

✕ ✕ Culture Shock ✕ ✕

*A Speaking lesson for Intermediate students
by Lindsay Clandfield*

Level: Intermediate

Aim: Students discuss how adaptable they are and then learn about the different stages of culture shock.

Preparation: Make a copy of worksheet A for every two students and one of worksheet B

Stage One: Play hangman with the word ADAPTABLE. When students have guessed all the letters ask them the following concept check questions about adaptable:

If you are adaptable, what can you do?

What kind of people are adaptable?

People say cockroaches are very adaptable insects. Why is this?

Are you an adaptable person?

Explain that they are going to do a questionnaire to find out how adaptable they are.

Stage Two: Students in pairs. Give each pair a copy of the questionnaire and set a time limit for them to ask and answer the questions. Circulate and give help to pairs as needed. At the end, do some whole class feedback. Ask students if they think that they are very adaptable or not.

Stage Three: Regroup students into groups of five. Explain that they are now going to read and talk about culture shock. Give the following introductory explanation to culture shock (it is better to 'explain' this rather than just read it, and check back that students understand):

For the past thirty years psychologists and anthropologists have been researching culture shock. They have studied the reactions and experiences during the first few months in a new country of travellers and diplomats, business people and international students. Research has shown that what most of these people have in common is a series of reactions to the new culture. Culture shock can affect people to different degrees, but there is a predictable sequence of stages that people undergo.

Give each group a cut up version of worksheet B and tell them to distribute the cards among each other. They must read their card silently. Tell them that they can check unknown words in the dictionary or with you, but at this point there should be no talking. Explain that they must completely understand what is on their card as they will have to explain what they have read to others in the group later (without the card!)

Stage Four: When students are satisfied that they understand their cards, take the cards away. Write up the following different stages of culture shock in a random order on the board: *acceptance, adaptation, honeymoon, shock, re-entry shock*. Instruct students to explain their stage to the others. The group's task is to decide what is the order of the stages that someone goes through. Give groups a time limit to finish the task.

Stage Five: Check back the answers to the task (correct answer is: honeymoon, shock, adaptation, acceptance, re-entry shock). Do some feedback on what students found out. Here are some follow up questions you could ask.

- *Do you know anyone who has had culture shock?*
- *Have you ever had culture shock?*
- *Some people say that culture shock doesn't have to happen between countries; it can also happen between jobs. People will go through the same stages if they change place where they work, or their school, for example. Has this ever happened to you?*
- *Imagine you have a friend who is suffering from culture shock: what would you do to help them?*
- *Experts say that if you have the following characteristics, you will not suffer from culture shock so seriously: open-mindedness, curiosity, a sense of humour, tolerance, a strong sense of self, adaptability and flexibility. Why do you think this is true?*

WORKSHEET A

HOW ADAPTABLE ARE YOU?

Work in pairs. Ask and answer the questions below.

- Have you had to move house several times? How did you feel about this change?
- Have you had to change jobs or schools several times? Do you find it difficult to adapt to a new job or school?
- Have you travelled to different countries? Which ones? Did you enjoy the experience?
- What is the longest time you have lived outside of your country?
- Do you think you are open to different ideas and different cultures?
- Would you go and live in a different country if you spoke the language?
- Would you go and live in a different country if you didn't speak the language?
- Do you know what culture shock is?

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- Would you go and live in a different country if you spoke the language?
- Would you go and live in a different country if you didn't speak the language?
- Do you know what culture shock is?

WORKSHEET B: THE STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK. Cut out one set of cards for each group of students.

The Honeymoon (or Tourist) stage

Everything is exciting and new. You might think that the new culture is ideal, and you might think that it is much better than your own. If you are sometimes frustrated or have problems, you quickly recover. Everything is quite positive, the people in the new culture are very nice. This stage can last for months, or maybe only a couple of days. It is called the tourist stage because tourists generally do not stay in a different place long enough to have culture shock.

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Shock

In this stage, all the little problems and frustrations appear much bigger! You may be very preoccupied with cleanliness (you think everything is dirty and unhealthy); you may be worried that other people want to rob you or cheat you; you feel confused and lonely. During this stage, if you find someone from your own country who has lived in the new culture for a long time, you may become dependent on them. You may find other expatriates and complain together about the new culture, making stereotypes of the people from that culture. You miss your own country and culture a lot. If it is possible, you might try to go home.

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The adjustment stage

If the shock was very hard, you will not get to this stage. If you do decide to stay, you eventually learn to deal with the differences. You may try to integrate the new culture with your own beliefs. You begin to learn the language and make more friends. You have the occasional crisis, but you develop a positive attitude towards it. Maybe you can even laugh about your difficulties! This period of adjustment can be slow, and it is always possible to go back a stage into shock again.

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Acceptance or acculturation

You can now live with the new culture. Although it is difficult to be completely assimilated, you go through important personal changes and growth as you become integrated into the new culture. You develop a bicultural identity.

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Re-entry shock

This is the shock of coming back home. You return from your time in another country and everybody is happy to see you again. The only problem is that you have changed a lot in ways that they haven't. And they don't understand that you have changed. Nobody wants to relive those fascinating, cultural memories. You almost feel like a stranger in your own culture.