

Activity 7: Reading

Life in My New Country

“Wow! I’m moving to the U.S.” I was excited and a little nervous when I got the news, but I had wonderful feelings about my new country. I had heard about people having adjustment problems upon arrival, but I never anticipated many problems for myself; after all, I have always been very active in my own community. But what I came to experience in the U.S. is what experts refer to as “culture shock.” Adapting to my new environment was not only difficult - it was challenging. However, now I understand the process of culture shock.

Culture shock may be divided into three stages. In the beginning, you like your new environment. This is the first stage, often referred to as the “honeymoon stage.” We all experience a certain thrill at being in a new place, seeing new things, and meeting new people. It’s a kind of cultural adventure.

During the second stage of culture shock, the novelty begins to wear off. Being in a new place can be exhausting, and after a while you begin to dislike everything about your surroundings. During this stage, you may want to spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching videos from your home country, or eating food that is familiar to you.

Finally, in the third stage, you begin to adapt to your new lifestyle and enjoy the diverse opportunities of the new culture. While you will always miss the comforts of your home culture, you understand that your new environment has its positive side as well. Maybe the fruits and vegetables are fresher at your new grocery store, or perhaps you have made a new friend whom you never would have met if you had stayed at home.

Embracing a new culture is difficult for many reasons. The customs, food, and weather are often extremely different from your home culture. Often the simplest things - like the telephone, supermarket, and transportation systems - seem confusing and strange. The language can be a huge problem even if you have studied it in school before your move.

The English language is full of phrases and idioms that are directly connected to the culture. For example, feeling like “a fish out of water” can describe someone in the second stage of culture shock. Expressions like these are not always easy to understand - even if you know the definition of the individual words that are used. Miscommunication and embarrassing mistakes are commonplace when you are trying to figure out a foreign culture.

When you are worried about everything that you say or do in public, you can feel self-conscious - like you don’t belong. But, really, even natives struggle with feelings of self-consciousness. In fact, because there are so many different cultures in the U.S., even an American experiences culture shock in a different city or region.

Finding your identity in a new country can be disconcerting, even if you never had difficulties in your native country. Because you may no longer have your family, your old job, or your old circle of friends, you are required to redefine who you are in this new community. This can be hard work!

I realize now that only by becoming familiar with the country and experiencing the customs and the culture can someone move into the third stage of culture shock. The more I get involved in my community, the more connected I feel to my new life. And it gets easier every day.