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The following lessons were created by **Colleen Connors**, a teacher participating in a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Teachers entitled Touch the Past: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Region.

Mini-Unit: Defining My Self and My Culture

Grade Level 9th

Subjects ESL

Objectives To help newcomer students define and validate their cultural identity as they embark on life in a new country. To introduce students to the concept of culture and its components. To help other students learn about the backgrounds of their classmates.

Standards NYS ELA standards 1-4, NYS Social Studies standard 5

Duration About 4 weeks

Materials Paper, paint, colored pencils, presentation boards, computer, projector

Vocabulary culture, artifacts, time-line, tradition, climate, geography

Background I teach 9th grade beginner ESL students, many of whom are brand new to the USA. Students arriving from one country will most likely be unaware of the nuances of the cultures of countries other students arrive from. To a certain extent, the teacher is also in the dark when it comes to what students have been through and what they are expecting. These assignments provide an avenue through which students can establish their identities on their own terms, enlightening both the teacher and fellow students.

Setting the Stage Students will get ready for this project by participating in a variety of ice-breaker exercises designed to get them interacting with each other. We will also look at a world map and pinpoint where various students are from.

Procedure The project consists of five lesson plans. I will teach one lesson every three days. The days in between will be used as student work time, because students will need a lot of teacher assistance since English is not their first language.

Closure Bulletin boards will feature work done by the students throughout these lessons. We will have a celebration at the end of the unit where the principal and other teachers will be invited to learn about the newcomers.

Evaluation What the students have gotten out of the work will be evident in the work that they produce and the presentations they do.

Links/Extension Students will learn about many different cultures during the year in their social studies class. This ESL unit will prepare them to compare cultures and discuss components of culture.

References Family Pictures by Carmen Lomas Garza

Attachment Lesson Plans (see below)

Mini-Unit: Mini-Unit: Defining My Self and My Culture
Lesson Plans
Colleen Connors

Lesson 1: What is culture?

This lesson will generate discussion about what needs we all share as humans and how different groups of people come to meet those needs in different ways. Photos and videos of different cultures engaging in different practices will be shown to facilitate discussion. Students will come to understand that while all cultures share similar needs, they usually have different cuisine, dance, music, language, tradition, technology, etc. Students will be assigned to write a description of the place and culture they come from. They will be asked to bring in photos/artifacts if possible. Students will present to each other in small groups.

Lesson 2: Description of an important day in the life of...

This lesson will continue the cultural dialogue by allowing students to share important experiences from their lives. The teacher will read from the book "Family Pictures" by Carmen Lomas Garza, specifically the story about the girl celebrating her 15th birthday. In the discussion, students will notice the cultural elements of how the milestone is celebrated. Imitating the style of Garza, students will choose an interesting moment from their own lives and write about as well as illustrate it. They will present these stories in small groups.

Lesson 3: Chronology of your life

Students will complete a timeline of their lives, highlighting milestone years. From this project, the teacher and other students will learn what the owner of the timeline considers to be important, giving more insight into his or her culture. For example, holidays certain students have never heard of may come up in discussion.

Lesson 4: Five items in your bedroom

To provide more details on the culture that a student is coming from, the penultimate assignment will be for students to bring in five small important items from his or her life. Examples may be a favorite book, piece of jewelry or photo. Again, this display will help the student to feel more known by her classmates and for her classmates to know her. Students may choose one item to photograph and add a description to for the bulletin board display.

Lesson 5: Write about someone you have come to know

In this final lesson, each student will be assigned to write an essay summarizing what they have learned about another student. Ideally, students will be matched with a student from a different country. These essays will also be included on the bulletin board display.