

Do Not Assume Multilingual Students Know About American Culture or Western Literary Giants

- Do not assume students have knowledge of Western or American cultural or other fads, movements (e.g., Hipsters), or
- Sports, TV personalities, or other cultural artifacts (e.g., Startrak) are often confusing to those who were NOT raised in America; or
- What may have been popular in your context growing up may have never been popular elsewhere.

Provide Key Terms

Even if you think something in the text is easy or generally known, some students coming from other regions around the world may have not heard about the name of a writer, philosopher, etc.

Provide briefly:

- Short explanations of proper nouns, key terminology, or concepts (always with visual representation: write on the board, use projector, give a handout)

Filling the Gaps: Time/Place

- Provide a historical context for readings
(e.g., Harlem Renaissance)
- Provide cultural and custom contexts
 - a) notion of time or punctuality varies across cultures;
 - b) common values such family, work, money vary across cultures in terms of priorities;
 - c) group behavior expectations in classroom contexts vary from Eastern to Western cultures

Avoid Idioms

- When presenting/discussing avoid idiomatic expressions such as “a no-brainer”, or “It’s a piece of cake”, or “through thick and thin”, it was blood, sweat and tears”.
- If you use idioms a lot, or cultural metaphors, or references to sports (it’s a touchdown), or movie culture, always provide a quick explanation.

Multilingual Learners: Activate Prior Knowledge

Before a reading or writing activity (if based on a reading) remember to engage background knowledge (the so-called 'schemata') by:

- helping students to connect what they know to what new material you are presenting with more ease, or by
- providing the context yourself

Prior Knowledge: What Students Already Know

USE

- Warm-up questions: ask one or two questions related to the reading topic to allow students to connect to prior knowledge and personal experience

Example:

1. What do you know about X?
2. Do people in your neighborhood, home town or home country care about X

Scan for Syntax

- Try to scan readings for some very complex structures: it sounds harder than it is to explain and it takes a few extra minutes.
- If possible, choose a couple of sentences that seem very hard/unusual/complex (e.g., inversion: “Little did I know”); or any long, complicated sentence.

Remember

- General knowledge is tied to culture;
- Reading comprehension is dependent on prior knowledge and it relies on cultural clues students are familiar with or are currently available to them;
- There are many cultural background schematas that drive comprehension;
- Draw on similarities between cultures and experiences to help students comprehend new texts.