

Teaching Culture!



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Name of activity: True or False?

Type of activity: Discussion

Topic: Stereotypes, cultural knowledge / awareness

Material: Copies of the text, whiteboard and pens.

(Due to the nature of the class, an interactive and practical second language class, the way we distribute the space in the classroom is essential. These classes are usually taught with tables arranged in a U or in a square so that everybody can see everybody's faces, work in pairs and groups easily, and also the teacher has their seat among the students. These arrangements also make it easier for the teacher to attend the students.)

Number of learners: At least 6 students. They will work in pairs or small groups.

Language level: From A2 till C2

Time: 45 minutes aprox

Goal: At the end of the activity, the learners will be more aware of the culture they are studying: habits, customs and behaviours. They will also express the differences they find with the cultures they come from, so they will need to share that information with the rest of the group.

Possible challenges: It is necessary to have a group of students used to work with Communicative activities so that they participate and nourish the discussion. Stereotypes that the students have about other countries and cultures might show up easily. It is important that the teacher does not have an ethnocentric behaviour: after expounding the national culture topic, the teacher has to give room to the rest of the cultures the students may talk about. It is not an exercise to judge, but an exercise to learn.

Preparation: A text with 10 short stories that face some cultural aspects of the country /countries where the language the students are studying is spoken.

For instance, one of the short texts could be:

"You enter a café-bar in Spain. All the tables are taken. You decide to sit in a table with a group of people you do not know, but there are some free chairs, so you go and share the same table. You can see people eating peanuts and olives and throwing the shells and pits to the floor..." *Question: May this happen in Spain?*

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Procedure:

1. We divide the class into pairs or small work-groups
2. We explain the activity
3. We hand out the texts, one per pair
4. One of the groups or pairs reads the first short story
5. The teacher checks that everybody has understood and is following the exercise. The students can ask whatever they need clarification about.
6. Now, all of them have to come up with an answer: is it a possible situation in Spain? They have to explain why they think so.
7. After some discussion, the teacher gives the answer: it is true or false, and gives a short cultural or historical explanation.
8. The teacher asks the students how they would proceed in their cultures or how would this situation happen in their countries. They students then need to share that information with the rest of the group. If the group is monolingual, they all will add some information about the same topic, but if the group is multilingual (as it usually happens in immersion learning environments) the discussion will be livelier and will motivate students to ask their class-mates from other countries.
9. Next short story and repetition of the process.
10. Teacher and students: Shared evaluation of the activity. What have they learned? Was it fun and interesting/motivating? What questions do they have or what language aspects they need feedback about...?

Follow up: Roll-play activity where the students can perform the short stories themselves.

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