

Culture Activity

Overview:

Learner Audience & Level:

UT Russian students
Intermediate to Advanced class

Activity Type: Culture exploration project

Activity Goals: Teach students be active observers and be able to ask native speakers about things that are culturally determined and therefore not clear to them.

Activity: Culture

PRE-Activities

1. Homework assignment/research project:

In pairs, students locate authentic Russian commercials, looking for “Russian Ads” or “Russian Commercials” on You Tube that are culturally, uniquely Russian (not English ads translated into Russian).

Examples:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdFWpW3yd4o&feature=related>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5h_ze68YDw&feature=related
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zslzx8D4hYw&feature=related>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qhlg1j048EI>
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5h_ze68YDw&feature=related

2. Writing assignment: students individually conduct a “cultural exploration” or cultural deconstruction of the advertisement (in native language or in Russian), identifying those cultural norms represented in the ad that are distinctly Russian. Also in their writing assignment, they must identify new vocabulary or vocabulary specific to the ad.

DURING-Activities:

3. From the writing assignment, students give an informational presentation to the class in which students show their ad to the class and point out the cultural artifacts revealed in the ad. In class, students discuss the ad, as a class, then formulate questions about the cultural norms that the ad represents. The class works together to formulate questions and to translate the questions into

Russian. If students have difficulty translating, they can post the English questions online and consult a native speaker or run it by the teacher. The students who gave the presentation lead the discussion and document the questions posed by classmates.

4. In Russian, student groups post the video, the cultural exploration writing assignment, and the Russian questions onto the class website.

POST-Activities:

5. The teacher has previously arranged a pen-pal class in Russia that (perhaps) is doing the same project for English language learning. The classes exchange their “cultural deconstructions” and questions for the opposite culture.

Reflective Statement on Culture

The main message of Dr. Garza's presentation is that culture serves as a basis of the whole process of foreign language teaching. Language is a culture, and knowing a foreign language is knowing how to communicate within a foreign culture. The instructor's goal is to incorporate culture in any kind of activity he designs. Garza also encouraged us, as instructors, to direct students attention to cultural differences and become active observers. Our belief is that by observing cultural norms, students at the same time pay closer attention to the language used. They expand their vocabulary, improve listening skills.

The activity presented above addresses the "Little c" culture. It is aimed at making students aware of cultural differences existing between the two countries. Not less importantly, it starts the dialog between students from different cultures. Students are engaged in a real life environment. A number of other projects can be designed in the future. For example, writing greeting cards to a pen-pal, videotaping short skits with real-life situations (at the store, in a restaurant), and asking for a feedback from their pen-pals.