

Lesson Title: Connecting Cultural Identity in Turkey and the U.S.

Author: Jenni Conrad, Hamilton International Middle School, jlconrad@seattleschools.org

Introduction:

This lesson allows students to develop sometimes surprising realizations about their own U.S. culture as they more deeply investigate Turkish culture and national identity. As part of a U.S. history course, this lesson encourages macro-level critical thinking about belonging and citizenship, which fits naturally into government and civics units. In terms of prior knowledge, students need to be able to offer examples of cultural expressions and beliefs.

Level: 8th grade accelerated (may be adapted for grades 7-12)

Objectives:

- Students will identify components of cultural and national identity.
- Students will evaluate the credibility and importance of specific cultural components, drawing clear and specific comparisons and contrasts between Turkish and American cultures and national identities.

Standards:

CCSS RH.9-10.2 and CCR Anchor Standard 2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

WHST.9-10.9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Time: 1 or 2 50-minute class period(s)

Materials:

- Student notebooks or notebook paper
- Justin McCarthy's article "Who Are the Turks?" from *Turkey and the Turks*, a TCF Educational Resource Guide
- Brief engaging video clip on Turkey and its culture, such as the first minutes of the Discovery Channel's *Flavours of Turkey*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auDyTT9EWrl> or the BBC's *Explore Turkey* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJ4ocPHGJdE>
- large format paper (poster paper) or whiteboard space for student groups to present their ideas to the class

Procedures:

- Explain that today we're going to look at how another nation defines themselves in order to better understand what it means to be an American.
- (5-8 min) In groups of 4-6, ask students to discuss this question: What ingredients or components would you consider in deciding if someone is an American? Ask everyone to each record the group's ideas in their notebook - this will help when they're working in different groups later. This is brainstorming, so even if only half of the group agrees on a given idea, the group should write it down. Components or ingredients need not be true for every single American to be valid or interesting. If in doubt, ask the person to explain their answer with the source – what is their evidence? There is no one right answer. At this point, go for quantity, as long as a reasonable person would agree to the idea. Possible examples to give students if they struggle: values, language, birthplace, hobbies, foods, traits, religion, etc.

- (10 min) Explain that the country we'll be looking at today is another multiethnic and multilingual democracy: Turkey. Ask students to discuss with a partner:
 - When I say Turkey (meaning the country, not the bird), what do you think of?
 - What is everything you know or think you know about Turkey?

Circulate and eavesdrop, then after 2-3 minutes, ask a few volunteers (especially those with direct or first-hand information) to share specific knowledge, focused on Turkey's culture and society. If students bring up incorrect information, offer correct info briefly.

- (2 min) Show the brief video clip you selected, telling students you want to give them a more visual experience of Turkish culture and Turkey's landscapes. As they watch, ask them to take mental (or paper) notes on what make Turkish culture and identity unique.

Optional: ask students to share with their partner what makes Turkish culture unique or what they noticed about Turkish culture that is similar to/different from American culture after viewing.

- (15-20 min) Pass out copies of McCarthy's "Who Are the Turks?" reading, explaining that McCarthy is an American historian and Turkish history expert. Briefly define any terms that students may not know: sultan, secular, fez, NATO, etc. As they read, ask students to underline the name of each new ethnic or religious group that migrates to Anatolia/Turkey, and number each one to create a running tally. Also ask them to annotate any sections that describe components of Turkish identity.
- (20 min) In groups of three, ask students to use their annotations and warmup discussion list to create a Venn diagram poster on Turkish Identity and American Identity Today. What are components that both nations share (ex: value of democracy) and cultural components that differ (ex: specific ethnic group migrations)? Ask students to make sure their group has consensus before recording each idea, and use pencil first so that editing is easy. The more specific their ideas, the better! In choosing each component, consider the source to know if it's really accurate: does the film, article, or students' own experiences tell them this idea is culturally important?
- Optional Next Day Activity: have students present their posters, explaining their decision-making process and the source of their evidence (film, article, personal experience, etc.). If groups have repetitive info, challenge them to explain in a new way why that component is so important, or have them share only unique components.

Formative Assessment:

Venn diagram poster and/or group presentations.

Rubrics or grading guidelines can use the following criteria:

- National/cultural importance of each component supported by evidence or experience
- Credible, specific comparisons: 4 for proficient credit, 5 or more for advanced credit
- Credible, specific contrasts: 4 in each box for proficient credit, 5 or more for advanced credit
- Clarity of ideas and justifications in presentation

Extension Ideas:

The following day, students could start class by responding to these questions:

- What were problems you found in creating categories for identity? How was it a difficult or unfair task?
- What surprised you or interested you most in comparing Turkish and American identities? What would you like to learn more about?

Other ideas:

- Students could use this lesson as a launching pad for exploring other nations' cultures, particularly a country of their choice - one they know little about and have not visited - in a research project looking at how geography, economics, government shape culture and society, or vice versa.
- Exploring media portrayal of different ethnic groups within the U.S. or how other nations (particularly non-Christian or non-western European) are portrayed in the U.S. media.
- Examining stereotypes based on religion, language, race/ethnicity.