

Cultural Literacy

Lesson Plan by Daryl R. Hall

Background: This lesson is based on the book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. In it, Hirsch argues that by concentrating so much on “critical thinking skills”, our schools have gotten away from teaching essential cultural knowledge that all students should learn. His updated book is called *The New First Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*. It is essentially a list of important facts of American and world history, literature, art, allusions, etc.

One online resource is at: <http://www.readfaster.com/culturalliteracy/>

Objective: The student will research and recall specific details of cultural literacy.

Materials: Cultural Literacy worksheets, computer with Internet hookup, projection of computer display.

Procedure:

- The teacher has the students play “Stump the Teacher”: the students ask the teacher questions that almost the entire class knows but the teacher doesn’t. Examples might be about current personalities, music, dance, slang, etc.
- After the teacher has demonstrated a lack of knowledge of current student cultural content, the teacher defines cultural literacy and its importance.
- Hand out Cultural Literacy worksheet #1.
- Instruct the students that they are responsible for researching and knowing the importance and the details of each item listed on the sheet. Cue the students that they will be tested on these items. Cue the students that the test will look exactly like the worksheet, that they will have to fill in the information from memory.
- Teacher leads a class discussion of each item on the list, checking for the class’s prior knowledge as well as demonstrating the detail needed for the test. The teacher may use the Internet and projector to display pictures of some of the topics.
- Cue the students that they will have one week to complete the worksheet on their own.

Assessment: After one week, collect and grade the worksheets. Give the blank worksheets as a test that same day. Grade for completeness and accuracy.

This assignment may be repeated with different worksheets.