

Successfully Navigating Intercultural Interactions

Each week of this month's Teacher's Corner has required students to reflect and think critically in order to deepen their understanding of culture and how it can affect interactions. This week, students will apply their experience and knowledge to figure out how to make intercultural interactions successful, even if they are challenging.

Preparation

Time: 60 minutes

Goals:

- To help students continue to reflect on what defines culture.
- To think about ways to avoid or mediate miscommunications or misunderstandings during intercultural interactions.
- To listen, speak, read, and write about culture in English.

Materials: Culture Thinking Map (Week 1) and Intercultural Interactions Thinking Map (Week 3), student notebooks, pencils

Preparation:

1. Ensure that all of the thinking maps and descriptive lists from previous activities are displayed in the classroom so that students can see them.
2. If desired, assign students to participate in completely new groups. Alternatively, students can continue to work in the same groups used during Activity 2 of Week 3.
3. If you have a large class, you can make a plan for how students will present their scenes at the end of Activity 2. Instead of having each group present to the whole class, you can pair groups to present to each other.

Activity One: Writing Scenarios

1. Have students get into groups (see Step 2 under Preparation).
2. Give groups a few minutes to review the information on the Intercultural Interactions Thinking Map and the information they recorded in their notebooks about how different groups would interact with each other (See Step 6 in Week 3, Activity 2).
3. Tell students that they will work together with their group to create a scenario where a misunderstanding or miscommunication due to cultural differences might occur. Provide students with the examples below so that they understand expectations for this part of the activity.
 - a. Example 1: There are eight people in a sales department at a company. The two leaders have received a cash bonus for the achievements of their department. One leader comes from a culture where resources are shared amongst community members and accomplishments are celebrated by everyone. The other leader comes from a culture where the needs of each individual are most important and every person works for and keeps what they earn or receive. The two leaders must come up with a plan for what to do with the bonus money.
 - b. Example 2: A teacher is giving a test to his or her class. The teacher notices that three of the students from the same culture group are whispering and helping each other on the test. After class, the teacher asks these three students to stay and explain why they were cheating on the test. One student explains that they were simply trying to help each other get good grades and make their parents proud because their parents want them to do well in school. The teacher must decide whether the students should get in trouble and have to retake the test.

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4. Let students know that another group of their classmates will act out the scenario they write. Allow time for students to ask questions and clarify what they are expected to do. Tell students that they will have 20 minutes to write down a scenario with their group.
 5. As students are working, move around the room and check in with each group to ensure that the scenarios make sense and will work for others to act out. Help any groups that need guidance or may be struggling with ideas.
 6. When 20 minutes have passed, check to see that all groups have finished. If needed, give students more time to complete the task.
 7. When students are done, collect all of the scenarios.

Activity Two: Acting Out and Reflecting on Scenarios

1. Explain to students that they will stay in the same groups but will receive a scenario that they did not write. On the board, write the following steps:
 - a. Read the scenario.
 - b. Discuss the different elements of culture that may cause conflict or misunderstanding in the scenario. Write these cultural elements down on the same paper as the scenario.
 - c. Think about possible ways to resolve the conflict or misunderstanding. Write these resolutions down on the same paper as the scenario.
 - d. Make a plan for how to act out the scenario using one of the resolutions your group thought of.
2. Answer any questions that students may have about the assignment.
3. Tell students they will have 15 minutes to discuss the scenario, brainstorm possible resolutions, and practice performing the scene.
4. When 15 minutes have passed, tell students that in a moment they will present their scene to their classmates. If you have paired groups together, as noted in Step 3 under Preparation, explain the plan to students.
5. Explain to students that as they watch their classmates, they should reflect on a few things. Write the following questions on the board:
 - a. What were the different cultural elements that caused a problem in this situation?
 - b. How was the conflict avoided or resolved?
6. After each group performs their scene, ask the rest of the class (or the other group if groups are paired) to discuss and share their answers to the reflection questions.
7. After all groups have shared their scenes, ask students to reflect on the following questions in their notebooks in class or for homework:
 - a. What are some possible reasons that intercultural interactions can be successful or not?
 - b. What are some actions you, or any person, could take to prevent or resolve misunderstandings when interacting with people from different backgrounds?

The activities in this month's Teacher's Corner have aimed to help students increase their cultural awareness through reflection and critical thinking. Because speakers of English come from many different backgrounds, the ability to recognize and acknowledge the less obvious elements of culture is an important skill for students studying English. With this knowledge and a better understanding of how to apply it to intercultural interactions, teachers are setting students up for success as they communicate in English.