

# Discussing Cultural Knowledge for Life in the USA

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## Introduction

This is a discussion lesson plan, ideal for teachers teaching adults living or planning to live in the US. As natives, we often take cultural knowledge for granted. This discussion lesson plan gives students the opportunity to learn practical linguistic and para-linguistic skills such as finding apartment, using greetings correctly, buying food, riding the bus, and pumping gas -- all real problems that my students have had at one time or another.

The approach of this lesson is written with immigrant adults' needs in mind; it aims for students to inform about their own countries, and then collectively share information about the US with each other. Students, because they have the opportunity to be first "the experts", will feel less intimidated about acquiring new information about tasks which they formerly did with ease. This is an important point -- preserving student confidence is vital, as any teacher of adult ESL knows.

As a bonus, you as the teacher will undoubtedly enjoy the opportunity to learn information about the students' native countries. Undoubtedly, using this plan as a basis, you could add more topics to suit individualized needs. Your customization and the inherent relevance of this lesson plan should foster lots of real communication.

## Did You Know That in the USA They ...?

### Compare and Contrast:

Suppose you were trying to orient a newly arrived foreigner to your native country. You must give him a crash course in day-to-day living. Answer all of his or her questions. After that, with the others in the group, contrast the ways of your native country with the American way of doing things.

#### 1. Finding an Apartment

Where do I look? How can you find the best deal? Must you put down a deposit? How big is the standard apartment? Are apartments measured in rooms, bedrooms, square feet, square meters? Are pets generally allowed in apartments?

#### 2. Buying Clothes

Where is the most expensive place to buy clothes? Where can I get the best bang for my buck? How are clothes sized: by inches, sizes, or what? Are used clothes available?

#### 3. Meeting and Greeting

How do you address someone formally (what names/titles do you use)? Do only men shake hands? What about hugging, kissing, and hand-holding -- who does this and when? What type of answers are given to questions such as "how are you" -- polite ones like "fine" or honest ones?

Discussion point: List the various greetings that you know in American English. Which are formal? How would you greet the following people: your boss, your friend, your colleague, a female store clerk, a male store clerk, some stranger on the street from whom you wanted directions?

#### 4. I'm Hungry Already

Where do I purchase food? How often typically? Where is the most economical place to purchase food? Can I purchase food in bulk? What composes a typical grocery list? What items are delicacies?

## **5. Call Me**

How can I get telephone service in my apartment? Do I rent or buy the telephone? What is the most economical way to call long distance? What number do I call in an emergency? What number do I call for directory assistance? What prefixes are for toll-free numbers?

## **6. Getting Around**

Do most people have cars? Explain the procedure for pumping gasoline. Are people willing to walk to buy things? Do most people use mechanics, or do a lot of people fix their own cars? How do I catch the bus? Can you flag it down or does it stop at designated points? What types of public transportation are available? Is flying economical?

## **7. Around Town**

Do people often eat take-out or fast food? Do people often eat in sit-down restaurants? What kinds of restaurants are popular? Do restaurants commonly offer other kinds of entertainment? What kinds of entertainment are popular?

## **8. Washing Clothes**

Will I likely have laundry facilities in my apartment? What type of money will I use for laundry mats? Is dry cleaning service available?

## **Conclusion**

After having done this activity, you could hone in on more specific aspects that were of special interest, such as finding apartments and purchasing cars. An abundance of free guides lends itself to numerous role plays of such real life situations. There are also some relevant conversation start questions available on this site. Compare and contrast writing assignments of the native culture versus the target culture are also something that you may want to consider as a follow-up. Implementing practical real-life cultural information into your lessons keeps student interest high; may it prove practical and rewarding for you.

## **Resources**

- Conversation Questions for the ESL/EFL Classroom  
<http://iteslj.org/questions/>
- Effective Ways to Use Authentic Materials with ESL/EFL Students  
<http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Kelly-Authentic.html>

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<http://iteslj.org/>

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<http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Allen-CulturalKnowlege.html>