

# AMERICAN WORKPLACE CULTURE

**Lesson Length:** 1.5 hours + Extension Activity

**Vocabulary & Expressions:** Direct communication, time-orientation, “time is money” “get to the point”

**Language/Culture Point:** Understanding cultural differences

**Objective:** Students will be able to acknowledge and discuss cultural differences in the workplace

**Materials:** Chart paper, Work Culture Scenario Cards, *playing cards, paper, pencils, rule sheets*



## STEP 1: ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE


Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Chart Paper	- Brainstorming

### TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Draw an iceberg on a piece of chart paper, with a smaller section above water than below the water line. Leave enough room above the water to write behaviors that are observable about the U.S. before someone arrives and after they arrive (movies, music, food, sports). The part below the water will have room to write values, rules and beliefs that are more difficult to observe or interpret from outside. Mention that there are many sub-cultures that can link people to others of a particular group like race or age, so cultural characteristics are generalizations and not always true of every individual.
2. Elicit behaviors that students have noticed about English speakers, particularly adults who are similar to those they work with, in different places like the store, at work, in restaurants, on TV, in movies and write those in the part of the iceberg above the water. Examples of American behaviors include: enjoying personal space, not standing too close to someone, keeping shoes on indoors, splitting the bill at a restaurant, and opening gifts in front of the person who gave the gift.
3. Leave the drawing up to fill in more later above and below the water line.
4. One main point of the lesson is to bring students to agree that aspects of culture aren't good or bad, they are just different.

# AMERICAN WORKPLACE CULTURE


## STEP 2: MINI-PRESENTATION WITH PROMPT

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
15 minutes	- Work Culture Scenario Cards 	- Scenario Cards - Think Aloud

### TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Using one set of the Work Culture Scenario Cards, tell a story about a new immigrant to the United States and all of the cultural situations that he has at work. Use the cards in the order they appear in the PDF.
2. As you tell the story, tape the cards to the board and write key vocabulary and/or draw illustrative pictures next to each card. For each card, Think Aloud about what the behavior might mean. For example, if the situation is “My coworkers from the U.S. say hello and ask me how I am doing, but walk away before I can answer.” Do a Think Aloud to start the process of reacting by saying something like, “I don’t think they are very friendly. Maybe they don’t like me. Maybe they are too busy to talk.”
3. Repeat the story. This time, ask if students have experienced the situation. Ask them to use facial expressions or words to show how the situation makes them feel.

## STEP 3: DISCUSSION AND COMPREHENSION CHECK


Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Work Culture Scenario Cards 	- Scenario Cards

### TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Remove the cards but leave up any vocabulary or pictures you have written on the board. Put students into small groups and give each group a complete set of the Work Culture Scenario Cards.
2. Have the groups work together to put the cards in the correct order and recreate the story.
3. Once the groups have finished, work together as a class to retell the story. Ask for students to share their reactions to each Scenario as you go through the story.

# AMERICAN WORKPLACE CULTURE

## STEP 4: HIGHLIGHT LESSON FOCUS AND MODEL TASK

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
15 minutes	- Work Culture Scenario Cards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scenario Cards</li> <li>- Predicting</li> <li>- Think Aloud</li> <li>- Problem Solving</li> </ul>

### TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Tell students that today we're going to talk about workplace culture in the United States.

2. Write the following questions on the board:

- What does this mean in my culture?
- What do I think it means in American culture?
- What does it mean in American culture?
- How is this different for me in American culture?

3. Draw a Work Culture Scenario Card and Think Aloud about the answers to the first two questions.


4. Then read the meaning on the back and continue the Think Aloud to answer the two remaining questions. For example:

**Scenario: Everyone is called by their first name.**

1. In my culture: It is rude to call someone by their first name. We always address our superiors by their last name or their title. Not doing so shows great disrespect.
2. In American culture: 1) Maybe Americans are just rude! 2) Maybe Americans do not have as many superiors. 3) Maybe there is another way that Americans show respect for superiors.
3. Oh, I see. It's a way to show friendliness. Everyone is treated fairly and equally.
4. Now, my boss in the US always tells me to call him by his first name and even invites me to eat lunch with him. It's nice to see him as friend and I don't feel intimidated as I did with my boss in my country.

# AMERICAN WORKPLACE CULTURE


## STEP 5: GUIDED PRACTICE

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Work Culture Scenario Cards 	- Scenario Cards - Predicting - Problem Solving

### TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Draw another scenario card and read it to the class.
2. Ask the class what this scenario means in their culture and allow a few students to answer. Then ask them what they think it means in American culture and allow a few students to answer.
3. Then read the meaning on the back and have a few students connect this to their own culture.
4. Ask a pair of students to draw one scenario card and read it to the class. The students should work to answer the questions together, reading the meaning when appropriate, and demonstrate their problem solving for the class. If the students have difficulty answering the questions, help to guide them or ask other students to help with the answers.

## STEP 6: PAIR OR SMALL GROUP WORK

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
30 minutes	- Work Culture Scenario Cards 	- Scenario Cards - Predicting - Problem Solving


### TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Put students in groups of 2 or 3 and give each group a set of Work Culture Scenario Cards.
2. Students will read the card together and answer the questions on the board about each card.

# AMERICAN WORKPLACE CULTURE

- After each group has finished discussing all of their scenarios, each group will present one scenario to the class. Allow time for more discussion with each presentation, as needed.

## STEP 7: HIGHLIGHT HOW ENGLISH WORKS

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Work Culture Scenario Cards 	- Word Sorts

### TEACHING ACTIVITY

- Write the following terms on the board and explain them to the class: power distance, formal vs. informal, and time orientation.
- In their groups, have the students sort the Work Culture Scenario Cards into each of the categories based on where they think they fit. If a group finishes quickly, have them think of other behaviors that could fit into each category.
- Once the groups have finished, go over the answers as a class. As you discuss each card, elicit from students why it belongs in a certain category, and explain anything the students might have missed.
- To wrap up, explain that cultures differ based on a person's background and experience in a group. A society can have many subcultures, but the majority of the main culture has people who have similar beliefs and a shared historical background. For reference, an example of formal vs. informal cultures can be found here:

 <http://manasikakade.com/2015/06/decode-a-culture-formal-vs-informal/>

## STEP 8: QUICK CHECK AND REVIEW

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Iceberg drawing on chart paper	- Brainstorming

### TEACHING ACTIVITY

- Students should notice how their culture is different or similar in the way that people react and interpret behavior.



# AMERICAN WORKPLACE CULTURE

---

2. Revisit the iceberg drawing and, as a class, add the behaviors from the cards next to the category the behaviors fall under.
3. Elicit other cultural aspects from students and add them to the iceberg. The teacher can assist in summarizing or rephrasing any aspects that are unclear.
4. Point out that the English classroom is an excellent place to get cultural situations explained, and that it is best to first assume that many workplace situations are neither good nor bad but merely different.
5. Encourage students to come into class with questions about behaviors they observe at work or in day-to-day life that confuse them or that they don't understand, and may be part of American culture.

# AMERICAN WORKPLACE CULTURE



## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
Varies 50 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Playing cards (one deck for every 4 to 6 students) with only these cards Ace, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 of each suit for a total of 28 cards</li> <li>- Paper and pencil</li> <li>- Rule sheets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Games</li> <li>- Problem Solving</li> <li>- Language Experience Approach</li> </ul>

### TEACHING ACTIVITY #1: CULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION

1. Ask students to think about a time when they experienced a cultural difference with a coworker or customer at work.
2. Elicit a story about the incident and write it on the board as the student says it. Be sure to cover what happened, who was involved and what was said.
3. Ask students to determine if the incident involved any of the new terms they learned (formal vs. informal communication, direct communication, time-orientation).
4. Restate the situation as a problem to be solved.
5. Elicit from the students at least 3 solutions to the problem, being sure that the chain of command is referenced and that human resources can be included in the solution. List the positive and negative consequences to each solution.
6. Have the students decide which would be the best solution, encourage the person who stated it to take a step to resolve the problem, and see it as not bad or good, but just a cultural difference.
7. This process can be repeated with as many incidents as the students can come up with.

### TEACHING ACTIVITY #2: CULTURAL SIMULATION GAME

Using cultural simulation games gives students a chance to understand how there are “unspoken” rules to each culture and when you arrive in a new culture, it’s not easy to learn the rules. There are several simulation games available. Some can be purchased and others are available with the rules online.

# AMERICAN WORKPLACE CULTURE

Bargna – a free game that just uses playing cards and several sets of rules that are studied and then taken away.



[http://pt.educationforsocialjustice.org/file.php/1/Bargna\\_Game.pdf](http://pt.educationforsocialjustice.org/file.php/1/Bargna_Game.pdf)

1. Put students into groups of 4 to 6, and separate the groups as much as possible.
2. Give each group a deck of prepared cards.
3. Give each group a rule sheet (each group's rules will be different).
4. Each group studies the rules and plays a few times to make sure they all understand the rules.
5. Take the rules away and announce that the game will be a tournament, where the person winning in each group will then move according to the game instructions. No one is allowed to speak or write words, but they can make gestures or draw pictures.
6. After playing for enough time to have several players move at each table, stop the game and start the debrief.
7. Explain that the game was not really about winning, it's about how the rules are different when you move.
8. Be sure to ask how students felt when someone new joined the group and how the new person felt.
9. Ask them if the "rules" of the new culture are written and explicit or if they have to learn them as they go.
10. Ask students how they would like to be treated when they don't understand the rules and do not have the language to explain what is different.