

Developing Content-Based Materials to Teach Language and Culture: A Sample

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Overview

Language is better learned when students are actively engaged. Course materials can engage students through content that is interesting and relevant to students' lives and through activities that encourage students to discover language rules (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017). Further, meaningful content can serve as the context to practice all four language skills with opportunities for collaboration, such as listening and discussion.

With this in mind, we developed a unit entitled "Learning English Through Cultural Explorations into the USA" to provide a starting point for understanding America's multiculturalism, which is reflective of its diverse population of English language learners. The unit is intended for young adults at the intermediate level who have learned to talk about familiar topics, common situations, personal interests, experiences, and reasons with elaboration. Since this topic is broad enough for any student demographic, activities have been designed to tap into learners' interests and collective experiences.

Unit 1 of *English in American Cultural Context* (Appendix) utilizes discovery-based and content-based approaches throughout the unit. The *discovery-based* approach allows learners to analyze language in materials before checking their answers against explicit rule statements. With this approach, learners are inspired to discover rules for themselves, which fosters memorable and clear understanding. *Content-based* learning is implemented to introduce language in the context of cultural topics. Later in the lessons, students use discovery-based learning elements to think critically and recognize patterns. Unit 1 also covers the 4 skills of language learning with reading, listening, writing and speaking activities, as well as many collaborative opportunities.



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Unit 1 implements five principles of materials design (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017), which are (1) stimulating curiosity, (2) inspiring out-of-the-box responses, (3) promoting open-ended learning experiences, (4) creating emotional and intellectual challenge, and (5) facilitating teacher and learner negotiation with materials. To stimulate curiosity and inspire unconventional responses, activity 1.d allows students to listen to a paragraph, note some descriptive words they heard, and then put them into a Venn diagram. This Venn diagram sets up a basis to further stimulate their curiosity with the task of drawing what students imagined while listening to the paragraph. Drawing and producing something other than the target language allows students to have fun while they learn the vocabulary and show comprehension imaginatively. Each lesson of the unit also opens up with a section called *Think...* This section is to get students' curiosity flowing and provide background information about the topic for discussion. The *Think...* section is also collaborative and allows students to become curious about their classmates. To promote open-ended learning experiences, activity 2.c of part 1.2 asks students to think about their childhood experiences. Since this activity is the last of the lesson, it reminds learners of what they previously learned and to apply the correct verb tense three times throughout their work. Because they are asked to write about a personal experience, no one story will be the same, which allows the use of different verbs. To create emotional and intellectual challenge, activities 3.a and 3.b of part 1.3 invite learners to discuss their experiences and think about facts as well as what other people think. With activity 3.a, we ask learners to come up with stereotypes based on their own beliefs and then compare those beliefs with facts. Activity 3.b asks students to reflect on stereotypes about their community outside of the United States, which also poses an intellectual challenge. This challenge is scaffolded with tips on what a reliable source is. Activity 3.b offers an emotional challenge because it asks personal questions and has students think about themselves from an outside perspective. To facilitate teachers' and learners' negotiation with materials, activities 3.b, c, and d, of part 1.3 enable students to choose the topic and support or disprove stereotypes. It does not have correct answers, so it promotes learners' thinking skills and confidence sharing their ideas.

References

Tomlinson, B., & Masuhara, H. (2017). *The complete guide to the theory and practice of materials development for language learning*. John Wiley & Sons.

Image Sources in Materials

Page 1:

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About the Authors

Jathan Cruz, Shun Ishihara, and Amanda Chhour hold BA TESOL degrees from Hawaii Pacific University and are currently pursuing careers related to teaching English in Hawaii and Japan.

Appendix

(see next pages)

Unit

1

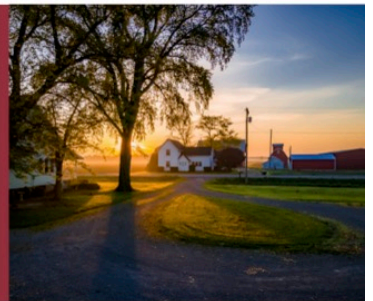
Urban, Suburban, Rural



1.1

Introduction

- What are urban, suburban, and rural areas?
- How are they different from each other?



1.2

Daily Life

- What do these communities do everyday?
- How are these activities done differently?



1.3

Culture

- What stereotypes do people have about these communities?
- How do these stereotypes affect you?



1.1 Introduction



Think...

Pair up and discuss the following:

- Describe the city or town that you grew up in. What were the people like?
- If you could change one thing about your childhood, what would it be? Why?
- How would your life be different if you lived in a different area?



Vocabulary

Key Terms:

urban area - a city with lots of people and buildings.

suburban area - a neighborhood, outside of a city

rural area - a countryside, farmland



1.a: Match the vocabulary with the definition.

- | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Metropolitan | • | • | in or relating to big cities |
| Traffic | • | • | a common idea of what particular type of person is like to or in the middle of a city, where there are a lot of stores and businesses |
| Commute | • | • | a very small town |
| Village | • | • | the vehicles moving along a particular road |
| Highway | • | • | a big fast road between cities |
| Downtown | • | • | the way in which you live, and what kinds of activities you do |
| Lifestyle | • | • | to travel regularly in order to get work |
| Stereotype | • | • | |



1.b: Fill in the blanks using the word bank.

metropolitan area commuting traffic special routine live located

My hometown is Philadelphia. Did you know that Philadelphia is the biggest (a) _____ city in Pennsylvania? It is (b) _____ between New York City and Washington D.C. Living here is great but there are bad things like the (c) _____ that happens every morning because everyone is (d) _____ to work and school. If you are ever in the (e) _____, I recommend that you get cheesesteaks, pretzels, and water-ice. Water-ice is a (f) _____ treat for children. I remember when my grandparents would buy it for me. Actually, it was the most favorite part of my weekend (g) _____ when I would visit them. Growing up here was great! Philadelphia has a lively community and I am happy to (h) _____ here! How about you? What is your hometown like?



Pictured above is the city of Philadelphia. Many people in America call this city "Philly."



Pictured below is a cheesesteak. A popular food in Philadelphia and often called a "Philly cheesesteak".

Listening

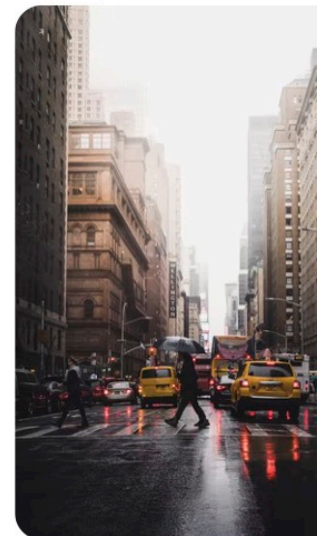
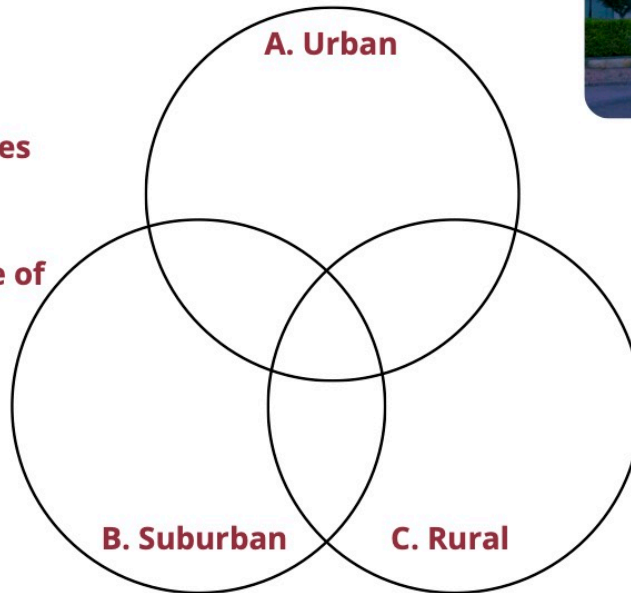
1.c: Click on the audio icon to listen to the stories and match the speaker to one of the terms.

___ Urban ___ Suburban ___ Rural



1.d: Listen to the stories again. Note some words that relate to each area. Then, on a separate piece of paper, draw a picture of what you imagined.

- A. Urban
- B. Suburban
- C. Rural



1.e: 🎧 Listen to the stories again. Answer each question.

Urban

(1) Where is the woman renting?

(2) Did she need a car to commute to her work? And how about now?

Suburban

(3) How did the women GET to school?

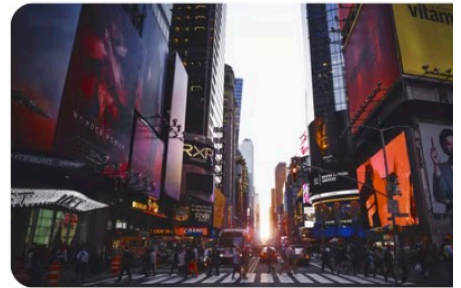
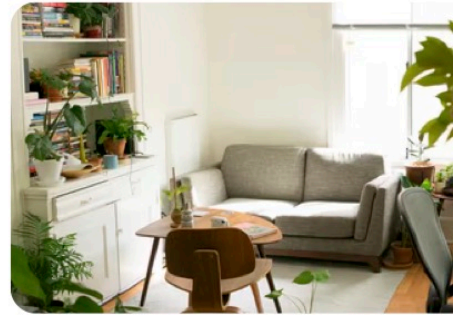
Rural

(4) Where does the woman play?

(5) Why DOES the man wake up early every morning?

1.f: Work with a partner. Discuss your lifestyle with your partner. (e.g. What's your morning routine? Do you have your own cultural routine in your country? etc.)

1.g: 🎧 Listen to Kevin and Jenny and compare two communities and take notes. One example is done for you.



Urban	Rural
<p><i>The stores are close by.</i></p>	

1.h: Work with a partner. Add your opinions in the table above.

1.2

Daily Life



Think...

Pair up and discuss the following:

- When you were younger, what did you do everyday?
- How did you go to school and work?
- What did you do in your free time?
- Do you think your neighbors or somebody in your area had the same experience as you?



What is the time frame of the activities in your answers?

A. Past B. Present C. Future

How does the verb form show this time frame?



Grammar

2.a: Circle the correct verb

- When I was younger, I ride / rode my bike to school. That was when I live / lived in the suburbs.
- When I was 7, I moved / move out to a rural area. I remember when we playing / played in the fields.
- I always take the subway to my work. The commute this morning take / took me 10 minutes to get here in the city.



Key Terms:

Simple Past Tense: Verb + -ed

Use when the action was completed in the past at a specific time

Example: I walked home from school yesterday.

Past Tense with "used to + base form of verb:

used to + base form

Use for habits in the past that no longer happens

Example: I used to walk home from school but now I take the bus.



2.b: Read the passage and underline the errors. Then re-write the correct sentences in the space below.

I used to live in a rural area of Kansas a long time ago. We needed to woke up early to take the bus to school. After school was the best. My friend and I play hide-and-go-seek on our property. We took a break to ate popsicles, especially when it is hot. Now I live in the suburbs. It feels different here without seeing open fields everyday. I miss playing hide-and-go-seek and eating popsicles. But, I'm sure I can made good memories here too!

A long time ago, I lived in a rural area of Kansas.

2.c: Write a short letter to your childhood friend about your favorite things you used to do. Use past tense at least 3 times.

Feeling stuck?

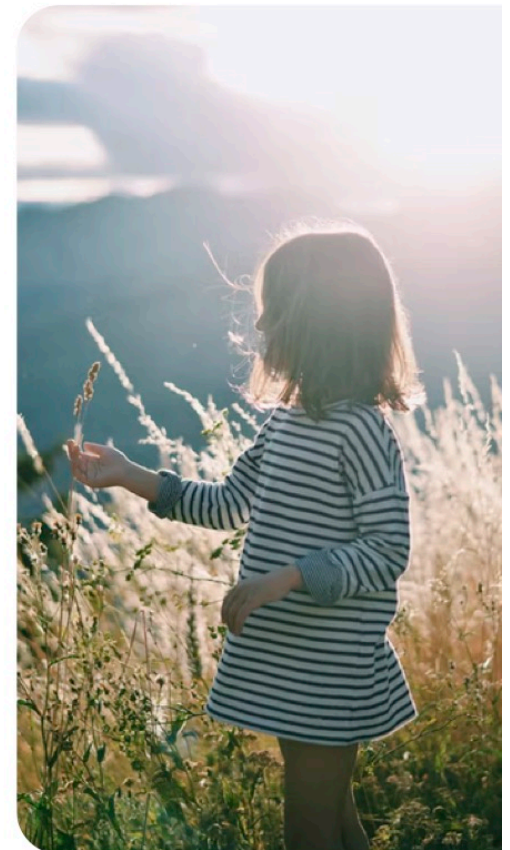
Think about:

- Your discussion at the beginning of the lesson.
- Who you often think about from your childhood.



Pictured above is a popsicle. It is a cold treat on a stick that is usually enjoyed when it is hot outside.

Pictured below is a boy playing hide-and-go-seek. It is a popular game among kids where one person has to find other kids that are hiding.



1.3

Culture



Think...

Pair up and discuss the following:

- What is a stereotype people have about your background? How do you feel about that stereotype?
- What used to surprise you about what people do in America?
- What is something you did in your country that people do not do in America?



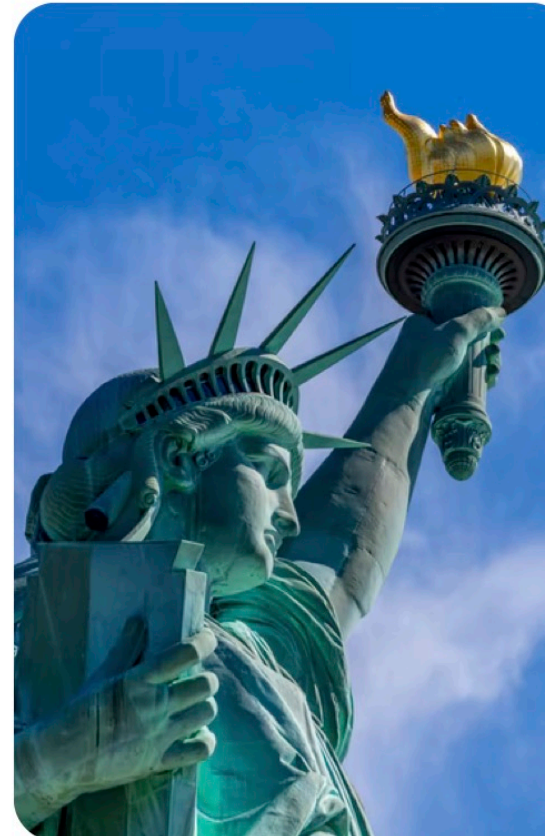
Speaking

3.a: In a small group, discuss the given stereotypes about people in the United States. Then, go to the internet. Find a fact that explains why the stereotype is true or false. Be sure to use a reliable source.

Stereotype	Fact
<i>People who live in the city are bad drivers and always cause accidents and traffic.</i>	55% of fatal accidents happen in rural areas. www.hntsa.gov
<i>People who live in rural areas are not as educated.</i>	
<i>People who live in suburban areas are rich.</i>	

What is a reliable source?

A reliable online source usually has been reviewed by many scholars and has supporting evidence. Most reliable online sources end with **.org, .edu, or .gov**.



Writing

3.b: Write a paragraph to a friend back home about stereotypes that people in the US have about your country. How did you feel about it and what did you learn from the experience? Be sure to include a clear descriptive stereotype and a fact to support or disprove the stereotype.

3.c: Talk with a partner about a negative stereotype you had about the US or a negative stereotype that people in the US had about you. How do your feelings differ from your partner's?

3.d: Describe how you and your partners' stereotypes have impacted the people in your community.

