



Cultural Onions

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1. Overview and Objectives

Activity Overview

This activity introduces students to the onion model of culture and facilitates community-building in a safe environment. Students learn a little about their classmates, about themselves and about the concepts of identity and culture.

Learning Objectives

General Objectives

- To deepen sense of community and reflect on their own identity/culture and on the concept of culture itself.

Keywords

concepts of culture, identity, community-building, intercultural awareness, hand-crafted materials

2. Activity Context

I have used this in intercultural communication courses. It would also be effective as an introduction to a "culture" themed unit in a FL class.

Students

Number of students	1 Min.	100 Max.
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Do students need to use a second language?	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No
What is the second language?	English	
Level(s) in target language:* * These levels are approximations; use your judgement * For activities related to English, please try to allocate the minimum level within the continuum on the right. * See appendix at the end of this document for reference about these mastery levels.	Elementary school or younger Beginner CEFR A1 IELTS 1.0-2.0 TOEIC 120-220 √ Pre-intermediate CEFR A2 IELTS 2.5-3.0 TOEIC 225-500 Intermediate CEFR B1 IELTS 3.5-4.5 TOEIC 500-700 Advanced-Intermediate CEFR B2/C1 IELTS 5.0-6.5 TOEIC 700-900 Advanced CEFR C1 / C2 IELTS 7.0 + TOEIC 900+	

Comments

This activity can of course be completed in any language, if the teacher provides instruction and questions in that language. It is also possible to have students answer the (English) questions in Japanese or another common classroom language and allow them to have their discussions in any language they please. This will depend on the goals of the course.

3. Activity Materials & Prep

Activity Duration

Total duration in minutes:	30-40
How many sessions?	1
Any homework?	Yes

Materials

Material # 1 Title:	Pre-class questions
Material Type:	Digital slideshow
Material Access:	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QD22xKBW_sSt8VPeERoMAnStEEPVImSJ/view?usp=sharing

Set-Up Instructions

1. Assign the pre-task questions (Material 1) to students for homework the previous class. They should write down answers to the questions and bring them to class.
2. Prepare sufficient sheets of origami paper to provide each student with 4 sheets.
Estimated Set Up Time (min.): 2

4. Activity Description

Suggested Time	Activity Instructions
2m	Hand 4 sheets of origami paper to each student and put the questions you assigned for homework on the screen/board.
8m	Instruct students to write the questions numbers and their answers on the origami pages in this way: Sheet 1 Q1-4, Sheet 2 Q5-7, Sheet 3 Q8-11, Sheet 4 Q 12-14. Students should write on the back (the white side) of the paper.
1m	Have students scrunch up Sheet 4 into a ball so the answers are inside, then wrap Sheet 3 around that, then Sheet 2 and finally Sheet 1. Have them draw some kind of identifying mark (like a small star or whatever - not their name) on the ball and remember the colour. This is their cultural onion.
5-15 m (Flexible)	Throw the onions around the room. Students continue to catch/retrieve and throw the onions randomly until you say stop. Have them check they are not holding their own onion, and then they can open them up, one layer at a time. They should read the answers on each layer and write comments. You can do this in pairs and have the students talk about the answers that they find there with a partner. After they have finished reading and commenting on all the layers, rewrap the onions.

5-10 m (Flexible)	Repeat the throwing, reading and commenting a few more times. Finally, have all students bring the onions to the front of the room. Students can then come and reclaim their own onion and read the comments people wrote in there.
10m	Debrief by having students discuss the following: How did you feel as you opened your onion again? How did you feel reading other people's onions? What did you notice as you progressed through the layers? How might the things you wrote or read connect to stereotypes or prejudice? (You can adjust the questions depending on the specific aim of the exercise in your class.)

5. Additional Information



Tips during the activity:

If students end up holding their own onion, have everyone throw again rather than just having them swap to preserve anonymity. I also recommend starting students off with a reminder to be kind and considerate as they read and comment.

Post-activity suggestions:

This goes well as an introduction before teaching various models of culture (the onion, iceberg etc.).

Appendix

TOEFL	IELTS	TOEIC	Cambridge exam	CEFR Level	Skill level
					HigherEd 
118-120	9		CPE	C2	Mastery or proficiency
115-117	8.5		CPE	C2	
110-114	8	975-990	CAE / CPE	C2/C1	Effective operational proficiency
102-109	7.5	966-974	CAE	C1	
94-101	7	945-965	CAE	C1	Vantage or upper intermediate
79-93	6.5	900-960	FCE	C1/B2	
65-78	5.5-6.0	785-940	FCE	B2	Threshold or intermediate
53-64	4.5-5	785-795	FCE	B2/B1	
41-52	4	670-780	PET	B1	Waystage or elementary
35-40	3.5	550-665	PET	B1	
30-34	3	225-545	KET	A2	Breakthrough or beginner
19-29	2.0-2.5	171 -220		A1	
0-18	1.0 - 1.5	120 -170		A1	

Source: <http://www.higheredme.com/2017/04/11/english-test-comparison/>