

Teaching Real Culture Session A, #8

Here are a few examples of daily culture across languages and regions. I use these in 10-minute video lessons that I create for K-8 around the country and also for home subscriptions. There's no end to the list of things you can do. No need to major on holidays. A year has 365 days of daily life. Favorable response to this kind of instruction if very strong.

1. Bananas. The history behind this fruit is both fun and violent. Nowadays there are some unusual dishes on Central American menus, like chicken and bananas. Note the history behind other food staples of any region.
2. Slang and sloppy speech. Much of our pronunciation, words and phrases are a matter of culture. Take a close look at how we talk, and you'll have a hard time finding actual words. They are blurred in successions of indistinct speech, very different from the nice, clean words we learn in language classes at school.
3. Immigration policy can cause unexpected complications for people who try to skirt it. Most citizens are not aware of the stipulations, and neither are many immigrants, both documented and undocumented. One example involves the current law that says that anyone who has been here illegally for more than one year, and who leaves the country, cannot return for ten years. So people who return to bury or visit a loved one have very, very complicated decisions.
4. Geography. Where in the world is Belize? Where is Armenia? If you planned a trip, which countries would you pass through or come near while going and coming in your car—and which ones if you flew? How would this affect your itinerary?
5. Geography. How long can it take to get from point A to point B in regions where most roads are unpaved? And then how about if it rains and the hillsides slip onto the roads?
6. Coyotes. These are human smugglers. Some are nice and some are mean. They bring people into a country through all sorts of crazy means, some quite risky and innovative.
7. Marrying someone from another country. A girl from the U.S. marries a guy in Mexico. Then she can't get him across the border on their timeline. Looking back, they should've followed the proper procedures. Meanwhile, the wife moves here and keeps her husband in touch with their baby by means of a webcam.
8. An unAmerican accent. Millions of U.S. citizens have accents that sound "unAmerican". And millions of these people have ancestors who were here before native-born citizens' grandparents were here.
9. Cross-cultural communication. A specialist in this area gives lots of examples of how people from around the world misunderstand each other because they don't understand typical behaviors and assumptions. A Japanese guest needs to understand why he cannot jump out of his car when a U.S. police officer pulls him over.

10. Driving. It's very important to drive by the rules and weather conditions when in another country.
11. Trips abroad. More and more college students are spending course time in other countries. Whether it's in Egypt or Canada, share the experiences with students of any language.
12. Hosting foreign guests. A man and woman open their home to guests from many countries and learn how to look at life and at the U.S. in a broader way without losing any patriotism.
13. Authentic cuisine. A Chinese waitress looks at the buffet and notes that the food is not actually Chinese, even though the Americans think they're eating what the people in China eat. Same with our "authentic" Mexican restaurants, most of which are delicious Tex-Mex.
14. Mexican Day of the Dead. A sacred cow in U.S. schools. This holiday is ridiculously commercialized in supply catalogs and is touted as the heart of Hispanic culture. Most Hispanics don't do this holiday, and most immigrants from Mexico do not keep it. Still, it's a very interesting festival with many different versions of theology and perspective. (We just need not to major on it. Teachers and students have a high interest in the many other topics.)
15. Tortilla. It's both a plate and a food. Some people still make these by hand. What a workout.
16. You and you. People around the world have different ways of saying "you". It's good to know the differences and occasions.
17. The musical scale. What the notes are called (and the scale itself) is an interesting issue from place to place.
18. Cinco de Mayo. Mexicans tell of their surprise that nonHispanic citizens here make such a big deal out of a day that hardly any of them celebrate back in the homeland. How has this day become so prevalent in school language culture here in the U.S.?
19. Respect. It's amazing how a situation can be turned around immediately from clash to cooperation when we respect people from other countries. For example, police can get to the bottom of a problem in a hurry when they exhibit trust to people whom they apprehend or question. We would like the same understanding when we move about in another country.
20. Songs. Try translating a song from one language to another. It can be a tough challenge to preserve the original meaning and rhythm. All kinds of linguistic and cultural things figure in.
21. Pumpkins. How come we have so many words for squash? How come everybody else doesn't? How come a pumpkin is just a squash to most people of other languages?
22. Lost language. At a big bicycle event, a man from Peru and his son are on a tandem. The son, at eight years of age or so, has already decided he doesn't want to speak his father's first language. Yet the kid understands Spanish perfectly. This is common. And some countries, such as India and Mexico, have hundreds of indigenous languages. Where do these go? How are they lost and how hard is it to keep them alive?

23. How much language? How much of a language do you really need to know? Maybe you only need what you actually need to get along effectively in the circles where the language operates.
24. Zum-Zum. There are many ways to say "hummingbird". This tiny nectar sipper or flower sucker or zoomer or, well, anyway, it sure flies a long way to return to Caribbean and other nations.
25. Food expectations. What can you expect to eat when you go to another country? Or from one region of it to another? Will you find your corn flakes and cold milk? How about ice cubes? A Hostess cupcake? Fresh, clean lettuce?
26. Ways to say foods. A Cuban is hungry. His host, from Mexico City, offers to make him a tostado. The Cuban says by no means. They misunderstand each other. Is it toast or a more complicated type of food? Same with some other food around the world. You want bread? Or rice? It can come with surprises. That's what make travel fun! Be a good sport.
27. Christmas "Day". When to open those stocking? The German says it's Dec. 6, a person from another country says it's Dec. 25, and a person from another country says it's Jan. 6. Hey, how about stuffing those stockings three times!
28. Looking for ancestry. Why didn't my mother speak German and pass it on to me? Why doesn't my aunt still speak Italian? Why doesn't my friend still speak Spanish? People are "encouraged" to lose a language, and then they later yearn for the language and to know more about where they came from.
29. Displays of affection. Easy does it. Maybe you do or don't want a hug, and maybe they do or don't. And a kiss on the cheek or to the air? Know the way it goes wherever you go.
30. Pets. What is exotic to us may be typical to someone else. An alpaca makes a pretty nice pet in some ways, although you probably won't get as cuddly with its cousin, the llama.
31. Love or like. How do we say these words in other languages? Love and like have many distinctive meanings. It's not just about the words; it's a way of thinking. I love you. I like her. I love potatoes. I love it. I love soccer. I like the way you sing. How do we put "love" and "like" on a greeting card?
32. Musical band. Watch a band, such as mariachis, and notice how everyone isn't playing like a rock star. Put on the music and have several students at a time play along on simple percussive instruments. Good stuff.

I'm so sorry I veered off course during my presentation. Some disturbing things commandeered my brain in another direction. So sorry! - mtr mtrex@earthlink.net