

Intercultural differences

Read the text:

Dorinda visits some English friends for dinner. Read what happens.

They invite Dorinda for dinner at 8.00 and she arrives at 7.30. At the door she takes off her shoes and gives them some ice cream for the dessert, and a bottle of wine. They offer her a drink which she politely refuses. Five minutes later, she pours herself a glass of wine.

At the table, they serve the onion soup, first to Dorinda, who starts eating immediately. She breaks her bread into the soup, and when she has finished, she helps herself to some more. She then has a cigarette while she waits for everyone else to finish. The next course is beef which she refuses without giving a reason. She is offered some chicken, which she eats, mostly with her fingers. She finishes her meal, leaving her knife and fork on the table.

During the meal, she talks very little and doesn't say anything about the food. She also refuses dessert saying she is on a diet. After dinner, she stays for about 15 minutes, then says, "I really have to go now", and leaves immediately.

The next day, she telephones saying how much she enjoyed the evening and asks for the recipe for the soup.

Discussion:

Discuss in groups which of Dorinda's actions are acceptable in your country and which are not.

Read the article about culture shock.

What is Culture Shock?

When you move to a new place, you're bound to face a lot of changes. It's natural to have difficulty adjusting to a new culture, but the good news is that culture shock is temporary.

Culture shock is a very real experience for many people who [move to another country](#). Anyone who has lived or studied or even travelled extensively in another country has tasted and lived through culture shock. At the time it may feel more like homesickness, but what most people who haven't undergone any kind of [pre-adaptation program](#) don't know is that there are several stages one goes through when adjusting to a new language and culture.

Before we undertake these five steps, let's look at what culture shock is and what causes it. Knowing what it is and where it comes from will help you identify it more easily and make your international move a little easier.

The online Oxford Dictionary defines culture shock as *disorientation experienced when suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture or way of life*. This is a good summary; however, let's break it down a bit further. When you [move to a new country](#), everything is unfamiliar; weather, landscape, language, food, dress, social roles, values, customs and communication - basically, everything you're used to is no longer in place. You'll find that the day unfolds differently, that business is conducted in a way that may be hard to understand, the stores are opened and closed at hours that you could never predict. Your patterns are off-kilter, the smells, sounds and tastes are unusual and you can't communicate with the locals - not even to buy a loaf of bread. This is culture shock. And like any form of shock, there is a definite and almost certain reaction.

Symptoms of Culture Shock

Signs and symptoms of culture shock are:

- a feeling of sadness and loneliness,
- an over-concern about your health,
- headaches, pains, and allergies
- insomnia or sleeping too much
- feelings of anger, depression, vulnerability
- idealizing your own culture
- trying too hard to adapt by becoming obsessed with the new culture
- the smallest problems seem overwhelming
- feeling shy or insecure
- become obsessed with cleanliness
- overwhelming sense of homesickness
- feeling lost or confused
- questioning your decision to move to this place

Sounds like fun, huh? Now you may have one of the above symptoms or a combination of a few; it's very individual and unpredictable. I know I tend to be much more emotional than I usually am, crying over simple things that normally I wouldn't even look at twice. Seeing people hugging or someone being kind to me would make me burst into tears. I didn't feel sad. Just sentimental. I suppose that should be added to my list. I also found that I clung to the familiar. E-mail and being in touch with people *back home* gave me a great source of comfort until I realized that I needed to remove myself from the old and embrace the new. I believe that was part of my transition from the *Re-integration Stage* to the *Autonomy Stage*.

The Culture Shock Model

Step 1: The Honeymoon Stage

Like any new experience, there's a feeling of euphoria when you first arrive to a new country and you're in awe of the differences you see and experience. You feel excited, stimulated, enriched. During this stage, you still feel close to everything familiar back home.

Step 2: The Distress Stage

Everything you're experiencing no longer feels new; in fact, it's starting to feel like a thick wall that's preventing you from experiencing things. You feel confused, alone and realize that the familiar support systems are not easily accessible.

Step 3: Re-integration Stage

During this stage, you start refusing to accept the differences you encounter. You're angry, frustrated and even feel hostile to those around you. You start to idealize life "back home" and compare your current culture to what is familiar. You dislike the culture, the language, the food. You reject it as inferior. You may even develop some prejudices towards the new culture. Don't worry. This is absolutely normal. You're adjusting. This is actually a pretty common reaction to anything new. Think back to when you started a new job or moved to a new house or a new city or when you moved in with someone. Any adjustment can cause you to look back in awe and wonder why you made the decision to change.

Step 4: Autonomy Stage

This is the first stage in acceptance. I like to think of it as the *emergence* stage when you start to rise above the clouds and finally begin to feel like yourself again. You start to accept the differences and feel like you can begin to live with them. You feel more confident and better able to cope with any problems that may arise. You no longer feel isolated and instead you're able to look at the world around you and appreciate where you are.

Step 5: Independence Stage

You are yourself again! You embrace the new culture and see everything in a new, yet realistic light. You feel comfortable, confident and able to make decisions based on your own preferences. You no longer feel alone and isolated. You appreciate both the differences and similarities of your new culture. You start to feel at home.

Answer the questions:

What may happen to people when they move to another country?

What may culture shock cause?

What is pre-adaptation program?

Name at least six symptoms of culture shock.

Describe each stage of culture shock.

Have you experienced culture?

Write a short paragraph.

Write a short paragraph about your own experience.

Write about the five stages of culture shock. (If you haven't experienced culture shock yet, you can get acquainted with this and be prepared.)

A few stereotypes of how the French and Americans often see each other...

The Americans see the French as ...

- **Lazy** : people who [do not work](#) and demonstrate in the streets (when they are not on strike)
- **Cowards** : they always [surrender](#), unreliable allies
- **Rude**, **anti-American** and [ungrateful](#), people who don't speak English, [distant](#) and difficult to [meet](#)
- **Communists** : people who live in a bureaucratic Socialist system and who are totally dependent on the [State](#)
- **Dirty** : people who do not use soap (recently, I received a message : "why do French women use perfume instead of taking a bath?")
- **Arrogant** and [conceited](#) people, always giving lessons to the others
- **Not democratic** : people who do not respect [religious freedom](#)

The French see the Americans as ...

- **Arrogant** and sure they are always right and good,
- **Moralizing** and overly [religious](#)
- **Insular** : people who do not know other nations and whose press never addresses international issues : read [more about it](#), see a few [examples](#), try our French [Quiz](#) and read a [funny letter](#) about it and measure [your insularity score](#) !
- **Domineering** : people who do not take [criticism](#) (see [examples...](#)) : see [why you can't criticize them](#) !
- **Naïve** : *de grands enfants* (i.e., people who are naive and have no, or a too short, history)
- **Violent** : people who have free access to guns and who use them to shoot each other when things go wrong (read [my column](#) about it)
- **Materialistic** : people who are arch-capitalists and only think about [money](#)

