

Culture in the English classroom

What are we talking about?

Edmund Dudley

Estonia, October 2018

In this talk

- What do we mean by culture?
- Topics of interest
- Lessons with culture: doing it right

The British – Is it true?

- British people drink tea at 5.00.
- It rains a lot.
- British people like animals.
- The food in Britain isn't very good.

THE BRITISH — IS IT TRUE?

British people drink tea at 5.00.

It rains a lot.

British people like animals.

The food in Britain isn't very good.

Four foreigners who live in Britain talk about the things people say about the British...

British people drink tea at 5.00. Kati from Hungary

It's true that British people **drink** a lot of tea (and coffee) but they **don't drink** tea at a special time. I work for a British company here and my boss **drinks** tea all the time.

It rains a lot. Nicolai from Russia

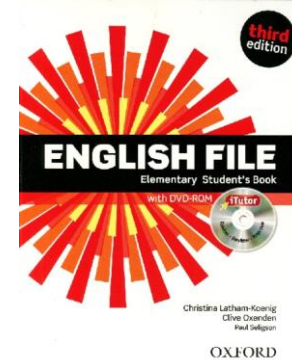
It **rains** a lot, but it **doesn't rain** every day. Be careful because the weather **changes** quickly. I always **take** an umbrella when I **go** out.

British people like animals. Norma from Mexico

I have a lot of friends here and they all **have** a dog or a cat. One family that I know **has** two dogs and five cats. British people **love** animals!

The food in Britain isn't very good. Hasan from Turkey

The restaurants are quite expensive but they are great, and the food is good in a lot of pubs, too. I share a flat with a Scottish boy, and he **cooks** every night. He **watches** all the cooking programmes on TV and he **makes** great curries!



In this talk

- **What do we mean by culture?**
- Topics of interest
- Lessons with culture: doing it right

A definition of culture

CULTURE

“the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another”

Hofstede, Geert, G. J. Hofstede and M. Minkov. 2010. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Culture

Software of the mind?



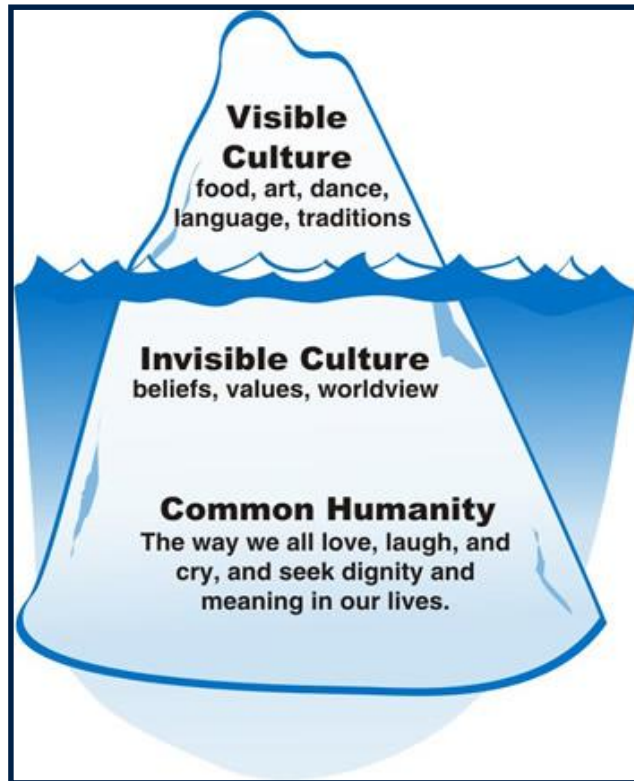
= the hardware

CULTURE

= the software

The cultural iceberg

www.languageandculture.com/cultural-iceberg



Whose culture?

Have you explored all of the following cultural comparisons?

1. Culture of English-speaking countries vs my own
2. Culture of different non-English-speaking countries vs my own
3. The culture of different parts of my own country

Which one(s) do your students find most interesting?

What do we mean by culture?

- **Awareness:** expanding students' horizons
- **Personlisation:** comparing our experience to that of others
- **Values:** Promoting acceptance and tolerance of others

In this talk

- What do we mean by culture?
- **Topics of interest**
- Lessons with culture: doing it right

Which (seven) topics are teens NOT interested in?

<https://mawsig.iatefl.org/gagas-grandma-and-garden-clippings-or-choosing-themes-for-teens/>

- Music (Madonna, ABBA...)
- Fashion
- YouTubers talking about normal life
- Drones
- Driving
- Countries nearby
- Backpacking
- Hair
- Weird food e.g. insects
- Comparing opinions across generations e.g. on tattoos
- YouTubers doing crazy things
- Video games
- Faraway, exotic places
- Historical figures

Which (seven) topics are teens NOT interested in?

<https://mawsig.iatefl.org/gagas-grandma-and-garden-clippings-or-choosing-themes-for-teens/>

- **Music (Madonna, ABBA...)**
- **Fashion**
- YouTubers talking about normal life
- Drones
- Driving
- Countries nearby
- Backpacking
- Hair
- **Weird food e.g. insects**
- Comparing opinions across generations e.g. on tattoos
- **YouTubers doing crazy things**
- **Video games**
- **Faraway, exotic places**
- **Historical figures**

Why don't these topics always appeal?

- Music (Madonna, ABBA...)
- Historical figures
- Fashion
- Video games
- Weird food e.g. insects
- YouTubers doing crazy things
- Faraway, exotic places

→ boring; out-of-date;
irrelevant

→ divisive; a topic for
friends, not
classmates

→ too far-removed
from their lives;
unachievable

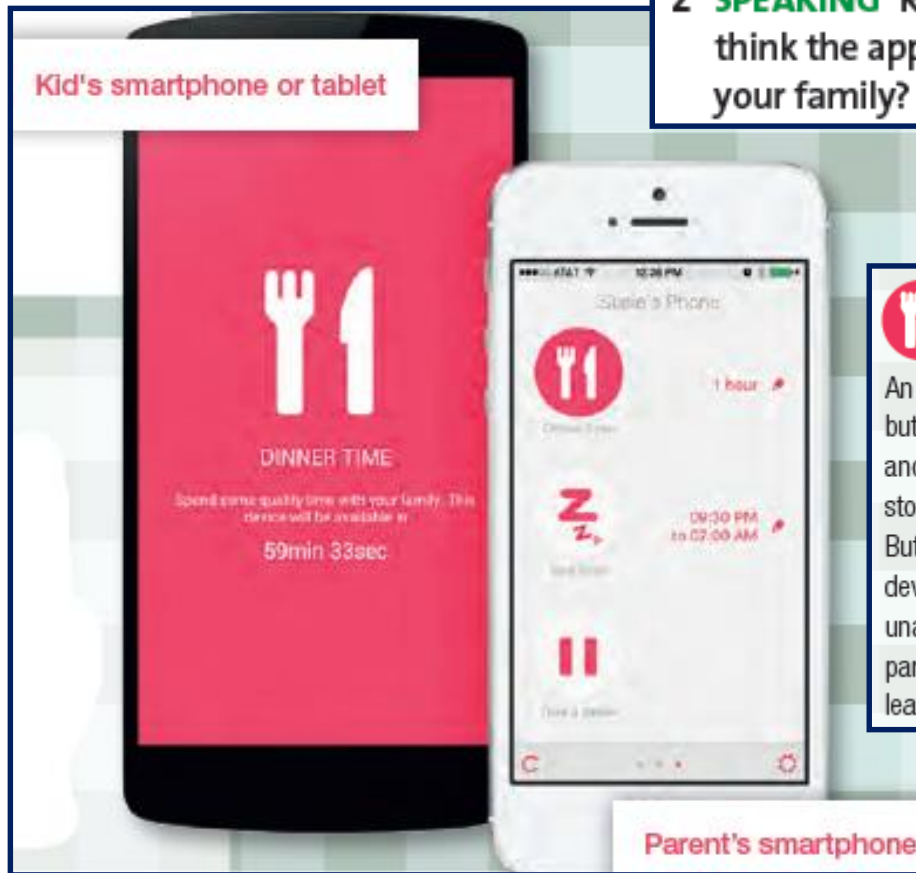
Topics of interest

Is it current enough?

- Avoid out-of-date topics, e.g. pop-music greats: they are seen as boring and irrelevant
- Be aware that students are not *that* interested in famous people
- Look for topics which are up-to-date and part of everyday life
- Can you think of any example up-to-date topics?

Look for up-to-date topics

- 1 SPEAKING** Look at the photo. What do you think this app does? Why might some people need it?
- 2 SPEAKING** Read the text and check your answer to exercise 1. Do you think the app would increase or decrease the number of arguments in your family? Why?



Tablets for dinner?

An evening meal for all the family was once part of everyday life in British homes, but this tradition has almost disappeared. Some people blame technology: children and teenagers are so addicted to their phones and tablets that they do not want to stop playing with them, even at mealtimes. This causes a lot of arguments in families. But now, parents can get a free app called DinnerTime, which locks their children's devices at certain times of the day and night. During those times, the children are unable to access messages, games, or the internet. In theory, this means that parents and children can spend more time together, eating and chatting. But will it lead to happier families or more family arguments?

Topics of interest

Is it inhibiting?

- Just because students are interested in a topic, it *doesn't* mean that they want to talk about it in class
- Asking students to identify their likes and preferences can be inhibiting
- Remember that although students hate talking about what they like, they like talking about what they hate

Avoid topics that are too personal


2 Culture

Tinseltown

1 **SPEAKING** Discuss these questions in pairs.

- 1
- 2
- 3

3 questions for students about films...



6 SPEAKING Discuss these questions in pairs.

- 1 What is the worst film you've ever seen, in your opinion? What was so bad about it?
- 2 Did you watch the film with other people? If so, what did they think of it?
- 3 Are there certain types of film that you often dislike? What are they?

7 SPEAKING Share your ideas from exercise 6 with the class. Did anybody else choose the same film? Are there certain types of film which are generally unpopular?

Topics of interest

Is it relatable?

- Red-carpet topics are a turn-off for many students
- Paradox: 'exciting' topics are often dull; mundane topics can be made interesting
- When topics provoke strong emotions, be ready to promote tolerance

Explore down-to-earth topics

2C

Listening

Eating out

I can identify the context of a dialogue.

A



B



C



D



Complete the sentences about special diets with the words below.

eggs fruit milk pork wheat

- a If you follow a gluten-free diet, you can't eat _____.
- b Muslims don't eat _____.
- c If you're lactose intolerant, you avoid _____.
- d Vegans don't eat _____, but most vegetarians do.
- e _____ is a good snack if you're following a low-fat diet.

8 SPEAKING Discuss these questions in pairs. Try to use phrases from exercise 6 in your answers.

- 1 Tell your partner about the last time you were in a restaurant. How good were the food and service?
- 2 Which local restaurants would you recommend to a foreign visitor and why?
- 3 Do you enjoy eating fast food? Why? / Why not?
- 4 What are your favourite dishes to eat a) at home and b) in a restaurant?

In this talk

- What do we mean by culture?
- Topics of interest
- **Lessons with culture: doing it right**

We see the world through a cultural lens

Lessons with culture: doing it right

- Whatever the focus of a cultural lesson, the students' own culture is always part of the topic
- Compare, contrast, consider...

- 1 What are some of the reasons why people emigrate to another country?
- 2 Do you know any immigrants to your country? Where are they from? Why are they there?

- 7 **SPEAKING** What traditions are there in schools in your country? Use the ideas below to help you.
ceremonies clothes first / last day at school
food graduation public holidays
shows and performances songs

Celebrate diversity

Lessons with culture: doing it right

Talking about culture involves:

- helping students to express their feelings – and to respect those of others
- noticing differences without judging them
- encouraging students to be curious, open-minded, and tolerant



Keep it cheap and cheerful

Lessons with culture: doing it right

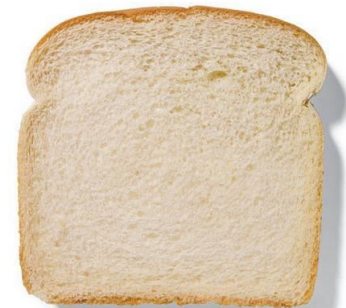
Explore unfashionable aspects of topics – students find it more interesting than we think;

e.g. for the topic of food,

Instead of just



you could also try



BBC Toast sandwich is UK's 'cheapest meal'

Mrs Beeton's toast sandwich



- Toast a thin slice of bread
- Butter two slices of bread and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste
- Place the toast between the two slices of bread-and-butter to form a sandwich

In this talk

- What do we mean by culture?
- Topics of interest
- Lessons with culture: doing it right

Culture in the English classroom

What are we talking about?

Edmund Dudley
Estonia, October 2018



Slides here:

legyened.edublogs.org