

# CULTURE, part one

Self-Paced Module  
Winter 2024



WASHTENAW  
LITERACY



# Training Guidelines



- Put questions in an email and send to Alison Austin, Program Director ([austin@washtenawliteracy.org](mailto:austin@washtenawliteracy.org)).
- Limit distractions (turn off devices, email notifications, don't engage in side conversations).
- Respect your own time by being a fully engaged, active learner! This is your time.
- **The goal is to learn, not finish!** Take care of your own needs and take time to reflect.
- Trust the process and plunge into activities as though you were in a classroom with others.



## **Washtenaw Literacy's Mission:**

Believing that literacy is the foundation for a sustainable community, Washtenaw Literacy provides literacy support, free of charge, to adults through a network of trained tutors.

It is our **Vision** to eliminate illiteracy in Washtenaw County.



PASSION



DIVERSITY  
EQUITY  
INCLUSION



INTEGRITY

[www.washtenawliteracy.org](http://www.washtenawliteracy.org)

734-337-3337

# Tutor Objective



To partner with an adult in pursuing their personal goals by improving their ability to understand, speak, read, and write basic English and do math through customized, research and evidence-based tutoring.



*What relevance to tutoring culture do you see in the the tutor objective? How does English language intersect culture?*

# 1:1 (atypical placement)



**Carlos** is from Guatemala. He is around 50 years old and has eight children. He has been in the United States for almost five years. He completed the fourth grade in Guatemala and is now working in the kitchen of a local bar. He can make himself understood conversationally, but he has very limited reading and writing skills. He avoids reading and writing whenever possible, often relying on his children for information. Carlos wants to take the citizenship exam and hopes to someday own his own restaurant in Ann Arbor using family recipes. He would like to be able to read news articles online as he has a fascination with politics, history and current events. He admits to a guilty pleasure; watching soap operas!

*This is to provide you with a learner to have in your head when moving through this module and thinking about culture.*

# Cluster (more common placement)



**Mari (Japan), Lily (China) and Anita (Mexico)** are all young moms with 2-3 infant/preschool children. They live in UM student housing (husbands are at UM). Mari is the most outspoken but also feel isolated at home all day. Lily is quiet but has PhD in Chemistry and feels “useless” here as a housewife. Anita is used to having lots of family around and really wants to meet people. They don’t know how long they will be in US, but want to work or go to University some day. For now, they are focused on being independent, raising their children and being helpful to their husbands. Mari likes to travel and wants to be a photographer. Anita is interested in cooking and gardening. Lily likes to watch movies, paint and read.

*This is to provide you with a learner to have in your head when moving through this module and thinking about culture.*

# Guiding Principles



We do adult literacy tutoring that is

- Contextualized learning (**pursue** learners' goals)
- Authentic materials (real-world, real-life)
- Scaffolded **practice (guide and support)**
- Dialogic (includes the learner)
- Differentiated instruction (fitted to the learning needs of individual adults, even within a group)

Consider



Which bullet points on the previous slide resonate most with you and your experience?

Which are clearly the goals of your learner(s)?

Which do you think are most important for your learners' success?



# Training Objectives



## 1. Develop skills needed for tutoring adults

- Name top 10 characteristics of American Culture
- Identify 6 go-to strategies for sharing culture
- Practice 2-3 phrases to help you express ideas of culture
- Know 4 ways to empower and include learners as experts

## 2. Build knowledge needed to engage with agency

- Understand Washtenaw Literacy's expectation of sharing culture in a way that is honest, humble, and inclusive

## 3. Align your perspective and expectations with the needs of adult learners

- Recognize asset-based approach
- Be ready to answer hard questions to support learners' understanding
- Identify characteristics of cultural learning and adjustment

# Agenda

- Background – slides 1-10
- What is culture? - slides 11-20
- Universal, Cultural, Personal - slides 21-24
- ◆ BREAK!
- Points of comparison between cultures - slides 26-35
- Gold standard strategies - slides 37-37
- ◆ BREAK!
- Cultural adjustments - slides 39-44
- Empowering learners – slides 45-48
- Final thoughts – slide 49 on



# What is Culture?

## “Elements common to a group of people”

This could include:

- Symbols
- Language\*
- Values
- Behavioral norms
- Traditions (holidays, celebrations)
- Lifestyle (food, dress)



\*one of the greatest gifts you can give is to help your learner understand the culture (contemporary American nuance) of English.

# What cultures are represented?





Make a list or draw the images  
you would use to represent the U.S.A.

Did you include current items? Historical?  
Holidays? Generational? From media?

How could you use these in tutoring to help  
your learner understand American culture?

# American Culture

When presenting American culture to a learner, will you present the real or the ideal? Will you talk about American culture as your demographic see it or someone younger or older or less financially secure or more? In the video, you will learn what researchers say are the top 10 aspects of American culture.

## Activity

**Click to watch the video.**

*(This will take you to Youtube.)*

What surprised you in this video?

If you made a list, are these your top 10?



# Caveat!



## **Culture is about groups. Groups form culture.**

- It is impossible to talk about groups without generalizing, over-simplifying and categorizing
- We (Americans) instinctively feel uncomfortable making generalization or being subject to them...We (Americans) don't like stereotyping
- Culture is just one of many influences on behavior

Tutor quote-“Tutoring isn't about me being comfortable, it's about me helping someone else succeed.”

***Guess what our learners request?***

# Our learners' #1 request?



ESL learners' #1 request is for help understanding culture and cultural differences.

This means you, the tutor, must:

- Set aside your own discomfort to help
- Try to be objective in describing culture
- Boldly share information on cultural norms
- Ask the learner for their impressions, understanding, observations and questions
- Not use your position as a tutor to influence the beliefs of the learners (political, religious, etc.)



## Self Assessment



Why do you think it's important to help learners understand American culture?

Will it help them if their tutor gives the safe “there is no American culture, we’re a melting pot” answer? Why or why not?

How can you phrase your answers to questions of culture so you feel less uncomfortable?

# Understanding Culture



**Culture in the abstract:** underlying values\* and assumptions of a society or group

**Culture in the flesh:** the specific behaviors that derive from those values

\*Probably one of the hardest aspects of culture to learn is the underlying values. And, yet, they have an impact on both the visible and the invisible aspects of culture. This is the most challenging part of tutoring ESL. *You have to constantly challenge your assumptions. Just because you experience something as truth, does not mean it's true for all people!*

# Understanding Culture, cont.



Actions aren't arbitrary and spontaneous; they are consistent with what people in a culture value and believe.

Once you accept that people behave the way they do for a reason (whatever you think of the reason), you can get beyond reacting to their behavior and figure out how to work with it.

When we look at behavior, we interpret what is happening through the filter of OUR cultural norms.

One of the exciting things about tutoring is learning to “see” your own culture, honestly, through another person’s eyes and culture.

# Understanding People

As we get to know people, we begin to understand their universal, cultural and personal traits. Tutoring is about the whole person. It's about honoring differences and learning from each other. It's about giving information so the learner can succeed.

## Activity

**Click to watch the video.**

*(This will take you to Youtube.)*

What surprised you in this video?

How will you guard against assumptions about learners?



# Universal, Cultural, Personal



Culture is only *one* dimension of human behavior, there is also Universal and Personal.

**Universal**=ways all people are the same

**Cultural**=what a particular group of people have in common with each other

**Personal**=ways each one of us is different from everyone else, including those in our group

# Universal, Cultural, Personal, cont.



Because of Universal behavior, **not everything about people in a new culture is going to be different**; some of what you already know about human behavior applies to everyone.

Because of Personal behavior, **not everything you learn about a culture is going to apply in equal measure, or at all, to every individual in that culture**. We are individuals.

# Practice Makes Perfect



Remember the earlier idea that you may need to make generalizations to help your learner understand cultural norms. So, how can you phrase your answers to questions of culture so you feel less uncomfortable?

Apply what you've learned about Universal, Cultural, Personal.

Answer questions directly and boldly but honestly.

A few sample phrases

- In the US, it's common to...
- In Ann Arbor many people...
- It's important to know that...

Example; Question - “Why do Americans spend so much time watching TV?”

Possible answer - “Compared to some countries, we do spend a lot of time watching TV. Many Americans consider TV cheap entertainment. I can’t speak for others, but personally, I don’t watch much TV.”

**Now, you try!**



Why do so few Americans vote?

Are men and women really equal in the US?

Why do so many Americans carry guns?

Are you afraid of getting shot by the police?

If I go to a party, should I bring the host a gift?



A photograph of a man and a woman sitting at a table in a library, both looking down at open books. The man is on the left, wearing a checkered sweater, and the woman is on the right, wearing a dark top. The background shows bookshelves filled with books. The entire image has a light blue tint. The word "BREAK!" is written in large, bold, black capital letters across the center of the image.

**BREAK!**

# Concept of Self



**Individualist**=needs of individual satisfied before those of the group; independence and self-reliance are stressed and valued; people distance themselves from others (urban, US).

NOTE: this is why we (Americans) are uncomfortable talking about stereotypes...because we believe in and value individual differences.

**Collectivist**=identity is a function of membership in a group; harmony and interdependence of group members stressed and valued; group members close emotionally but distant toward non-group members (rural, Nepal)

# Communication Styles



Any behavior observed across the cultural divide has to be interpreted in two ways:  
the meaning given to it by the person who **does** the action  
the meaning given to it by the person who **observes** the action

Only when these two meanings are the same do we have successful communication, successful in the sense that the meaning that was intended by the doer is the one that was understood by the observer.

Communication styles differ from culture to culture. Communication can include non-verbal behaviors such as eye contact, personal space and gestures. The most important and most studied communication distinctions are the indirect/direct, or high context/low context, dichotomy.

Look at the description of the Indirect/High Context style on the next slide. Is this the US?

# Communication Styles, cont.



## Indirect/High Context

Homogenous, collectivist cultures (e.g. Thailand) rely on indirect communication—more nonverbal, less literal

Communication goal is maintaining harmony and saving face

Actual meaning of words may be a poor guide to what an indirect communicator is saying

# Communication Styles, cont.



## Direct/Low Context

Heterogeneous, individualist cultures (e.g. U.S.) are more direct; less assumed—rely more on words, literal meanings

Communication goal is giving or getting information

Direct way of saying things might strike some listeners as too harsh

# Language Matters



Communication styles matter. Language matters. The language we use tells a story. It may be a story of our culture, our religion, our age, our income or something else. Watch the video to learn more about language differences from around the world and what it reveals about those cultures.

## Activity

**Click the arrow to watch.**  
*(This will take you to Youtube.)*



Which example stood out most to you?

How does inclusive language matter?

# Locus of Control



**Internal**=locus of control within individual; very few givens in life that can't be changed, there are no limits to what I can become if I set my mind to it and make the necessary effort

(Typical Americans believe in an internal locus of control.)

**External**=locus of control is external; some aspects of life are predetermined, life is what happens to me, there are givens that must be accepted, it's fate

# Obligations



**Universalism**=Certain absolutes apply across the board regardless of circumstances, apply the same rules to everyone in like situations, lay personal feelings aside to view objectively

(While we waffle a bit on this, Americans subscribe to universalism. We think you should be friendly to everyone and treat everyone alike. We value blind justice and objectivity.)

**Particularism**=Treat your in-group the best you can and let the rest of the world take care of itself, no absolutes; everything depends on whom you're dealing with, exceptions will always be made for certain people



How do you think the above factors might impact tutoring?



Which one is the most interesting to you?

Which one might you want to research more for the sake of understanding your learner?

***What do you think is the #1 reason an ESL learner calls office?***

# Culture's Silent Impact on Tutoring



The most common reason an ESL learner contacts staff is thinking their tutor is mad at them and they don't know why. This is almost always a communication problem. And, almost always the result of a cultural assumption.

For instance, the learner is late several times and sometimes leaves early. The tutor talks with the learner about it and they agree that they will be *on time* and work together for a full 2 hours at each meeting. The very next week, the learner shows up at 2:15 for a 2pm session. The tutor is frustrated and it shows.

When staff talks with the learner, it is clear that in the learner's culture, any time within a 30 minute window is considered "on time".

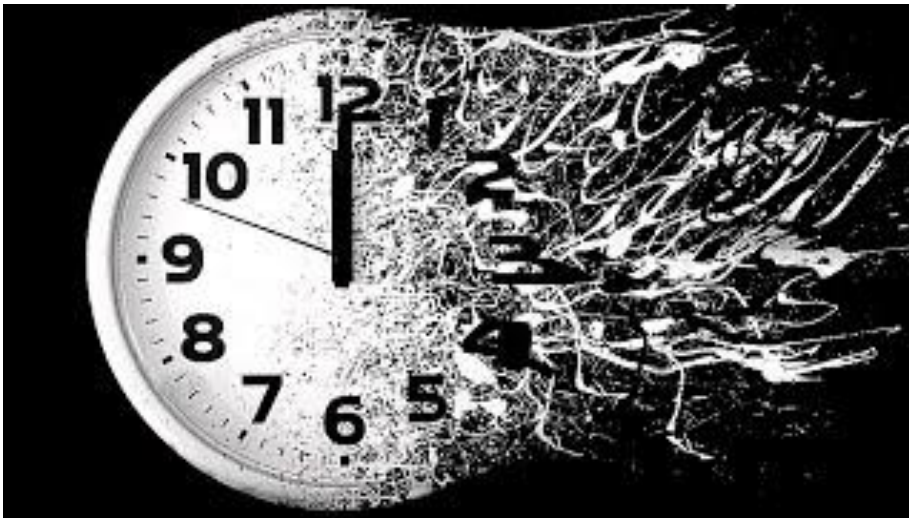
# The Example of Time

The only invisible culture is your own. A fish doesn't know he is wet. It's hard to recognize your Midwest accent, even though people from Boston will hear it. If you are open, if you are humble, you will learn as much from tutoring as the learner does. Imagine activities where the learner is the tutor!

## Activity

**Click the arrow to watch.**  
*(This will take you to Youtube.)*

How can guard against assumptions and create open lines of communication?



# The Gold Standards (Strategies)



- Word Bug
- Critical Incident
- Venn Diagram (and other GOs)
- Picture Collage
- LEA (Language Experience Activity)
- Story Telling
- Dialogs and Roleplays
- Reading/Writing

Which of the strategies from the previous slide do you use when addressing issues of culture?

Do you have a favorite?

Which might you need to review?

How would you use them or other strategies or graphic organizers to frame a conversation about culture?



A photograph of a man and a woman sitting at a table in a library, studying. The man is on the left, wearing a checkered sweater, and the woman is on the right, wearing a dark top. They are both looking at open books. The background shows bookshelves filled with books. The entire image has a light blue tint. The word "BREAK!" is written in large, bold, black capital letters across the center of the image.

**BREAK!**

# Cultural Awareness



- I. **Unconscious Incompetence**-state of blissful ignorance, unaware
- II. **Conscious Incompetence**-you realize that there are some things you don't understand
- III. **Conscious Competence**-you make an effort to behave in culturally appropriate ways
- IV. **Unconscious Competence**-you no longer have to think about what you're doing in order to do the right thing

*(Does this remind you of the stages of learning?)*

Think of a learner or learners.  
Where are they in the process  
of becoming culturally aware?



What evidence will you see or hear in this  
stage?

How can you help them move comfortably  
forward?



# Cultural Conditioning



- 1. Observation/Instruction** – you watch people, someone explains
- 2. Imitation** – you focus and awkwardly try
- 3. Reinforcement** – people encourage and correct you
- 4. Internalization** – you now know how
- 5. Spontaneous Manifestation** – it comes naturally, easily

How do you see these steps reflected in the learner(s) you tutor?

How can observation or discussion of these steps help you and your learner?

How can they be helpful as topics to use when approaching more academic tasks/skills in lessons?

How does this help you prepare for the needs of your learner?



# Phases of Adjustment



**Honeymoon** – 1-6 weeks. Everything is new, fun, and exciting.

**Initial Culture Shock** – up to 2 months. Tired of relying on others, “homesick”.

**Initial Adjustment** – up to 6 months. Doing basic everyday tasks such as shopping.

**Culture Shock** – rotates with adjustment. Finds relationships lacking intimacy.

**Adjustment** – rotates with above. Moves deeper into new culture with success.

How do these phases align with a learners' experiences? What do you observe?



What will help them move forward and adapt?

What support and tutoring can you offer?

There is also “Going Home Again”. When going home, students often don’t anticipate that they will experience new phases of adjustment and a sense of culture shock in their home country. This new cycle of shock-adjust-shock-adjust happens when folks return to their home country and have to re-establish relationships and norms.

# Empowering & Including Learners



- **As observers**
  - Observe a specific or general situation
  - Report back for discussion
- **As researchers**
  - Could be reading, watching videos or in person research on a topic
- **As a focus group**
  - Ask them for an objective view of culture
  - Good for compare/contrast

# Funds of Knowledge

[Click here](#) to read a summary of Yosso’s Cultural Wealth Model. Yosso’s model validates the wealth of non-academic knowledge that exists within every person.

Similarly, “funds of knowledge” is an asset-based, rather than deficit-based, approach to education.

## Activity

**Click the arrow to watch.**  
*(This will take you to Youtube.)*

How can you capitalize on the learner’s knowledge?

How can you be inclusive by inviting the learner to share?



# Invite Participation



Tutors can also empower learners to “study” culture outside of tutoring sessions. Learners can be cultural observers either of a specific aspect of culture or in general.

Learners can also be cultural researchers. And, learners can act as a focus group to compare and contrast experiences and cultures.

In other words, as the tutor, don’t feel this is all on you! Encourage active participation and active learning.



Let's think for a minute about the idea of learners as cultural researchers.

What homework could you assign that would empower your learner as a cultural researcher?

How can they teach you about your own culture? What benefits would this approach offer?



# Misc. Recommendations



- Engage the learner on all levels (choices and decisions, “Funds of Knowledge”)
- Find authentic, contextualized materials
- Model and develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSAs) you expect
- Tie activities to [Webb’s Depth of Knowledge](#)
- You don’t have to know it all, trust your students
- Make practicing English fun and interesting through cultural exchange and research
- Use strategies that explore, not preach/teach



Which of the recommendations  
stick out to you?

Which interest you most?

Which ones have you never considered?

# Great Tutoring



**Great tutoring** requires;

- **great content** (stimulating activities, appropriate challenge, relevant information)
- **great facilitation** (active-participatory approach, cooperative learning, trusting your student)

**Great tutoring is repetition without boredom.**

**THANK YOU for striving to be a great tutor!**

# Tutor Oaths



## As a Washtenaw Literacy Designer-Tutor\*, I will:

1. Keep in touch with Washtenaw Literacy
2. Tutor to my learner's goals
3. Prioritize time based on goals
4. Balance the skills areas
5. Activate prior knowledge
6. Respect differences
7. Dream small
8. Provide repetition without boredom
9. Create session plans for my learner

Which of these oaths most resonate with the content of this module? How do they apply?



*You are on the path to becoming a design-tutor! Through training, you will learn how to design session plans and select materials specifically designed for the needs of learners with whom you partner. For more on how you can keep these oaths, engage in training.*

# Training Objectives



## 1. Develop skills needed for tutoring adults

- Name the top 10 characteristics of American Culture
- Identify 6 go-to strategies for sharing culture
- Practice 2-3 phrases to help you express ideas of culture
- Know 4 ways to empower and include learners as experts

## 2. Build knowledge needed to engage with agency

- Understand Washtenaw Literacy's expectation of sharing culture in a way that is honest, humble and inclusive

## 3. Align your perspective and expectations with the needs of adult learners

- Recognize asset-based approach
- Be ready to answer hard questions to support learners understanding
- Identify characteristics of cultural learning and adjustment

# Next Steps



## 1. Today

- **Complete the — form ([click here](#)).**
  - Once you submit this form, you will be marked as “completed” for this module.

## 2. Within a month

- Attend your next session to continue training. ([Click here](#) to see a description of the modules and their scheduled dates.)

## 3. As needed

- Contact Alison ([austin@washtenawliteracy.org](mailto:austin@washtenawliteracy.org)) if you have questions or need information about your next session.

# General Agency Contact



## **Agency Contact Information:**

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