

Culture Shock

A discussion activity that helps students share and analyze their culture in concrete ways. This simple activity uses culture as a ready-made source of content to help students meet other cultures and break down stereotypes. It also gives them a more subtle understanding of culture.

For this activity, the teacher prepares a list of behaviors such as:

In my culture it is rude/polite/strange/normal to:

- 1) Spit in public
- 2) Give up your seat to someone on the bus
- 3) Disagree with people older than me or in positions of power over me
- 4) Hold the door for women
- 5) Shake hands with a stranger
- 6) Ask someone what their religion is.

Students are placed in small groups as mixed as possible by nationality, ethnicity, gender and age. They should discuss the prompts—are these activities or behaviors Rude? Polite? Strange? Normal? As the teacher monitors he/she can prompt the students to think about different contexts as well.

Note that the list can easily be designed to target a particular thematic unit such as behavior at a hotel, or a particular set of vocabulary. It can include stereotypes for students to discuss or contain some of the most common differences between American culture and the students' home cultures.

While this activity works best in a diverse classroom, even students from similar backgrounds will often find regional, family, or personal differences.

Use your own language!

Speak English! Speak English! English only! How many times a day do students hear this?

For this activity, students think of a word from their own language and write it down on a piece of paper.

사과

On the back, they will write a sentence in English (except for their word) that includes some context clues about the word.

I picked a bright, red 사과 from the tree and ate it.

Students then pair up with a student who speaks another native language and trade papers. Using context clues, students should figure out the part of speech and then figure out the word.

This activity works great for

- Using context clues
- Vocabulary review
- Parts of speech

To adapt this for higher levels, you can obviously require more difficult vocabulary, require certain parts of speech, or only abstract words. This activity can be expanded into a warm-up for

- Extended definition strategies (LS module 2)
- Definition Essays
- Descriptive strategies and essays

This is not a new idea. It's basically a variation of the game Taboo. But when students are told they can use their own language, and then get to share their language and alphabet with someone else, they seem to get a sense of pride and empowerment, which is what we want.