and how many do not? Have you found any other common traits?

Culture Name	Community Size?	Wealth Differentiation?	Division of Labor?	Nomadic?	...
Bororo					
Copper Inuit					
Klamath					
Mbuti					
Tlingit					
...					

Sample student data table



Hunter-Gatherers

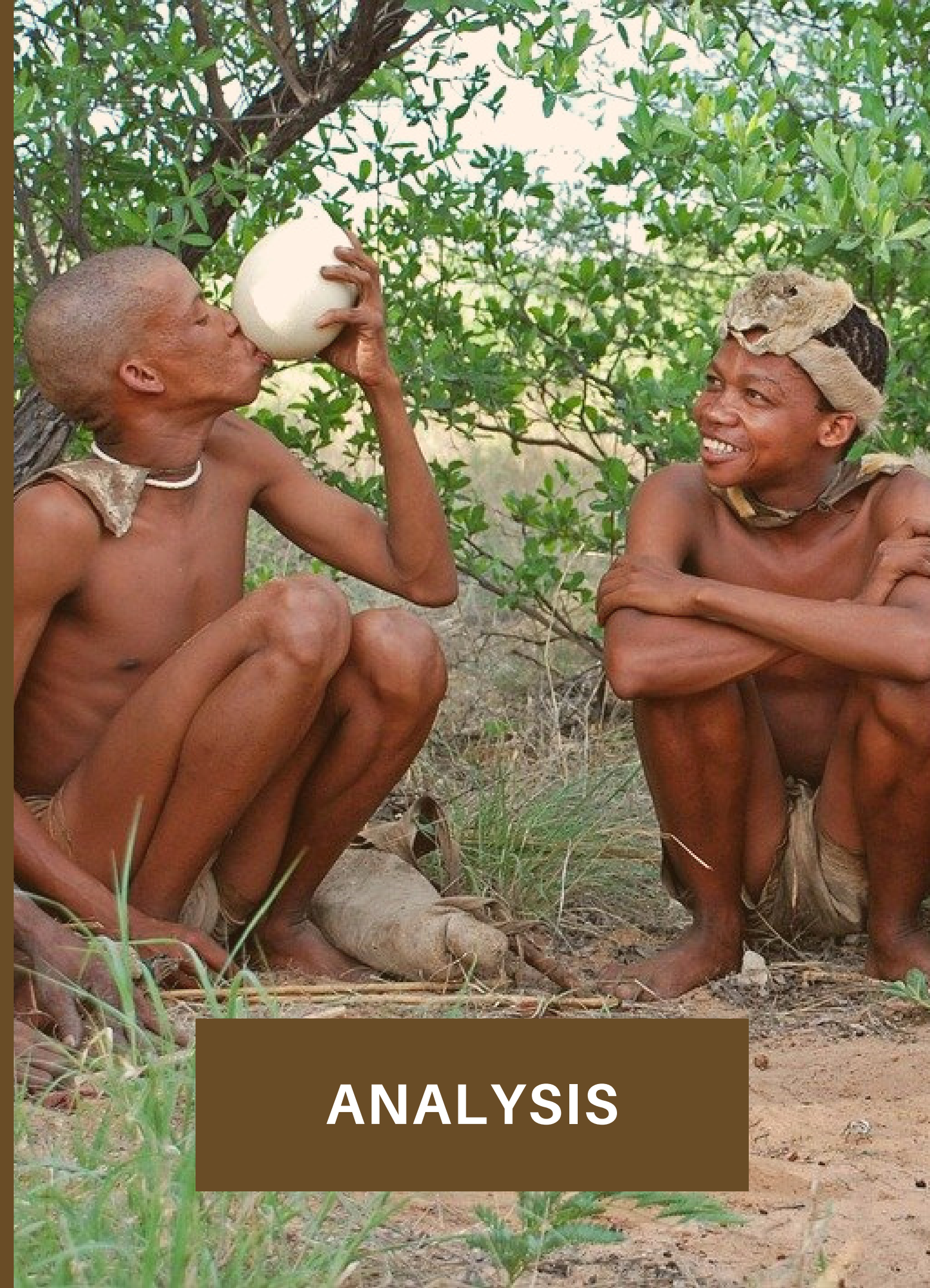
WORKBOOK ACTIVITY

analysis & further discussion

Exceptions to the Rule

Now that you have completed your research and table, reflect on the similarities and differences that you have recorded between the hunter-gatherer societies.

Do any of the cultures have traits that stand out as “exceptions” for hunter-gatherers?



ANALYSIS



DISCUSSION

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

- Most hunter-gatherers are egalitarian, can you find an example of a socially stratified forager society?

DIVISION OF LABOR BY GENDER

- Are there any hunter-gatherer societies where women do the hunting?

CHANGE IN THE ETHNOGRAPHIC RECORD

- Looking at historical and newer ethnographic data in eHRAF, can you find any examples of cultures where aspects of hunter-gatherer life or society have changed notably over time?

POPULATION DENSITY

- What conditions might result in a hunter-gatherer society that settles in larger populations with a higher density?

References

1. This activity was adapted in part from Hunter-Gatherers (Explaining Human Culture), by Carol R. Ember, in Teaching eHRAF. <https://hraf.yale.edu/teach-ehraf/hunter-gatherers-explaining-human-culture/>
2. Ember, Carol R. 2020. "Hunter-Gatherers", in C. R. Ember, ed. Explaining Human Culture. Human Relations Area Files, <http://hraf.yale.edu/ehc/summaries/hunter-gatherers>

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