

Role of culture in *Eyes Open*

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It is a truism that language and culture are inseparable and yet this is something that is often overlooked in English language teaching materials which focus exclusively on a linguistic agenda. For this reason, each unit of *Eyes Open* includes a *Discover Culture* spread which clearly emphasizes culture. These spreads include a video-based page and an extended reading which are related in topic. The Discovery videos and accompanying texts have been carefully chosen to offer insights into life and realities across the planet. Unlike other textbooks, *Eyes Open* offers a truly global focus, concentrating both on the English-speaking world and also on other countries. Why have we chosen to do this?

English as an international language

Due to globalization, English is spoken in more places in the world than ever before and the number of proficient non-native speakers of English now outnumbers natives by approximately 5 to 1. For this reason, it is likely that your students will speak English in later life in global contexts with a majority of non-native speakers present. This has obvious repercussions for pronunciation. For example, is it now desirable for learners to sound native-like? But it also has an effect on the cultural input that we present in class. It may be counter-productive to present only examples of native-speaker culture if your learners will rarely find themselves in a purely native-speaker environment.

For this reason, in its *Discover Culture* spread (and throughout the units) *Eyes Open* features cultural input from many different societies. For example, Level 3 Unit 3 features a video focusing on characteristic musical styles from three different countries: Australia (where English is spoken as a first language), India (where it is spoken as a second language) and Mexico (where it is learnt as a foreign language). This is not to say that target culture is ignored. One advantage of this approach, of course, is that the students' own country may appear in these pages thus engaging learners even further and offering an opportunity to use students' real-world knowledge and experience to analyse a text critically.

An intercultural 'glocal' approach

Eyes Open is a course that will be used in many different countries. Therefore the topics chosen are global in reach and appeal. However, they are also sufficiently familiar to students for you to 'localise' them. Put simply, this means that you could seek out local angles on global topics. For example, if the unit discusses a subject such as graffiti (a truly global phenomenon), you could get students to find examples of graffiti from their local context. This is, of course, facilitated by the *Your turn* sections which always attempt to bring out the students' own views on a particular subject and allow them to reflect on their own world. Such an approach is very much in line with the Common European Framework's principles in which intercultural awareness predominates. Such an approach encourages learners to reflect on their own culture and identity and seek out differences and similarities between that and the target culture. As a consequence learners will see that their own culture is plural and diverse, and they may begin to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about how their own culture is seen by others.

Challenging stereotypes

While featuring topics which are familiar to teachers and students, *Eyes Open* also offers an alternative vision of certain widely-established cultural traditions. Cultural phenomena are truly representative of different countries rather than merely reiterating cultural clichés and stereotypes which may no longer be true.

For example, rather than focus on well-known British sports like rugby or cricket, Level 1 Unit 8 focuses on Scotland's lesser-known Highland Games. Likewise, the course features exciting and teen-relevant material such as the Burning Man music and culture festival in the USA (Level 3 Unit 3), rather than more established traditional music festivals like the Proms in the UK.

How have we implemented our approach to culture?

Discover Culture sections

Video exploitation

As in other parts of *Eyes Open*, the visual aspect is taken very seriously. After a series of warmer questions to activate the learners' schemata, students watch the video for gist and specific comprehension, but there are also questions which focus on visual stimuli. For example, students might be asked to test their memory on the images that they have or have not seen in the clip. Likewise, before watching, students might be asked to imagine which images they think would appear in the clip and then watch and check their answers. Students in the *Your turn* are then asked to find a personal connection with the topic shown in the video and/or give an extended opinion about it. As explained above, the approach embraces all cultures in which English is spoken as first, second or foreign language, from cricket in India, to bullet trains in Japan to school life in South Africa. Very often, different countries' cultures are compared within the same video such as one clip which focuses on the distinct animals which live in the world's cities. In this way, students are learning about world culture through English but via the dynamic and motivating medium of Discovery Education™ video.

Reading exploitation

As in the video section of *Discover Culture*, images play a key part in activating students' interest in the topic. Images have been chosen specifically to trigger a response, encouraging students to hypothesise about what they are about to read. Once again, the topics here offer interesting focuses and contrasts on a topic related to the previous video spread. For example, in Level 3 Unit 2 two different schooling traditions are highlighted: The Royal Ballet in London is compared to La Masía, FC Barcelona's football academy for teens, which provides many of the team's best players. This is in line with the approach taken to culture in the series. By exploring world contexts (such as Spain here) where English is spoken as a foreign language, it is hoped that that teachers and students will feel able to localise the material to suit their own context. For example in the case above, the follow-up question after the reading could then be "Is there a football academy that functions in a similar way in your country?" At the same time, connections between target and world culture can be forged. For example, students might be asked if they have ever stopped to reflect on the similarities between training to be a ballet dancer or a footballer.

Ideas for further exploitation

If a *Discover Culture* spread has proved popular with your class, why not get students to produce a mini project on a similar topic? This could either feature a local context similar to the one in the spread or describe a related personal experience. Encourage them to use digital resources to research the project. These projects can be showcased in class by way of student presentations using digital tools for added effect. The Teacher's Book has an *Extension Activity* box at the end of each *Discover Culture* section, with specific ideas for further exploitation of the topics.