

Embedding Culture Into World Language Instruction

Guiding Questions

- What is culture?
- Why is it important to embed culture in the second language classroom?
- How might the cultural triangle from the National Standards for Foreign Language help us to better understand and teach the relationships between the products, practices, and perspectives inherent in a given culture or a specific community within the target culture? [Annenberg - El triángulo cultural](#)
- How might teachers use the National Standards to design opportunities for students to experience and explore culture in meaningful ways?
- How might teachers guard against reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices when teaching culture?
- How might teachers assist students in recognizing the diversity that exists within the target culture (i.e., avoid overgeneralizations)?

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Principles

Activate Prior Knowledge & Experiences - Build on what students already know about their own culture to help them understand cultural ideas and practices that are new to them. Start locally and then build (i.e., self, families, communities, nations). Teach them that they have a culture (i.e., how would they respond to the idea of eating chicken soup on Thanksgiving?)

- [101 Characteristics of Americans/American Culture](#)

Allow the Culture to Speak for Itself –

- **Interaction/Participation** - Provide students with multiple opportunities to interact with the target culture (through exposure to culturally authentic artifacts and materials, native speakers, opportunities to view and participate in culturally authentic practices, community events, etc.).
- **Evaluation** - Assist students in evaluating the accuracy, authenticity, authority, credibility, and coverage of the cultural information they encounter.
- **Interpretation** - Teach students to generate a variety of alternative hypotheses about the meaning of the cultural information they encounter and to base their final interpretations on sound reasoning and evidence (as opposed to emotional reactions or hearsay).
 - [Civilisation Français](#)
 - [Taller Hispano](#)
- **Avoid Stereotypes**- Purposefully provide counterexamples to stereotypes and over-generalizations. Try to avoid absolutes (i.e. "All French people . . ."), "othering" (objectifying the other culture or separating "US" from "THEM," often with the intent to criticize or pass value judgments), "exoticizing" (i.e., emphasizing only what grabs attention or will be perceived as strange or weird by students), "trivializing" (i.e., presenting only what is quaint or silly) or "political bias." You can "type" without "stereotyping."
 - [Amish Paradise](#)

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- **Compare, Don't Just Contrast** - Present both similarities and differences between the target culture and the dominant culture of your students (i.e., refrain from "othering" the target culture by emphasizing solely the differences).
 - [American Culture & American Diversity](#) (See pp. 41-56 for great activities that help students explore cultural perspectives)
 - [Cultural Venn Diagram](#)
 - [Pre-departure Orientation for Chinese Students \(Chart\)](#)
- **Critically Evaluate Texts** - Consider the cultural content (or lack thereof) embedded in the texts you choose to use
- **Elicit & Challenge Incomplete or Mistaken Information**- Uncover students' mental models about culture by giving them opportunities to talk about their own culture. Address their misconceptions respectfully. Offer students multiple examples/representations of the phenomena under study so they can see the diversity that exists within the target culture. Be sure to address both "big C and little c" culture.
 - [Barbara Snyder's Culture Clashes](#)
 - We & They by Rudyard Kipling ([Poem](#), [YouTube Reading](#))
- **Embed Culture in EVERY Activity**
 - Cultural Circumlocution Pairs
 - Culturally Authentic Realia Mixer
 - Culture Hear-Circle Arabic ST
 - Culture Capsule Rubric Template
 - Examining Foreign Currency
 - The Scoop on School
 - Listening Grid Activities
- **Frame the Culture Positively** - Encourage students to avoid value judgments (i.e., "different," not "better," "worse," "stupid," or "weird"). Speak about the culture as though a native speaker were standing in the room--honestly, openly, but respectfully.
- **Highlight Connections & Relationships** - Focus on the *relationships* between products, practices, and perspectives in the target culture rather than considering each one separately and in isolation.
- **"Make the Familiar Strange"** - Encourage students to examine their own culture from the perspective of an "outsider."

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- **"Normalize" the Target Culture** - Use culturally authentic images and materials on a regular basis. Try not to "frame" or "teach" the culture as something that needs to be separated or "pulled out" each time (from Deanna Mihalyi)
- **Prioritize Perspectives**- Encourage students to examine how the beliefs, values, historical events, and physical conditions of the culture influence the logic behind what and how people do things.
 - [American Culture & American Diversity](#) (See pp. 41-56 for great activities that help students explore cultural perspectives)