Guidelines for Teaching World Cultures

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1. AVOID THE EXOTIC! This is the most important, and the most difficult.
   • “Traditional” vs. “Modern”—no dichotomy
   • Small ethnic groups are not representative
   • Is a given cultural expression contemporary or historical?

2. Use visuals, maps and pictures CAREFULLY. Be critical and keep them complex.
   • Cities, not just villages
   • Western dress, not just “traditional” dress
   • Middle-class, elites, and professionals, not just “primitives”
   • Make geographic connections within the region AND globally.
   Find out what is happening with and without the U.S.

3. Use voices from the countries you are studying.
   • News papers from that country can be found on the web
     Some are government controlled, some are oppositional
   • Classroom visitors—be sure to ask which country!
   • Read authors from that world region, not just American versions

4. Be wary of simple approaches.
   • If working on war, think about resources
   • If working on ethnicity, think economic and political power

5. Connect issues to the U.S.
   • Violence, poverty, etc. are here also
   • Values: communal, individual, hierarchical, gendered
   • Include international political heroes to teach about commitment
to social or environmental justice for inspiration

6. ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR HERITAGE STUDENTS!!!
   • Racism against African American, Hispanic, or Native American
   students is often promoted by unsophisticated “cultural
   knowledge”
   • Even “positive” racial ideas, about Asians for example, can be
   harmful to heritage students
   • Muslim students are carrying a tremendous burden post 9/11
Questions for Cultural Reflection:

1. Describe how people in your family dress. What is distinctively American about it? How is it different or the same as how people in your family dressed in 1800?

2. Describe how people in your family worship. What deities do they believe in? What spirits? Do you, or people you know, engage in magic practices?

3. What are the folk tales told in your family? Which family member told you folk tales? When do you tell them?

4. What are the objects that your family holds sacred? Why?

5. What are the rituals in your family around birth and death, religious and non-religious? Which are your “holy days” and how does your family observe them?

6. For each of the above, does everyone who lives in your community dress, believe, and do the same as your own family? Do you dress, believe, and do the same as your own family?