



PROJECTS BY TEACHERS

Bridging Cultural Gaps between ESL Students and American Students

Displaced by a civil war beginning in 1991, Somali refugees have moved to the Twin Cities in large numbers. Many have continued on to Barron to work in the Jennie'O Turkey Store. The population of Barron is now about 15% Somali, a big change for this small town. This lesson was developed by Barron Area School District's ESL coordinator Kim Frandsen and ESL aide Esa Kohi to bridge cultural divides between students. The ESL students involved were Somali, Kenyan, and Mexican.

Barron High School weather.yahoo.com

Teachers: Kim Frandsen and Esa Kohi

Concept

High School ESL students interview American students about American culture. ESL students share cultural information with the American students.

Resources:

- "What does it mean to me?" cultural self-questionnaire [click on [PDF](#)]
- ESL students interview questions for interviewing American-born students pdf web

Steps:

1. Pre-Interview Assignments

ESL students talk about dimensions of culture in class. Students reflect upon their own culture first by working on these assignments.

History - war, religion, rules, economic issues, and distribution of power.

Time - Read the time and culture case study from *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures, Third Edition*, by Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester. Allyn & Bacon, 2005. Reflect on their own opinion of time according to punctuality, waiting time, and overall value of time.

Reflection - Students completed the "What does it mean to me?" chart.

Students brainstormed possible cultural questions to ask American students.

2. Interview

I taught two sections of intermediate ESL. I matched my two sections with a Family and Consumer Education class and an Advanced Placement English class. We met in the library for 3 days. An American treat was provided each day.

Day 1

I gave a general overview about this project. My purpose was for students to just talk to each other and gain information. I gave cultural background on chocolate chip cookies.





Students' interaction was amazing. It was great to see everyone interacting with one another. A potential problem to think about was if students are absent to make sure there is a back up plan. Another thing I had to do especially the first day was make sure my students were not just asking the questions on the sheet and were sharing their culture with the other students. My students were worried about getting done with their assignment while I wanted it to be more of a conversation between the classes.

Day 2

I gave the cultural background on apple pie and whipped cream. Students continued to talk to each other.

Day 3

I gave the background on potato chips and Coca-cola. I also brought in children's games to play such as Sorry, Clue Jr., Monopoly Jr., Uno, Operation, Memory, and Perfection. The American students could show how to play these games. Most ESL students have never played these types of games before.

3. Wrap up/Conclusion

ESL students took the information from the interviews and chose five areas in which to compare and contrast American and world cultures. Each student wrote a report on the information. American students also wrote a paper as well.

Reflection:

I thought this project was very valuable for bridging the cultural gaps that exist in our school. This was the first time some of these students talked to someone outside of their culture before. I was very impressed with how genuinely interested both groups were in each other. It was exciting and amazing positive progress being made.

American Students' Reflections:

I really liked that we were picked to do these interview things with the ESL kids because I think I really learned a lot about Mexico and Kenya, and some of my former stereotypes about both of those places are changed now.

We did have similarities though, which was cool because I didn't expect to have a lot in common with a Somali girl. I didn't know a lot about Somali culture or lifestyle until talking to her, so it was very beneficial for me.

Needless to say, I think many people have taken the trials any immigrants have gone through to conform to our standards of what is "normal". Because they look, or act, or sound different, many people are afraid to get to know them. That's a shame, because they are missing out on an entirely new and wonderful experience in their lives.

ESL Students' Reflections:

- This was the first ever sitting down and talking to an American student before.
- This was a good experience to try different foods and talk to students just like me.
- I have a lot more in common than I thought we would.

