

Working with cultural products



Area of study

This activity is designed to take place as part of a module in Transition Year for students who have been learning the target language (TL) up to Junior Cycle. It is designed as a stand-alone activity, but it may also complement the school exchange cycle of activities.

Cultural products are realia, souvenir objects and artefacts used in everyday life from a country where the target language is spoken, for example a “bombilla” in Argentina. By making the language and culture alive and memorable, cultural products also contribute to making language learning more interesting and motivating. They provide learning opportunities for students at all levels as well as catering for different learning styles.



Learning Outcomes

By engaging in this task, students will:

- express their perception of cultural products.
- describe, interpret and evaluate a cultural product.
- explore the cultural significance of given objects.
- identify and reflect on cultural similarities and/or differences in relation to the production and use of certain objects.
- engage all senses in exploring this cultural dimension of the language they learn.
- feel empowered by using the target language for a meaningful purpose.
- use their creativity and organisational skills to complete the task.
- develop their oral and writing skills for a practical and meaningful purpose.
- work collaboratively to reach a common goal.



Task overview

Students describe, interpret and evaluate realia/cultural products and relate their cultural significance to their own culture. The aim is to complete one or both of the following tasks:

Task 1. Prepare an exhibition of the cultural products in the school.

Task 2. Create a short movie/digital story around an object or selection of objects.

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TASK 1: Prepare an exhibition of the cultural products in the school.



Culture focus:

All cultural aspects that are conveyed by the cultural products provided by the teacher and students.



Language focus:

Vocabulary: e.g. objects and their use, adjectives to describe the objects and verbs to describe the action they perform, the categories of people involved and the places where they are used.

Grammar: e.g. present tense, imperfect tense if the object describes a past habit/tradition, impersonal form, correct use of articles, singular/plural of nouns and basic prepositions.



Examples of objects:

Spanish-speaking countries: Bombilla (Argentina), cuchara para aceitunas, carbón de Reyes (España), una peineta, Molcajete y tejolote (Central América), porrón, bota de vino, baraja española

Italy: pupi siciliani (traditional Sicilian puppets), moka or napoletana (two different coffee machines), carbone della befana, saliera e pepiera (they serve the same purpose but they work the other way round), gondola, panettone e pandoro, maschera di Carnevale, coltello per il parmigiano, tombola, trullo, costumi tradizionali regionali

French-speaking countries: Boules et cochonnet; un bol; pince à escargot; la fève (object in the galette des Rois), un jeu de tarot, une fourchette à gâteau, une cuillère à pamplemousse; cuillère à crème de gruyères (Switzerland); appareil à raclette suisse; le peigne à myrtilles (Switzerland); le cor des Alpes; un balancier de coucou (Switzerland); un gaufrier (Belgium); un cornet (for fries); cuillère musicale québécoise, raquette en bois et babiche (Quebec); la calebasse (Sénégal).



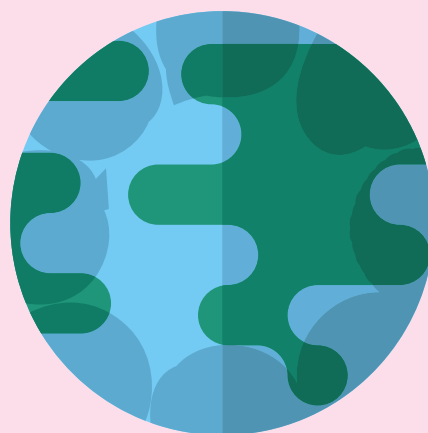
Time:

5/6 class sessions + time spent gathering



Materials:

Whiteboard and cultural products (realia, souvenir objects, artefacts, etc.)



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Activities in sessions 1 and 2 serve as preparation for either of the tasks chosen.

All cultural aspects that are conveyed by the cultural products provided by the teacher and students.

Session 1 (in and outside of class):

- The teacher shares the aims of the task with the students and encourages them to gather cultural products/artefacts from a TL culture for the next lesson. They may be asked to bring one product but are free to bring more if they want. Objects may vary from unusual kitchen utensils to objects used for hobbies. For the purposes of this task, physical objects are ideal, but printed images from the Internet may also be used where there is no access to a given real object. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds should be encouraged to bring objects from their own culture.
- The teacher and students brainstorm how cultural products can be sourced: not only from personal travels and school exchanges in a country where the target language is spoken but also through acquaintances living in Ireland, students in the school, people they know who have travelled, cultural institutions in Ireland and so on. The teacher will also bring cultural products. All teachers tend to gather such cultural products to create a learning environment that is conducive to learning. It is also useful to bring some whose name and purpose is not immediately obvious, in order to:
 - trigger the students' curiosity.
 - engage them in speculation in the TL.
 - make the description of the object more meaningful and motivating.
 - discover something new about the TL culture.

The teacher will also bring cultural products. All teachers tend to gather such cultural products to create a learning environment that is conducive to learning. It is also useful to bring some whose name and purpose is not immediately obvious, in order to:

- its name
- its purpose
- its origin (country, region, etc.)
- who uses it
- when it is used
- what cultural aspect, tradition, landmark, etc. it represents, and how this is similar to or different from their own culture

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The teacher demonstrates by using one cultural product that is likely to be unknown to students and may follow these steps:

- Let the object circulate around the class, so that students can touch and examine it. While this is happening, the teacher may also ask students to say something about the object. Examples are:
 - What they see/hear/taste/touch/smell (description: what the object looks like, what it's made of, its size, etc. involving as many senses as possible)
 - What they think about it (interpretation: what it is for? who uses it? When?)
 - make the description of the object more meaningful and motivating.
 - How they feel about it (evaluation: what feelings are triggered after seeing and touching this object? e.g. pleasure, surprise, fear, etc.)

Elicit their answers and note them on the board, dividing them in three columns as per the above questions

Session 2 (in class):

- The teacher divides the students into small groups and gives each group one or two objects provided by students from another group or by the teacher. The students' task is to
- negotiate a common description of the object(s).
- suggest 2 or 3 interpretations related to its/their use.
- reflect on whether the object(s) reminds them of an aspect of their own culture or if, on the contrary, it represents something unique of the target language culture. They may also discuss whether they could imagine such an object (and the trend/tradition it represents) being introduced into their own culture.
- prepare and deliver a quick presentation of their object(s), deciding in advance what part each student is going to talk about. The presentation may also be prepared using apps such as Adobe Spark <https://bit.ly/3bVTYJA> or other similar tools.

The "owner" of the object confirms or corrects their peers' interpretations and the whole class may add to its description and agree or disagree with their evaluation.

This session may be repeated depending on the students' interest and motivation.

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TASK 2: Create a short movie/digital story around an object or selection of objects

- The teacher divides the students into small groups (possibly changing the group configuration if students completed the first task). Each group is given an object or a few random objects which they have to use to create a short movie/digital story/documentary.

Possible digital tools to be used: iMovie, Adobe, Storybird, ShowMe, Animoto, PhotoStory, Book Creator, Click here <https://bit.ly/3bVTYJA> for more ideas.

- Students create a short storyboard for their movie/digital story and decide from what point of view they are going to tell it (a peer from a country where the target language is spoken, the object itself, etc.). They use their creativity as much as possible; a number of graphic organisers are available here <https://bit.ly/3e8UhSV> to facilitate this part of the students' task.
- The group hands in their script, which the teacher will review, giving students formative feedback for the next lesson.
- Students act on the teacher's feedback to improve their script and finalise the digital story.
- Each team presents their documentary to the class.
- Students could use presentation rubrics or simple feedback forms for peer-assessment.
- You may need additional sessions depending on the number of presentations.

Key skills

Being creative
Communicating
Working with others
Managing information and thinking

Teaching approaches

Activity-based learning
Group work
Pair work
Discussion
Debate
Project work and research
Use of ICT for research and presentations

Assessment approaches

In Task 1, students complete an information fact sheet on a cultural object
In task 2, students' presentations are assessed by their peers using rubrics.

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Evaluation

The unit will be evaluated by asking students to answer the following questions:

- The things I most enjoyed about this unit were...
- The most interesting thing I learned was...
- If this unit was being taught to another group of students, I would suggest the following changes to make it better...

This activity was inspired by and adapted from:

- Salto-Youth Cultural Diversity Resource Centre, Intercultural Communication Resource Pack.
- B. Tomalin and S. Stempleski (1993 first edition), Cultural Awareness, Oxford: OUP.

Resources

The following is an example of the information page for the cultural products to be displayed in the exhibition. It may be adapted and translated into the target language.

Task 1

Image	
Name of product	
What does it look like?	
Weight, measurements, materials etc.	
Where does it come from (country, region, etc.)	
What it is for?	
Who uses it?	
What cultural aspect, tradition or landmark does it represent?	
Is there something similar in your own culture or a culture you know?	