

**Title:** Cultural Identity – Building Cultural Awareness

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**Course:** 11<sup>th</sup> grade US History (could be adapted for grades 9-12 US or World History)

**Introduction/Objectives:**

I often start the year asking students to consider: “What is an American?” This question is difficult to answer due to the great diversity of the nation, and due to the fact that – as in most countries – a citizen’s political, social, and cultural ideas may differ greatly from other citizens in the same country. Yet while many US students easily recognize this diversity within their own country and accept these diverse people as “Americans,” they sometimes overlook the fact that other countries can hold the same diversity and are not monotypes.

This lesson will launch one of the central questions of the year-long course with a twist: comparing the discussion of “What is an American?” with the question “What is a Turk?” The content of this multi-day lesson will encourage students to deepen their thinking about America/Americans, while stimulating new consideration of a people and country they may not have considered in much depth previously: Turkey. Both will be invaluable as we return throughout the year to discussions of the US’s place in the world, its considerations about choosing and building international alliances, and the importance of cultural understanding in becoming a world citizen.

Looking at the US from the outside through the eyes of people who are not American can help students to recognize some of their own cultural biases or assumptions about their own country. Student-to-student connections between the US and Turkey offers students a chance to engage in personal dialogue with peers from another culture. This should help students to deepen their understanding of perspective and bias by hearing views of their country by outsiders, and recognizing that their own views of other countries may not always be 100% accurate and may require further investigation through research, travel, and communications.

**Lesson Structure:**

This multi-day lesson encourages students to think about cultural identity and build cultural awareness (of both the United States and Turkey) by having students:

- 1) think about their own sense of what it means to be an American, and discuss these ideas with the class
- 2) brainstorm ideas of what Turkey/Turks are like
- 3) develop a more thorough and accurate sense of Turkey/Turkish people through an examination of images, music, “founding documents,” current news articles, etc.
- 4) hear from peers in another country (Turkey) about what these Turkish students think America/Americans are like (and compare it to their own views, which they will also share with their Turkish peers)
- 5) hear what their Turkish peers think of Turkey/What it means to be Turkish (and compare it to their own views, which they will also share with their Turkish peers)

- 6) reflect on the ways in which this lesson reinforced and/or changed their initial ideas.

Steps 1, 2, and part of 3 may be accomplished in the first one-hour class period. Step 3 should be completed in the next one-to-two class periods (or longer, if a more in-depth exploration is preferred). Steps 4-5 will need to happen in, ideally, two out-of-class sessions where the Turkish and American teachers coordinate their times for the skype conversations. (NOTE: If the timing for skype conversations is not possible for certain teachers/classes, an alternative could be an ongoing blog, set up in advance, with students from both countries contributing ideas in response to the same specific questions, or students could pair up in a threaded online discussion to converse back and forth.)

### **Step 1:**

In the initial step, students will list (individually brainstorm and write down/record in their journals or on a study guide) characteristics of America/Americans, and what being an American means to them.

Next, students will list (brainstorm and record individually in their journals or on a study guide) the tangible ways in which this identity shows up in our society. Possible examples of categories might include:

- Specific monuments
- Flags
- The media
- Magazines/TV/movies...
- Literature
- Founding documents
- Famous images
- Cultural heroes
- Music
- Etc...

Students will share and discuss their ideas about America/Americans with the whole class, paying particular attention to what common themes and ideas arise, and what ideas about America/Americans may differ within the group. We will try to develop a working definition of what it means to be “American” in today’s world.

### **Step 2:**

Students will list their ideas about Turkey/Turks (again, brainstorming individually). NOTE: After this step, students will only pair-share their ideas rather than sharing them aloud with the whole class yet, since many students will very likely have limited knowledge. This brainstorming is intended as an “activation” phase so that they become aware of their current knowledge/ideas before learning details that will either reinforce or challenge their current perspectives.

### **Step 3:**

This introduction to Turkish culture and people might take a couple of class periods. The teacher will show a range of **images**, both historical and modern – many taken here on the trip, showing a range of lifestyles, dress, cultures, landscapes, etc.; play some Turkish **music**; have them read one of **Ataturk's speeches**; read several articles from Turkish and American newspapers about Turkey's role in current events; etc. The goal is to help students build a sense of what it means to be Turkish in today's world. Examples of materials used to build this sense of Turkey/Turkish people might include:

**The 10 minute film "Who are the Turks?"** from the TCF website, at:

[www.goldenhorn-rotary.com/ercu/ERCU\\_FLASH\\_eng.html](http://www.goldenhorn-rotary.com/ercu/ERCU_FLASH_eng.html)

**Images (some of these will come from my photos taken on the study tour; others will come from the TCF website; and many can be researched by individual teachers online):**

- Street scenes from Istanbul and Ankara that include women dressed fashionably and wearing headscarves, standing in front of modern department stores, as well as more traditionally dressed women (to challenge perceptions about modernity)
- Fashion images from *Ala* (a Turkish Islamic women's fashion magazine)
  - <http://www.voanews.com/content/turkish-fashion-magazine-targets-female-islamic-professionals/1404001.html> is an excellent link to both an article and a short, 3-minute video clip of a fashion shoot in *Ala* magazine, interviewing Turkish women about their decision to wear the headscarf, their interest in modern fashion, and how their lives and clothing both blend and reflect their ideas about their own identity
- Modern skyscrapers in Istanbul and Ankara
- Mosques: Suleiman's Mosque, Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia (though a museum, still a former mosque)
- Rural farmscapes: showing agriculture, herding, villages
- Spice bazaar; Silk bazaar; fancy modern shopping mall in Ankara

### **Music:**

- clips of songs by Tarkan
- clips of songs by Mercan Dede
- Other examples of both modern and traditional music of Turkey (found on TCF website at [www.turkishmusicportal.org](http://www.turkishmusicportal.org))

### **Central documents by national founders:**

- Excerpts from Ataturk's inspirational speeches on modernization and the new Turkish government. EXAMPLES:
  - Ataturk's Last Message to the Turkish Army

- Ataturk's speech of October 29, 1933 – on the Occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Turkish Republic

### **News Articles:**

- These will vary according to current events

### **Reflection and Revision:**

Students will take some time (first individually, then in small groups) to revise and share their ideas of Turkey/Turks based on the data provided in class. They will take note of which of their initial ideas were confirmed, refuted, or changed in some way. Small groups will then share out with the whole class their working definitions of what it means to be a Turk (just as we began the lesson with their ideas of what it means to be an American)

### **Steps 4-5:**

The capstone of the lesson will be a skype exchange (or hopefully several) between the American students and English-speaking high school students from Kabatas high school in Istanbul (arranged in advance with the principal there). The students from both countries will share their ideas about their own country and the other country, and hear what their peers in the other country have to say about these ideas. As much as possible, students will be encouraged to use the concrete examples and details that they have learned about the two countries as a foundation for their comments, as well as personal experiences.

This exchange will help students in both countries to realize that other countries may have some accurate and some inaccurate ideas about them; and also begin to change those ideas and stereotypes through personal interaction and discussion. In addition, it should help students to deepen their understanding of perspective and bias by hearing views of their country by outsiders, and recognizing that their own views of other countries may not always be 100% accurate and may require further investigation through research, travel, and communications.

### **Step 6:**

Students will reflect individually on how this lesson has reinforced and/or changed their ideas about America/Americans and Turkey/Turks. The lesson will conclude with an assessment where students write a well-developed and clearly written statement that includes at least three of the following (which will depend on the data chosen for the lesson and the content of the conversation between the American and Turkish peers):

- What does it mean to be an "American" today? (Define the word "American")
- What does it mean to be a "Turk" today? (Define the word "Turk")
- What similarities and/or differences do you see between Turkey/Turks and the US/Americans? (choose 3-4 key categories for clear comparison)

- Explain (using concrete details from the news articles and other data you have observed) one political goal or foreign policy agenda that is shared/similar between Turkey and the US.
- How did talking with your Turkish peers influence your ideas about your own country? About theirs?
- What similarities or differences do you see between the US and Turkey as secular states with a strong religious tradition? How has this set of circumstances influenced each of these countries? (NOTE: This last question could really be the starting point for a whole other in-depth lesson on just this topic. Perhaps interesting to explore as a follow-up lesson.)

**Assessment:**

- Final written reflections (step 6, above)
- Thoughtful contributions to the skype conversations or blog entries (steps 4-5, above)
  - In both assessments, students should demonstrate thoughtful, in-depth consideration of the questions and issues; support their ideas with clear and accurate concrete details; incorporate statements from their Turkish peers; and show awareness of bias/point of view.
- If writing is being assessed, teachers will use their own rubrics to focus on the parts of writing that are being emphasized in their classes at the time of this lesson.