

Excerpt from “The Culture of the Sherpas”

Archer, A. L., Gleason, M. M., & Vachon, V. (2017). *REWARDS plus: Reading and writing strategies applied to Social Studies text: 3rd Edition*. p. 78. Voyager Sopris, Dallas, TX.

The Culture of the Sherpas

Sherpas are an ethnic group of people best known for their climbing prowess and the extraordinary guidance they provide for mountaineering expeditions. Many Sherpas live in the Khumbu Valley, high in the Himalayan Mountains of Nepal. This valley is the southern gateway to Mt. Everest. But Sherpas have their own culture and customs apart from being mountaineering guides.

Language

Modern Sherpas have their own language, called Sherpa, which is related to the Tibetan language of their ancestors. Now that the Sherpas live in Nepal, most of them speak Nepali while interacting with non-Sherpas. Those Sherpas who work as mountaineering guides also learn one or more languages spoken by the climbers they support. The guides speak English, Japanese, German, or any number of other languages. Clearly, Sherpas have a talent for learning languages.

Food at 14,000 Feet

Traditionally, Sherpas have been animal herders and subsistence farmers. Sherpas herd yaks, which are large shaggy mammals similar to buffaloes. Sherpas drink the yak’s milk and make butter and cheese from it. The yak fur provides wool for clothing, the hide provides leather for shoes, and the dung (manure) provides fuel for cooking and fertilizer for agriculture.

Sherpas grow most of their food. Since the middle of the 19th century, potatoes have been their primary food staple. Other staples are barley, corn, rice, and beans. Sherpas start the day with potato pancakes covered with spicy cheese sauce, or a thick porridge of roasted barley flour mixed with tea or water. Lunch might consist of boiled potatoes dipped in spices that are sometimes made into a soup. Frequently, a baked flatbread accompanies the meal. For dinner, they might mix potatoes or noodles with vegetables and spices and sometimes meat to form a stew. A lentil and rice stew, also combined with spices, is another traditional meal. Sherpas drink lots of Tibetan tea, which they make from black tea, butter, salt and sometimes milk.