

CULTURALLY SPEAKING

A Conversation and Culture Text for
Learners of English

Rhona B. Genzel

Martha Graves Cummings

NEWBURY HOUSE/HEINLE & HEINLE

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Rochester Institute of Technology
Learning Development Center

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overview

Culturally Speaking is a conversation textbook that focuses on the importance that cultural elements play in communication. The text is designed to develop conversational fluency in a variety of situations. *Culturally Speaking* has been developed for use with intermediate and advanced ESL students and may be used in high school, college, adult education, or industrial training programs. This book has been designed for people who are new to the United States or who plan to live, work, or travel in the U.S.A.

Culturally Speaking is based on the concepts that people learn most effectively through doing and that communication involves knowledge not only of the language but also of the culture. Throughout the book, students make and share cross-cultural comparisons and practice conversations in realistic, everyday situations as they learn about American customs and culture. Rather than experiencing English in isolation, students experience language in its natural context, replete with gestures and social amenities needed for effective communication. Students learn how to interact comfortably with native speakers, on the telephone, at social gatherings, and in educational situations. They learn to make introductions and small talk, participate in an American classroom by asking and responding to questions, explain medical problems to a doctor, and go shopping in a department store. In addition, students discover how to respond to invitations and to deal with friends in times of happiness and difficulty.

As students work through the Quick Customs Quizzes and Let's Share exercises, they are reminded that people around the world have different values and customs. The text makes no attempt to pass judgment but serves as a vehicle for learning about others as it encourages interest in and respect for other cultures while teaching conversation.

to the teacher

The goal of *Culturally Speaking* is to get students talking and acting comfortably in a variety of situations. To do this, each chapter focuses on a different aspect of mainstream American culture. Students begin by making cultural comparisons and sharing information about their culture; they move on to model conversations, half dialogues, role plays, and ultimately simulation games. As students complete each chapter, they become more and more proficient, not only in the language but also in the cultural context in which language is used. They become proficient with a variety of situations and self-confident about their ability to communicate.

To accomplish this, each chapter contains a variety of creative exercises to spark student interest in culture and to provide them with the conversational and cultural tools they need to communicate effectively. Some of the activities included in the book and suggested methods of use are listed here.

LET'S SHARE

Let's Share is designed to encourage discussion on a topic that students are uniquely qualified to discuss—their country and its customs. Students enjoy this exercise because they know the content well and are eager to share information about their culture with others. Therefore, in addition to teaching cultural elements, it fosters lively discussions. In this exercise, after the students have filled in the comparison charts, they should be encouraged to share that information with members of the class. The atmosphere should be one of genuine interest and curiosity. No judgments should be permitted on the merits of one culture over another. Each should be accepted at face value and appreciated for its uniqueness. This sharing creates an atmosphere of mutual respect and openness.

Teachers may encourage students to bring in photographs or pictures from magazines depicting the elements of culture being discussed.

MODEL DIALOGUES

Before students are asked to provide dialogue or to converse, they are provided with model conversations. The conversations should be practiced orally with appropriate body language and gestures.

1. Students should discuss what body language would be appropriate for each person in the dialogue. (Students may refer to "Gestures and Body Language" in Chapter One.)
2. Once the body language has been established, students may be asked to act out the model dialogues using appropriate gestures.
3. In more advanced classes, students may be asked if there is other body language that could be used. They may then act out the dialogue using alternative body language. The class can then discuss if the body language changed the meaning of the dialogue.
4. Students may enact the dialogues in different ways:
 - a. Have two students enact the dialogue while laughing.
 - b. Have two students enact the dialogue very seriously.
 - c. Have them enact the dialogue not looking at each other.

Discuss how each approach changes the meaning of the words.

NOW YOU DO IT

Once students have completed the cultural sharing, practiced the idioms and phrases, and manipulated the model dialogues, they are ready to prepare responses to half dialogues. This is the next step from sample dialogues and leads to free conversations, role plays, and ultimately simulation games.

1. Students may work in small groups or pairs to complete the half dialogues.
2. More advanced students may write an original conversation.
3. Once the dialogues have been written:
 - a. Students may be asked to take turns practicing them.
 - b. Students may be asked to discuss appropriate facial and hand gestures for each person in the dialogue.
 - c. Two students should then be asked to act them out, with appropriate gestures, in front of the class.
 - d. If several tape recorders are available, students in each group can tape their dialogues. These tapes may then be played back for the students to hear how they sound.
 - e. The instructor may wish to tape or videotape some of the conversations. These can then be written on the chalkboard for the teacher to point out grammatical elements and idiomatic usage. The videotape may be used to discuss the facial and hand gestures as well as language elements.
 - f. Students may practice the dialogues with the tapes that accompany *Culturally Speaking*.

ROLE PLAY

In role play, the students are given a situation and must respond spontaneously. Role play comes closest to natural conversation because the participants in the role play do not know in advance what their partner is going to say.

1. Students may work in pairs enacting situations while the teacher circulates, listens to the conversation, and provides assistance when necessary.
2. Several conversations may be taped, transcribed onto the chalkboard, and discussed in terms of grammatical forms and appropriate idiom usage.
3. To improve listening comprehension, the class may be divided into groups. Two students converse while a third listens and writes down observations.

Many options are available to the teacher to vary the use of the Let's Share section. We suggest the following options:

1. The first time the Let's Share section is used, the teacher may want to lead the discussion with the class as a whole. This way the teacher can establish a tone of mutual respect and appreciation.
2. Students may be asked to work in groups of three or four. One student in each group should be assigned the task of reporting to the class what the group has discussed.
3. Students may be organized in pairs. One student is assigned the role of speaker and for five minutes must discuss his or her culture in terms of the information on the Let's Share page. The other student is assigned the responsibility of listening carefully. The listener should not take notes. When the speaker has finished talking, the listener must repeat what he or she has heard. The speaker then indicates if the listener has reported the information correctly. The students then change roles: The person who was the listener now becomes the speaker and talks about his or her culture. The person who was the speaker becomes the listener. This is an excellent way to increase listening comprehension and is a good device to make sure that the listener is, in fact, paying attention.

ANALYSIS

Analysis sections are closely related to Let's Share sections. As students analyze how people in other countries do or perceive things and make comparisons with their own culture, they arrive at a deeper understanding of themselves and of others. The information provided in these sections becomes the basis for later communication practice.

QUICK CUSTOMS QUIZ

The Quick Customs Quiz is a fast-paced exercise in which students read situations and choose the answer they feel is the most appropriate way to deal with the situation. Answers at the end of the book reflect how a mainstream American would respond in a similar situation. Students may be asked to choose answers as they think an American would or to choose as they would for their culture. Discussion of the answers should then follow.

One approach to the Quick Customs Quiz is for students to complete the exercise for homework and come to class prepared to discuss their answers. During in-class discussion, cross-cultural comparisons can be made. Students should be encouraged to discuss how they feel about dealing with situations in the way the book suggests a mainstream American would act. The instructor may also discuss alternate methods of handling situations.

VOCABULARY, IDIOMS, AND PHRASES

Some situations require knowledge of special terminology. Therefore, key vocabulary words and expressions such as those used when dating, eating out, going to the doctor, making introductions, responding to invitations, and using the telephone are provided. Students learn the terms in a conversational context and may use them in a variety of ways:

1. Through oral reading and conversation.
2. By asking students to use the terms in sentences on their own. These sentences should then be rewritten, substituting a blank for the expression. Students should then exchange papers and fill in the appropriate expression in the blank spaces.

SIMULATION GAMES

One of the unique features of *Culturally Speaking* is the integration of four simulation games into the text. Each game is used as the climax to the activities of a particular chapter. It is the simulation game that bridges the gap between using practical language in directed activities on a one-dimensional level and performing, interacting, responding, and initiating on a three-dimensional level that approximates the real world.

After students have practiced model dialogues, learned appropriate vocabulary and idioms, and completed conversations and role plays, they are ready to experience interaction as it occurs in the real world. The games, which focus on attending school, going out socially, shopping in a clothing store, and visiting the doctor, simulate activities students may encounter and provide them with an opportunity to interact in English.

The games are relatively easy to administer. The four games are briefly discussed here. For more information about running and setting up the games, see the Appendix and the setup and prop guide with each game.

1. *Attending School* (Chapter Two). Students ask the teacher questions, answer questions, and converse socially with other students. They practice being active participants in the classroom and use the language and culture supplied in the chapter to make appointments with teachers, ask appropriate questions, and engage in small talk with their classmates.
2. *Going to a Nightclub* (Chapter Six). Students must order from a menu, observe proper restaurant etiquette, make introductions, and interact

socially. They have the opportunity to use the language and social amenities they learned in the chapter on building friendships.

3. *Shopping in the United States* (Chapter Seven). Students buy goods, ask about sizes, make returns, and pay with cash, check, or credit card. This game is designed to give students practice using size charts and interacting with salespeople.
4. *Going to the Doctor* (Chapter Nine). Students go through all the general procedures for an office visit to the doctor. They must speak to the receptionist, fill out a health form, and talk with the doctor and nurse. Students practice terminology and procedures they learned in the chapter, which focus on a visit to the doctor's office.

ANSWERS

Answers to the exercises are provided in a separate section at the end of the book. Sometimes cultural elements are elaborated on to provide students with a better understanding of the concepts presented.

GLOSSARY

The glossary at the end of the book provides definitions for the difficult words and idioms used in the text. It also gives their part of speech and uses each item in a sentence so that students may see each word used in an appropriate context.

acknowledgments

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*Rhona B. Genzel
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Getting Along with People

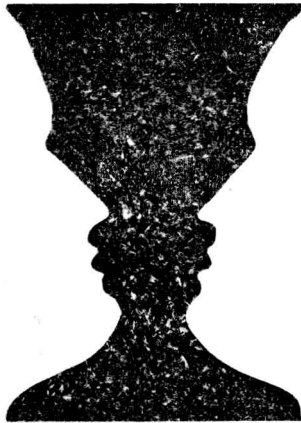
Each of us from different cultural backgrounds has a unique way of doing things, analyzing situations, and reacting to circumstances. Our individual way of viewing a situation is called *perception*.

Look at the pictures below. What do you see?

Depending on your perception, you will see either a vase or the profile of two faces in figure A. In figure B, depending on your perception, you will see either an old woman or a young woman. See p. 159 for solution.

Just as our perception of lines in black and white can be changed, so can our perceptions of life. This difference in perceptions makes up cultures.

To live comfortably in another country, you need to understand its thinking and expectations. In *Culturally Speaking*, you will experience how people in the United States think, live, and act. You will also see how Americans perceive others and interpret actions and behaviors. At the same time, you will compare your own culture, traditions, and ways of responding to situa-



tions and share them with your classmates. As you share your knowledge and learn from others, you will not only learn English but also begin to understand life in the United States.

1 HAND GESTURES

Even before people begin to talk, you can tell a great deal about them by observing their gestures. Gestures can tell about the person's attitudes, feelings, and interests.

LET'S SHARE

Gestures may have more than one meaning. In fact, they may mean something totally different from one culture to the next. Look at the photograph below and those on page 3.

In the United States, this gesture symbolizes victory or triumph. In the Soviet Union, it signifies friendship.





This gesture in the United States means that something is good, acceptable, or "OK." However, in parts of South America, it may be interpreted to have a vulgar meaning.

MATCHING

Below are some commonly used hand gestures. Match each picture with its meaning in the United States. Check your answers on page 159.



- A. ____ To show that you have won
- B. ____ To ask someone to come closer to you
- C. ____ To wish for good luck
- D. ____ To ask someone to stop
- E. ____ To show approval

LET'S SHARE

Look at the pictures on pages 2 and 3. Do any of these gestures have a different meaning in your country? Indicate the letter of the gesture in the gesture column in the chart on page 5. Then explain how it is used in your country.

HAND-GESTURE IDIOMS

The English language is rich in *idioms*. Here are some commonly used idioms that involve the hands. Try to match the idiom with its meaning. Check your answers on page 159.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ___ 1. To be empty-handed | A. To be bored; to have nothing to do |
| ___ 2. At one's fingertips | B. To steal |
| ___ 3. To have a finger in the pie | C. To be clumsy |
| ___ 4. To have sticky fingers | D. Completely under another person's control |
| ___ 5. To have butterfingers | E. To attempt to do something |
| ___ 6. To have something in hand | F. Easily available |
| ___ 7. Wrapped around someone's finger | G. To be involved in something |
| ___ 8. To twiddle one's thumbs | H. To have something under control |
| ___ 9. To try one's hand at something | I. To lack something that is needed |

ROLE PLAY

Below is a list of situations in which you can use hand gestures to show how you feel. Choose one situation and act it out in front of the class. The object of this exercise is for your classmates to guess which situation you have chosen by watching your gestures.

1. You want someone to come to you.
2. You want to show approval.
3. You want to show that your team has just won the game.
4. You want to wish someone good luck.
5. You want someone to stop coming toward you.