

To the Teacher

Cultures in Contrast provides international students with the opportunity to read about and analyze contemporary social and ethical issues. The text is structured according to the theory of collaborative learning, encouraging honest interactions on these thought-provoking topics as a method to increase proficiency in English and competence in cross-cultural communication. Although the activities in the book may be done alone, most should be done by students working in pairs or small groups or by the class as a whole. Nearly all the tasks integrate the four skill areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Because of the number and variety of activities, teachers can select those that best suit their needs, interests, and course objectives.

The goals of the text are to help students deal with complex social and ethical issues, to clarify their values in these areas, and to improve their academic English skills. While the material covers issues that are of importance not only in North American culture but in every culture, the emphasis is on easing students' transition into social and academic life in the United States. Additionally, students may improve their cross-cultural communication skills through developing an increased sensitivity to and acceptance of cultural and personal differences. I hope that the text, to borrow Edward T. Hall's words, "will provide a key to unlock some of the secrets of the eloquent language of culture which speaks in so many different ways."¹ The following is an overview of the book and its activities.

Personal Response

Each chapter begins with a question addressed to the students. It enables them to focus on the basic issue to be analyzed in the chapter and to respond in a spontaneous manner. It is effective to ask students to answer the question in writing and then have an informal class discussion based on students' opinions.

Exploration

This activity allows students to reflect on their cultural and personal values and to express their viewpoints on a variety of topics. Students read each statement and then respond by writing *yes* or *no*, according to their experiences and beliefs. There are no right or wrong answers. A class discussion of this task is an excellent introduction to the case study. Students can complete the task alone or in small groups, with those from the same countries or cultures working together.

Glossary

Definitions are given for difficult or unfamiliar vocabulary words found in the exploration, the case study, and the discussion questions. These definitions are specific to the context.

1. Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), 19.

Case Study

The case study is a realistic narrative that presents a problem or situation that students are likely to encounter in a university or another academic environment. Thus, students will be able to identify with many of the characters in the scenarios. These cases require students to make ethical choices, but no one choice is the best solution. The students can read the case study before coming to class, or a student can read it aloud during class. Before moving on to the discussion questions, I usually ask one student to summarize the case study.

Discussion

These questions guide the students in identifying the key issues and problems in the case studies and help them come up with potential strategies and solutions. The whole class can discuss the case study together. Students may also work in pairs or small groups to answer the questions orally or in writing before they do the case study report.

Case Study Report

Writing the case study report will help students to develop their critical thinking skills as well as their coping skills and strategies through analysis of contemporary social and ethical issues. The report is best done using the suggested format given in Appendix B (p. 219). Students should work in pairs or in small groups when completing the report. Many solutions to each problem are possible, and any solution that the students can justify is valid. After students finish their reports, a member of each group can give a short oral report to the class on the group's solution. It is also effective to have the students do a role play of their chosen solution.

Vocabulary

Several paragraphs elaborating on the topic in the chapter are presented, and students must fill in the blanks in the sentences with the appropriate words. After completing the task, students are asked to give a short written response to the issues discussed in the paragraphs, thus reinforcing their active knowledge of the vocabulary. This activity can serve as a quiz after students have completed the chapter.

Activities

These additional activities are an outgrowth of the topics discussed in the case study and are aimed at improving students' writing, listening, and speaking skills. They include writing assignments, debates, surveys, and role plays.

- *Writing assignments:* The writing assignments may be tailored to the needs of the course objectives and curriculum, as well as to the skill level of the students. They range from short writing tasks to formal essays and journal writing.
- *Debates:* The debates give students the chance to argue their point of view in a structured situation. If possible, the students should choose which team they prefer to join, and each team should elect a team leader who will give a three-minute opening speech and a three-minute closing summation. All members of the debate team should be

prepared to support their position and rebut the opposing team's arguments, and the leader must ensure that no participant dominate the debate.

- *Surveys:* This activity encourages students to interact with others and is useful in sharpening listening and speaking skills. Students should survey at least ten people, from the United States as well as other countries, and report their results to the class.
- *Role plays:* The role plays involve several scenarios: acting out a scene from the case study, doing a second role play showing how the first situation could be handled more effectively, or acting out a future scene. The role plays can be prepared in class, with all students working in teams of two or three. They may also be assigned as homework, with each student doing at least one role play during the semester.

Oral Presentation

Two topics related to the issue discussed in the chapter and their methods of organization are suggested. When preparing their presentations, students can use the additional readings in the chapter or may do their own library research on the topic. The presentations should be about fifteen minutes in length and include graphic aids if possible. Appendix C (p. 222) provides guidelines and a model outline for a presentation. The topics for oral presentations may also be used for writing assignments.

Chapter Readings and Comprehension Questions

Every chapter contains related readings from a wide variety of sources, ranging from newspaper and journal articles to presidential proclamations. The authors' styles and approaches include personal experience, argument, and advice. Comprehension questions, which students may answer orally or in writing, follow the readings. These questions check the students' literal comprehension as well as their ability to draw inferences and ask the students to make connections between the reading and the case study.

Strategy Session

At the end of each chapter, students reconsider the issue under discussion, choose a strategy for coping with a difficult dilemma, and explain their reasoning in a well-thought-out written response. If none of the five suggested strategies would be their choice, students may develop their own strategies. There are no right or wrong choices, but students must be able to justify their decisions.

Suggested Films

Since this generation of students is so visually oriented, watching films is a natural accompaniment to their reading and writing tasks. In addition, these films, which range from Hollywood and foreign movies to documentaries, will greatly enhance the students' understanding of the complex issues they are analyzing and stimulate their interest in the subjects. If possible, one film should be seen in conjunction with each chapter. Students should fill in the Film Analysis Form (Appendix D) after they watch the assigned film, and they can also give an oral report to the class on the film.

Additional Readings

The articles listed in this section have been chosen to enrich the students' knowledge of the topic and add other perspectives on the issue. Teachers may wish to use these readings to familiarize students with library research or may prefer to place them on reserve in the library. After reading the articles, students should complete the Reading Report Form (Appendix E). They can also use the readings for their oral presentations.

Appendixes

Appendix A contains questionnaires on culture shock and culture fatigue. These questionnaires are a good introduction to the concepts covered in the text. Appendix B provides the format for the case study report and a sample report for chapter 1. Appendix C offers guidelines for giving an oral presentation and a model outline for a presentation. Appendix D, the Film Analysis Form, is to be used after students have seen the assigned films. Appendix E, the Reading Report Form, is to be used after students read one of the suggested articles from journals or newspapers. Models of the reading report and film analysis are also provided. The materials in the appendixes may be reproduced for classroom use.

Instructor's Manual

The instructor's manual contains guidelines for collaborative learning, a sample lesson plan for a group work activity, a note on using films, and the answer keys to the vocabulary and comprehension exercises. Examples of student writing and background reading for each chapter are also included. The selected bibliography has newspaper articles on international students, readings in cross-cultural communications, and literary works with cross-cultural themes. The informative articles by Philip G. Altbach and Qian Ning will be of interest to both teachers and students. The materials included in the instructor's manual may be reproduced for classroom use.