

## MATERIALS FOR TEACHING CULTURE: REALIA, FILMS, SIGNS

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**Abstract:** The culture of teaching and learning refers to the beliefs and value system in which both educators and learners value the process of teaching and learning, where their practices reflect their commitment and where the resources to facilitate teaching and learning are made available (Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997:43). Below we will examine how realia, film and signs relate to the study of culture.

**Keywords:** culture, realia, movie, films, signs, symbol, cultural symbols, emblems, hand gestures, flags, animals.

The components of culture: a) customs and traditions, which are stable elements of culture. Custom is an inherited stereotypical way of behavior, which is reproduced in a particular society or social group and is familiar to their members. Tradition is a set of representations, rituals, habits and skills of practical and social activity, being transmitted from generation to generation, which are the regulators of social relations. B) household culture (everyday life). C) daily behavior, which includes not only the rules of behavior and etiquette, but also facial expressions, gestures. D) “national picture of the world”, showing the peculiarities of thinking and perception of the world.

In education, realia (/ri'eɪ.li.ə/ pron. Ree-ay-lee-ah) are objects from real life used in classroom instruction by educators to improve students' understanding of other cultures and real-life situations. A teacher of a foreign language often employs realia to strengthen students' associations between words for common objects and the objects themselves. In many cases, these objects are part of an instructional kit that includes a manual and is thus considered as being part of a documentary whole by librarians.

In translation, Realia (plural noun) are words and expressions for culture-specific material elements. The word realia comes from medieval Latin, in which it originally meant “the real things”, i.e. material things, as opposed to abstract ones.

In the theory of translation, the term “realia” is used in two senses.

On the one hand, realia are understood as all the things specific to certain people. These things include objects of culture and life, historical events, place names and personal names. On the other hand, realia are the words and phrases denoting those things. Despite the ambiguity of the use of the same term in relation to the objects of reality and linguistic signs indicating these objects, the term “realia” in the sense of

“words” has become firmly established in translation and at the same time maintained its objective value. Perhaps the main reason of its use is the fact that the phrase “language unit indicating realities” would be inconvenient to use because it is too long. There are several definitions of realia. According to the definition of O. S. Akhmanova, realia are “variety of factors, being studied by foreign linguistics, such as state structure, history and culture of the specific nation, linguistic communication between native speakers, and etc., in terms of their reflections in the language” [1, p. 482]. A. D. Schweitzer gave the following definition of realia “the units of national language, indicating unique referents which are peculiar to this linguistic culture and absent in the comparable linguistic cultural community” [2, p. 185].

Movies shape cultural attitudes and customs, as audiences adopt the attitudes and styles of the characters they watch on screen. Filmmakers may use their movies to influence cultural attitudes toward certain social issues, as in *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Super Size Me*.

The relationship between movies and culture involves a complicated dynamic. In considering the relationship between film and culture, it is important to keep in mind that, while certain ideologies may be prevalent in a given era.

Just as movies reflect the anxieties, beliefs, and values of the cultures that produce them, they also help to shape and solidify a culture’s beliefs. Sometimes the influence is trivial, as in the case of fashion trends or figures of speech. After the release of *Flashdance* in 1983, for instance, torn T-shirts and leg warmers became hallmarks of the fashion of the 1980s (Pemberton-Sikes, 2006). However, sometimes the impact can be profound, leading to social or political reform, or the shaping of ideologies.

During the 1890s and up until about 1920, American culture experienced a period of rapid industrialization. As people moved from farms to centers of industrial production, urban areas began to hold larger and larger concentrations of the population. At the same time, film and other methods of mass communication (advertising and radio) developed, whose messages concerning tastes, desires, customs, speech, and behavior spread from these population centers to outlying areas across the country. The effect of early mass-communication media was to wear away regional differences and create a more homogenized, standardized culture.

Film played a key role in this development, as viewers began to imitate the speech, dress, and behavior of their common heroes on the silver screen (Mintz, 2007). In 1911, the Vitagraph company began publishing *The Motion Picture Magazine*, America’s first fan magazine. Originally conceived as a marketing tool to keep audiences interested in Vitagraph’s pictures and major actors, *The Motion Picture Magazine* helped create the concept of the film star in the American imagination. Fans became obsessed with the off-screen lives of their favorite celebrities, like Pearl White, Florence Lawrence, and Mary Pickford (Doyle, 2008).

Cultural symbols can be religious or spiritual, or they can represent the ideology or philosophy of a culture's language, values and traditions. Cultural symbols include signs, emblems, hand gestures, flags, animals and much more.

Symbols may mean many things in a culture. Often, colors, objects, animals, and other objects can mean different things to different cultures. For example, the bald eagle represents strength, power, and freedom in the United States while the dragon represents strength and wisdom in many Asian cultures.

Cultures use symbols to create and communicate values and traditions to the cultural group. Symbols are used by a culture to identify other people who are part of the same culture and are a way to connect and relate to one another in a culture.

In order to clearly understand cultural symbols, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the individual words. A symbol is an object, word, or action that represents a concept. Culture is all of the behaviors, languages, beliefs, traditions, and its shared meaning that guides the standards of a group. Together, a cultural symbol is a symbol that holds meaning and understanding for a group. Many groups use symbols to express a concept of their culture. Symbols are used by a culture to express a value of the culture. Cultural symbols allow a group that shares the same beliefs to identify each other based on the experience of that symbol. A continued belief or experience can be transmitted through the cultural symbol. For example, when a flag from a country is raised, people who are affiliated with that country will stand in honor of that flag as it represents nationalism.

Symbols are very important for cultures because they help a group create the culture itself. Cultural symbols can represent many things and help cultures express specific ideologies and social standards of the culture that are communicated amongst the group.

A cultural symbol is a physical manifestation that signifies the ideology of a particular culture or that merely has meaning within a culture. What is culture, you may ask? Culture is an accumulation of the beliefs, traditions, language and values of a particular group of people.

The Christian culture has the cultural symbol of the cross, where the Jewish culture has the cultural symbol of the Star of David. Cultural symbols don't have to be actual symbols or signs; they can also be gestures such as hand shakes and hand signals. Additionally, the same symbol can mean different things in different cultures. Americans should be careful in Greece, for example. The thumbs up, which symbolizes that everything is great in American culture, is just like giving the middle finger in Greek culture.

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