

## Spotlight on Culture and Interculture in the ESL Classroom

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#### Introduction

The aim of this article is to show how culture can attract the attention of even those students who have a complete lack of motivation, and to propose some classroom activities, with subject matters ranging from geography to food.

#### Intercultural Competence

Before beginning, it is worth pausing to consider that culture can be studied from various viewpoints: *own culture*, *target culture* and *interculture* (Aarup, 1995). Undoubtedly, it is of vital importance to know our *own culture* and how it can be used in the EFL classroom as a source of material. The study of the *target culture* is classic in language teaching, and its effectiveness depends on students' attitude towards the foreign culture, topics covered in the classroom, and design of pedagogical activities. Finally, the third term to consider is *interculture*. Within the communicative environment of the classroom, we teachers tend to center our attention on linguistic aspects, brushing cultural issues aside. We ourselves can provide a contrastive analysis between the students' own culture and the target culture. The objectives of doing such an analysis are to create interest in and respect for both cultures, to learn about another culture, and to help students know how they can behave properly in intercultural situations, in order to avoid misunderstanding and even reduce the effects of cultural shock.

#### Activities

The following activities are aimed at introducing culture in the classroom in a fun and interactive way. They were used with E.S.O. (Obligatory Secondary Education) and Bachillerato (Post-Secondary Education) students.

#### Geography

This activity deals with two topics that have awakened the curiosity of many teachers during recent years: *team teaching work* and *English across the curriculum*, also known as *Crosscurricular English*.

#### -Objectives :

- To locate English speaking countries and their capital cities
- To recognise flags and learn about their design
- To learn the symbols that stand for each country
- To develop a critical attitude towards stereotypes and prejudices against FL culture

*-Material:* world map, photocopies, coloured pencils, scissors and glue.

*-Procedure:* Using a world map, each student matches the labels (country – capital city), flags and symbols with the country they belong to. At this point it is worth mentioning that the teacher should include the name and capital city of the country the students come from in order to contrast what they know (own country) with what they do not know (foreign countries). The rationale behind this is *interculture*.

THE U.S.A	Madrid
Ottawa	AUSTRALIA
SPAIN	Dublin
NEW ZEALAND	THE U.K.
Canberra	Wellington
IRELAND	Washington D.C.
London	CANADA

Let them draw and colour the flags. Invite them to think about the symbol that stands for their country and the results will be startling. According to my students, the symbols that represent Spain are the following: a black bull, a

bullfighter, a guitar, a bottle of sherry, a flamenco dress, a Spanish omelette, the sun, and, last but not least, the Alhambra!

### Symbols

Symbol	Country	Drawing
Shamrock		
Bald eagle		
Maple leaf		
Lion		
Kangaroo		
Kiwi bird		
	Spain	

KEY: Shamrock > Ireland / Bald eagle > The USA / Maple leaf > Canada / Lion > The UK / Kangaroo > Australia / Kiwi bird > New Zealand

### In a Pub

*-Objectives:*

- To learn vocabulary that belongs to the lexical field of food and know the traditional dishes of each country
- To be aware of the differences between a British pub and a Spanish one
- To contrast different devices for socially appropriate communicative interaction

*-Material:* menu, realia (plastic bottles, glasses, cloth, coins, bell) and classroom furniture

*-Procedure:* This activity consists of a recreation of a British pub where food from different English speaking countries is served.

Arrange the class into groups of four students. Three of them are the customers and the other one is the barman/barmaid. In addition, teacher participation is also required as s/he will be the owner of the pub.

Each group has a photocopy of a menu and students decide what they are going to have. After that, one of them will go to the bar to order food and drink from the barman/barmaid. The latter should serve drinks and food, give the bill to customers, manage money and change, say the typical “*Last orders!*” ten minutes before closing time and clean the bar! On the other hand, the only sentence the teacher, as owner of the pub, says is: “*Time, ladies and gentlemen!*”

This task gives way to a relaxed atmosphere because students enjoy themselves. It is an unusual way of doing a role-play, but it works and students deal not only with language but also with culture.

### Ghostly Manifestations

*-Objectives:*

- To read foreign language texts in an autonomous way and be conscious of the great amount of information that can be acquired/learned by means of written texts.
- To be able to express oneself with accuracy and fluency.
- To promote interest in the target culture
- To contrast Spanish folklore and target folklore (traditional stories, fairy tales and urban legends).

*-Material:* photocopy and photographs/pictures

*-Procedure:* This activity comprises three short, amazing stories. They deal with ghosts and mysterious creatures, themes that are of interest for teenagers. They usually think this topic is rather exciting and are keen to learn more about it.

#### Story 1 *The Grey Lady* (80 words)

Hello, my name is Janet and I live in Glamis Castle (Scotland). This is a beautiful place with more than a hundred rooms and some of them are secret.

James the Fifth of Scotland hated me because I belonged to an enemy clan. He said I was a witch who wanted to poison him but it was not true. He sent me to prison and finally burned me at the stake. I still walk the floors and the clock tower! (Adapted from Sinclair, 1997)

#### Story 2 *Robert Louis Stevenson’s Museum* (44 words)

The famous writer Robert Louis Stevenson had a home in Monterey, California. Today it is a museum and some visitors say there is a ghost there: an old lady with a long, black dress. She likes walking around the museum where there are visitors! (Adapted from Reinhart, 1998)

**Story 3 *The Truth Is Out There* (87 words)**

Cryptozoology is the study of mysterious creatures. Have you ever seen the series *The X-Files*? Some episodes are based on these hidden animals such as a Bigfoot or a serpent-like monster like Nessie. Do not discard discoveries of previously unknown living animals. What about the recent discoveries of the megamouth shark, the giant muntjac (barking deer), or the African okapi that seems to be a mixture of giraffe and zebra?. Open your mind because the truth is out there!

After reading the stories, students should answer a series of open questions in which they will show their ability to express themselves in writing.

- A) Which is the most amazing story? Give reasons.
- B) Which ghost or mysterious creature would you like to see? Why?
- C) Do you know any story about ghosts or strange creatures in your city/village?

**Story 4 *A Native Australian Story* (107 words)**

*A Native Story* is a traditional Australian story in which the leading role is played by an aborigine girl called Oolana. It will be enjoyed by students as they only have to circle the ending they consider to be the correct one.

Oolana, a beautiful aborigine girl was betrothed to Waroonoo, but she was in love with Dyga. The two lovers ran away but the tribespeople chased them and forced them to return.....

- A) Both decided to drown themselves in a deep river. Today, travellers still see the lovers swimming together and kissing each other.
- B) Oolana threw herself into a gorge rather than marry Waroonoo. Today, travellers still hear the woman's voice calling out at night, extending her hand and pulling people underwater.
- C) Oolana arrived at home, married Waroonoo and poisoned herself that night. Today the woman appears from nowhere to young couples advising them to marry the man/woman they love.

KEY: C) This exercise encourages students to choose what they believe to be the best answer and justify their choices orally, often leading to disagreement and debate.

**Way of life**

*-Objectives:*

- To know the main sociocultural aspects that belong to the language they are studying
- To achieve better comprehension of another culture.
- To learn how to fill out a form (authentic material)
- To attract students' attention in a powerful way.

*-Material:* photocopy

*-Procedure:* In order to avoid the traditional activity "Fill in a check", give your students documents, certificates, etc., that arouse their curiosity and interest such as a TV license. Spaniards will be surprised and shocked because it is not necessary to fill this form in Spain in order to have a TV set or video recorder at home.

<b>TV LICENSE</b>	
Name: _____ Surname: _____	
Address: _____ Post code: _____	
City/Town: _____	
This license is for a ( please tick ? ) ? Black and white TV set *	
? Colour TV set	
* If you want a black and white license, please sign the declaration below	
<b>DECLARATION</b>	
(Please sign this if you are buying a b / w license)	
I declare that I do not own or use a colour TV set or videocassette recorder at the address shown above.	
Signed _____	Date _____

## Play with Your Name

-Objectives :

- To activate schemata (activate previous knowledge to prepare for new knowledge)
- To be aware of the cultural background of the foreign culture.

-Material: sheet of paper.

-Procedure: Give a sheet of paper to the students. They should write their name downwards, vertically. After that, ask them to look for two or more words starting with each letter. The words should be related to *culture*, i.e., food, geography, festivals, monuments, celebrities, etc.

Muffin / Mayflower / MoMa / Maple Opera House / Ottawa Nessie / New York / Notting Hill Carnival Thames / Thanksgiving Day / Twinings Saint Patrick's Day / Statue of Liberty Easter Bunny / Everglades / Egg cream	Pretzel / Pumpkin / Pound / Pier 17 / Platypus ATM (Automated Teller Machine) / Aotearoa Burns Night / Bagel / Broadway / Beefeater Loch Ness / Little Italy / Luther King / Leek Over easy egg / Old Curiosity Shop
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The multiple possibilities of this activity are worth mentioning here as it can be used as a simple activity, a test or a game (randomly the teacher writes a name on the blackboard and students compete in groups).

## Conclusion

One of the natural qualities of human beings is curiosity. This desire leads us to be eager to know about things and to learn as much as possible about them. We teachers can take advantage not only of *Nobrow culture* (High arts and popular culture) (Keller, 2000) but also of *interculture*. This implies a double effort, as well as a double reward, as students can show what they know and even learn things about their own culture in order to contrast it with the target one.

## References

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