

# Cultural Awareness Logs: A Method for Increasing International-Mindedness among High School and Middle School Students

*A high school teacher describes an assignment that draws on Hall's cultural iceberg to help students develop global perspectives and better close-reading and analytical skills.*

**K**aitlyn was a ninth grader who was quite sure that “all Asians look alike.”

Stephanie was a seventh grader who looked down on the characters in *Things Fall Apart* because “they live in huts,” instead of a house like she did.

Seth was an eleventh grader who saw little point in rereading a text, even one he liked on his initial read.

## Instilling a Global Perspective

One of the most pervasive challenges we face with adolescents is the difficulty of teaching them to see beyond themselves (Trost 177–78). This problem spans middle school and high school for most and into higher education for many. In fact, a good portion of the adults who we work with could probably benefit from a lesson on seeing the world from multiple perspectives (Gopal 375). Economic drivers also create an imperative for teachers to reveal the wider world to students. A Committee for Economic Development (CED) study in 2006 cited research by George Washington University professors Michael J. Marquardt and Lisa Horvath, who explained:

Many of today's global business challenges are too complex, occur too quickly, and involve too many resources for *local* teams or leaders to handle on their own. Instead, *global* teams include individuals of different nationalities who work together across cultural barriers and time zones for extended periods of time. These teams work

on projects serving a wide set of customers, solve problems across borders, and significantly improve an organization's profitability and services. The success of multicultural teams is becoming critical to success in the global marketplace. American companies lose an estimated \$2 billion a year due to inadequate cross-cultural guidance for their employees in multicultural situations. Companies could be spared these financial losses if employees possessed the necessary cross-cultural skills to interact successfully with their foreign counterparts. (CED 6; italics in original)

University of Oregon Presidential Chair and Associate Dean for Global Education Yong Zhao echoed those findings, identifying that “what used to be required of a small group of individuals—diplomats, translators, cross-cultural communication consultants or international tour guides—has become necessary for all professions” (425).

## Cultural Awareness Logs

To prepare students for these increasingly global realities, I drew on American anthropologist Edward T. Hall's cultural iceberg to design what I call Cultural Awareness Logs (CALs) as a method for encouraging students to investigate texts, analyze for depth, and understand a wide array of cultures and subcultures. I have used this method formatively and summatively, with students in grades 7 through 12, and have shared it with teachers of language arts, humanities, mathematics, and science. The CAL is not a cure-all, but it is something educators “can do to help our children, live, work and

interact with people from different cultures and countries” (Zhao 425).

CALs target elements within texts, helping students find meaning and insights from cultural behaviors, beliefs, values, and thoughts of others. They show developing analytical readers how to investigate texts and cultures for key details, help developing researchers to categorize facts and begin citing sources formally, and teach developing thinkers to make strong, specific inferences about those texts and cultures. By allowing students to engage in-depth with a variety of cultures, they learn to go beneath the surface of a culture and identify key, meaningful similarities and differences between their cultures and those they are studying.

CALs require students to chart the following in columns (see fig. 1):

1. List the group of people the cultural observation describes (Cult.).
2. List the text where you found the observation (Text).
3. List the page number(s) where you found the observation (Pg.).
4. Paraphrase a description, or give a detail or direct quotation from the text that shows the basis of your cultural observation (Description / detail / quotation).
5. Identify one of the 46 categories from Hall’s cultural iceberg (see fig. 2) that best encompasses or aligns with the cultural observation (Category).
6. Make a cultural inference that connects to your observation and to the category you chose, so you can derive an in-depth truth about how people of this culture live. This truth may be unique to the culture or comparative to your culture or another culture with which you are familiar (Inference about the culture).

I presented this method in August 2012 and March 2013 at regional conferences organized by

World View, the international education arm of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a significant portion of the attendees approached me afterward or via email, all intent on implementing it immediately. Because CALs yielded such a strong response, I offer here a fuller view of how and why Cultural Awareness Logs help students develop a more global perspective.

CALs can be adapted for students at many grade levels. The key is to introduce CALs early in a school year and use them frequently with a variety of texts across a variety of cultures, preferably with a variety of text types. Doing so provides a way to achieve Common Core State Standards, which guide students not only toward increasingly complex texts but also toward increasingly complex tasks while reading (NGA 8). CALs achieve this by pushing students to consider the perspectives of others. In-depth understanding is what leads to intercultural empathy, as it allows students to use inquiry to wrestle with issues, rather than being forced into compliance.

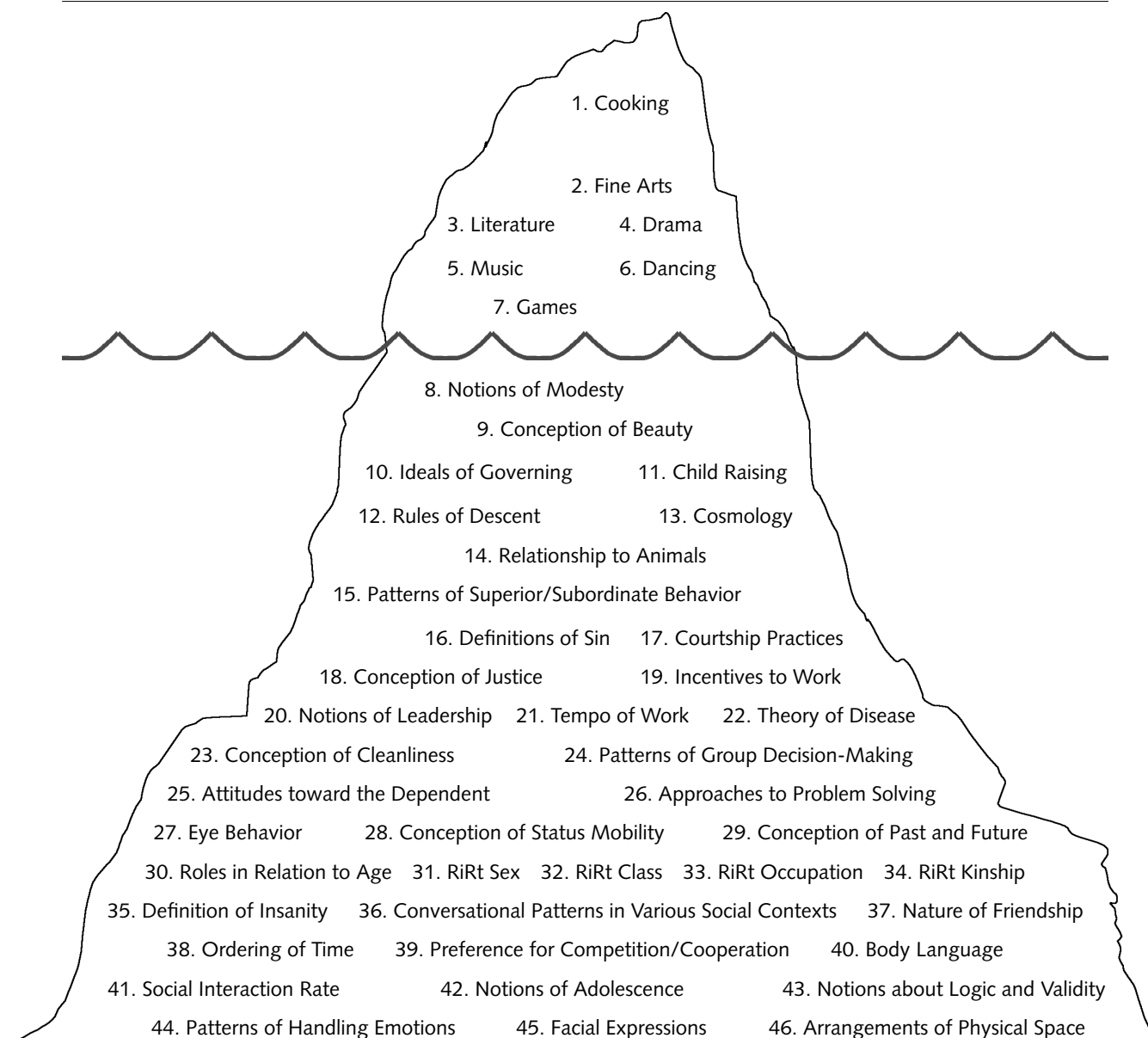
Intercultural empathy is an important 21st-century skill in a flattening world, yet many classrooms do not focus on this with necessary regularity. Building cross-cultural competencies fosters essential citizenship learning for American students, most of whom have been isolated from a globalizing society by 3,000 miles of oceans. Even from a purely pragmatic stance, CALs enhance student abilities as researchers and planners of analytical and evidence-supported writing while they become better inference-makers, an essential skill set for reading development (Hansen and Pearson).

## The Philosophy of CALs

In revising Bloom’s taxonomy, David R. Krathwohl identified “a hierarchy” of complexity that moves from “Remember” to “Create,” with “Analyze”

**FIGURE 1.** Cultural Awareness Log

Name: _____				Mr. Michael Thier	
Cultural Awareness Log				Date: _____	
Cult.	Text	Pg.	Description / detail / quotation	Category	Inference about the culture

**FIGURE 2.** Iceberg Concept of Culture

Just as most of the iceberg is out of sight and below the water line, most of what makes up other people's cultures are outside our awareness. There are 46 elements that make up culture on this list, but this list could easily be much longer. To prepare for your Cultural Awareness Log, list the 46 terms and come up with working definitions for as many as you can in **20 minutes**. Think connotatively. Think of cultures you've lived in or have visited or observed. You may use examples as part of your definition.

**Note:** RiRt = Roles in Relation to

Adapted from Edward T. Hall's cultural iceberg in *Beyond Culture*.

identified as the fourth level on that ladder (215). I have found that setting Analysis as the minimum learning target grows students' cognitive competence in thinking critically and making knowledge. Using Analysis as the baseline makes students in-

herently responsible for being able to Know, Comprehend, and Apply. Shifting that responsibility to students allows teachers to become more nimble diagnosticians of where students fall down on the Bloom ladder. That makes targeting remediation

more efficient and effective. Using Analysis as the baseline also allows for rich differentiation in the classroom. As students self-graduate to Synthesis and Evaluation, a teacher can directly instruct students in need of remediation in the first three rungs or in enhancing their analytical skills, giving teachers agency to “decide where and how to improve the planning of curriculum and the delivery of instruction” using Bloom’s taxonomy (Krathwohl 218). For instance, Stephanie, the seventh grader quoted above, wasn’t as narrowminded as she sounded; she just lacked vocabulary to discuss cultural differences. CALs allowed me to provide her with a framework to find the words she needed to discuss Igbo culture beyond stereotypes. Kaitlyn, by contrast, was (by her own admission) as narrowminded as she sounded, and read and spoke at a high level before CALs. But parsing elements of culture made her realize, on her own, the problematic nature of lumping together a continent of 3.9 billion people.

## Implementing CALs

In this section, I describe the steps necessary for creating a unit using the Cultural Awareness Logs.

### Find a Text That Works

Choose a text with a clear, thoroughly described setting that exposes at least one culture or subculture. It is advantageous initially to choose a text with a setting that would feel foreign to students but that has clear overlaps to cultures your students might find familiar. This will allow you to guide their exploration for points at which the cultures intersect and depart. I have often worked with *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe’s novel that juxtaposes Western imperialism and Christianity alongside traditional Igbo practices in Nigeria. The tension makes for rich conversations that eventually led Stephanie to realize that “Huts are just houses made from different materials . . . . Theirs are just like ours.” Similarly, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Haddon) allows students to meet a British protagonist who lives with Asperger’s syndrome, but American teenagers find him relatable as he exhibits many behaviors typical to teenagers dealing with divorced parents. Also, I recommend “How the World Was Made” (Marriott and Rachlin) for a great foray into CALs without using

a lengthy text. This story of creation told by the Native American Cheyenne people contains many archetypal motifs, so it allows for a great deal of cross-cultural investigation with comparison and contrast. Particularly, Maheo, the All-Spirit, conducts many miracles that would seem familiar to those from Old Testament traditions. Ultimately, most any text chosen to stretch students’ senses of how people live differently in various parts of the world will provide fruitful, thoughtful inferences and discussion.

### Unpack Culture and Hall’s Iceberg

To begin using CALs, a teacher must become familiar, and then familiarize students, with Edward T. Hall’s cultural iceberg (see fig. 2) and its 46 categories. The categories allow for a wide range of cultural study. Initially, I lead discussion to define what culture is and what it is not. Some “What Culture Is” responses tend to include “a shared belief,” “common practices,” or “traits a bunch of similar people have.” The most common “Culture Is Not” response is “a single person” or “a one-time event,” such as an eclipse or other phenomena. Next, I assign students to unpack meaning from as many categories from the iceberg as they can in 20 minutes, asking them to tease out what each category could show about a culture. I instruct students to “Think connotatively; think of cultures you’ve lived in or have visited or observed.” They are allowed to use examples in lieu of a pure definition. I start the students at different points, some beginning at Category 1, some at Category 11, others at Category 21, and so on. When we reconvene, we share and generate common questions that help define each category. This avoids student replication of their classmates’ work, which saves time but also builds community as we all wrestle toward common definitions or questions. An exemplar question dealing with Patterns of Superior / Subordinate Behavior wonders: *How do people act compared to those with higher or lower rank?* An exemplar question dealing with Roles in Relation to Sex wonders: *How does sex determine status?* When students habitually use CALs as they read, these and other questions become part of their meta-analysis of the text.

I ask students to note the difference between categories 1 through 7 and 8 through 46. Each category’s status above or below the water line

differentiates how superficially or deeply the category allows the reader or observer to delve. Just as most of the iceberg is out of sight and below the water line, most elements that make up another's culture are outside our awareness. The first seven categories mire the reader or observer in what former International Baccalaureate director George Walker called the Five Fs: *Food, Festivals, Famous People, Fashion, and Flags*, and international education advocates agree that these are good starting points to discuss culture (Skelton, Wigford, Reeves, and Reeves 53), but ultimately lead to skimming the surface of a complex entity such as culture. One of the challenges of global education is focusing students on the lives of people who otherwise would be "out of sight and out of mind" (Zhao 423). Some adults consider self-absorbed behavior by adolescents to be age-appropriate. But adolescents can be coached to see beyond themselves.

### Familiarize Students with the Chart

I walk students through the purpose of each of the six columns of the chart. I find that student outcomes are directly proportional to how much time I spend clearly explaining the columns. On my first time leading students through CALs, I assumed too much knowledge. Now, I separate my explanation of Columns 1–3, Column 4, and Columns 5–6 for two reasons:

1. Students find Columns 1–3 initially accessible because the columns ask for concrete information, providing students with the confidence and comfort they often need to unpack abstract ideas.
2. The difference between Columns 1–3, which demand Knowledge, and Column 4, which demands Comprehension and Application, feel vastly different to students than Columns 5–6, which depend on growing student ability to Analyze a text and Evaluate a culture.

When I explain Culture (Column 1), Text (Column 2), and Page (Column 3), I model evidence-gathering skills necessary for conducting research. The CAL chart provides students with a template, or graphic organizer, to gather information efficiently. I also take this opportunity to teach shorthand and annotation of texts. We ask questions of the text, which is among the many skills

Linda Elder and Richard Paul identify as necessary for close reading (36–37). I show students why evidence matters through analogies to convicting criminals in courtroom settings. *Law & Order* clips on YouTube are great for this purpose.

We dedicate much time talking about Columns 4–6 individually. I make sure to ask students to pay particularly close attention to the connections across columns. There seems to be some debate among students over what is the preferable order of operations. All students agree they need to identify a description, detail, or quotation that sparks their thought first. Students also agree that ability to identify discussion-worthy descriptions, details, and quotations grows with each successive chapter. Then there is a divide. Some identify a category next to frame their inference. Others infer and seek out a category to deepen their inference. I am careful not to insist on one approach. Both are effective, as long as the reader builds an inference linking culture to category to detail / description / quotation. When intersections occur, students have created their own knowledge that explores a truth that is significant to understanding another culture deeply. They have also acquired a skill essential to analytical research and writing.

### The Early Rounds

Students performing close reading for depth depend on repetition of CALs with increasingly complex levels of engagement. For the first assignment, I assign a single chapter. Often, first chapters are rich targets as authors expose settings to their readers. While reading Chapter 1, I assign students to build five rows from the CAL. I do not legislate which descriptions, details, quotations, inferences, or categories students pursue. Reluctant or struggling readers may require more scaffolding; for example, the teacher may offer examples of descriptions, details, and quotations that can serve as starting points. In general, my only stipulations are that students may not use the same category twice, nor may they use Categories 1–7. This forces them to generate a wider breadth of cultural understanding and allows them to develop five distinct cultural inferences. For each successive chapter read, students add five more rows, but they must use at least one new category in each chapter's worth of investigations. This allows students to deepen familiar ideas

**FIGURE 3.** The Beginner's Grading Scale

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100:	Completes all six columns for all five rows
95:	Missing one box from one of the minor columns (Nos. 1–3)
90:	Missing two boxes from minor columns or one box from a major column (Nos. 4–6)
85:	Missing three boxes from minor columns or one major and one minor
80:	Missing four boxes from minor columns or two majors, or other combination
75:	Missing five boxes from minor columns or two majors and one minor, or other combination
70:	Missing six boxes from minor columns or three majors, or other combination
65:	Missing seven boxes from minor columns or three majors and one minor, or other combination
60:	Missing eight boxes from minor columns or four majors, or other combination
55:	Missing nine boxes from minor columns or four majors and one minor, or other combination
50:	Missing ten boxes from minor columns or five majors, or other combination
<i>Continue progression of subtracting five points for minor columns and ten points for major columns.</i>	

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and acquire a fuller sense of the culture across new categories. Most students try to use multiple new categories. In texts with 10–15 chapters, students typically engage with 20-plus categories. Students provide themselves with a nuanced, full view of a text and a culture by the end of a multi-chapter text.

#### Transition from Beginning Grading Scale to Advanced Grading Scale

If you choose CALs as a summative assessment, it is important to start with The Beginner's Grading Scale (see fig. 3). This simply assesses completion and emphasizes practice. It is designed to build student comfort with process and prioritizes the columns that build student analytical and evaluative skills more than those that lean on student knowledge and comprehension. Items in Columns 4–6 are valued twice as much as those in Columns 1–3 because students who are reluctant to analyze and evaluate often need incentive to grow in those areas. By contrast, the Advanced Scale (see fig. 4) is designed for mastery. Though students complete five rows, the assessor only scores the work of one row when using this scale. At times, I have assessed rows chosen randomly after students submit their work. Other times, I have asked students to choose the rows they wanted assessed prior to submission. The four goals of the Advanced Scale move a student from compliance to deep understanding. In the process, they graduate from comprehension beyond application to analysis and evaluation. I believe students must be held to the Beginner's Scale until they decide they are ready to move away from

**FIGURE 4.** The Advanced Scale

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1. Inference, not just the row on the CAL, is grounded with textual support, not just casual mention.
  2. Inference reveals a unique truth (or specific comparative truth) about the culture, not simply a casual commentary.
  3. Inference analytically explores a truth about a culture, not vaguely, superficially, or by simple description.
  4. Inference, not just the row on the CAL, clearly demonstrates an exploration of the category, not just a superficial mention.
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- 100: Does all 4  
 92: Does 3 of the 4  
 84: Does 2 of the 4  
 77: Does 1 of the 4  
 70: Inference exists but does 0 of the 4  
 0: Nothing submitted
- 

it. I have had some students want to try the Advanced Scale after only a few rounds of CALs. Others have spent a semester using the Beginner Scale before taking the plunge with the Advanced Scale. Ultimately, both scales allow the teacher to gather much qualitative and quantitative data about student gap areas as readers, writers, and, most importantly, thinkers. Some of those gaps often include definitions of culture. After five rounds with *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, one group of high school juniors was able to articulate clear, thorough, specific, and insightful inferences about more than 35 cultures and subcultures within the text. The students parsed measurable

differences between “Parents,” “Single Parents,” “Abusive Parents,” and “Parents of Children with Special Needs.” The students built clear comparisons across “the British,” “Christians,” and “People in the Developed World.” However, some students struggled within the categories or with finding details to serve as textual evidence. This struggle enables the teacher to target and develop strategies to remediate.

### Students Present Their Results

This is where CALs fall apart if lessons are not intentionally planned to model and value reflection. Encourage students to become assessors, growing their evaluative capacity using the assessment scales. Discuss examples to elucidate further what a culture is and what it is not. Use full-class discussion or groups to mine for rich, deep examples of inferences and examples that are close, but need refinement. Then show students how to identify the gaps. Resist the impulse to provide the gaps in a purely teacher-directed fashion, instead draw-

ing on full-class discussion or groups to mine for examples that have some scattered successful elements and have the class build stronger inferences from those elements. Spending time with the Beginner’s Scale and providing strong and weak examples elevates students’ analytical and inferential skills quickly.

As an example, Figure 5 shows examples of Cultural Awareness Log entries I’ve created from a class discussion I had with eighth-grade students who read “How the World Was Made” (Marriott and Rachlin).

### Reading for Culture

While CALs did not change the world, they did grow analytical and global thought for my students. After working with CALs, Seth said, “There was a lot of foreshadowing and author intent that had an impact on the reader on a first read, but was only subconscious at that point. It was noticed consciously on a second read.” More importantly,


**FIGURE 5.** Examples of Cultural Awareness Log Entries from “How the World Was Made”

Cult.	Text	Pg.	Description / detail / quotation	Category	Inference about the culture
Cheyenne	HtWWM	2	“Do you think that you can help me?”	Attitudes toward the dependent	This question indicates a culture that seems like it wants to help those in need, which is a contrast to the Igbo culture we read about in <i>Things Fall Apart</i> . The Igbo seemed to shun the needy.
Cheyenne	HtWWM	2	“the Earth Woman and he thought she was very beautiful: the most beautiful thing he had made so far”	Conception of beauty	Female beauty is prized, like most humans do (e.g., Aphrodite, Helen of Troy, etc.). Humans are different than the animal kingdom (e.g., most birds), where the male is more colorful.
Cheyenne	HtWWM	2	“Maheo reached into his right side, and pulled out a rib bone.”	Cosmology	These people believe that man is made in god’s image, like in our Bible. But it’s different because he makes a man out of the woman’s rib, unlike our story. That makes women more powerful in their culture than they might be in ours.
Cheyenne	HtWWM	2	“No man can do more than his best.”	Tempo of work	This sounds more balanced than our culture or Japanese or German cultures. All three of us often ask people to sacrifice family time for work. For the Cheyenne, hard work is valued but not at expense of a person if he did “his best.”

Examples from Cheyenne culture are from eighth-grade students reading “How the World Was Made” in Michael Thier’s *Language*. A classroom at Mount Mourne, an IB World School.

Kaitlyn acknowledged, “The activity has made me look at characters in a book as real people instead of just a made-up culture . . . . I see it as an equal culture, just different than mine. They’re on the same plane, but they have different sets of beliefs and morals. One isn’t better than the other; they’re just different.”

Reading for cultural depth builds a collaborative spirit among students and engenders trust with the teacher, so students feel comfortable using CALs to tackle texts that many teachers consider taboo. I have planned lessons to use CALs to dissect Hinduism’s Bhagavad-Gita and Vedas, Judaism’s Old Testament, Christianity’s New Testament, and Islam’s Koran. This produces a sense of cultural understanding on levels deeper and more meaningful than stereotype allows. Doing so allows students to use cultural, religious, or other criteria to evaluate protagonists from literature or key figures in history.

I have found that using Cultural Awareness Logs consistently and across texts can generate gains with students in terms of their abilities to investigate texts, analyze for depth, and understand a wide array of cultures and subcultures. 

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### READWRITETHINK CONNECTION

Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

In this lesson, students evaluate a nonfiction or realistic fiction text for its cultural and personal relevance. Students write about a story that they identify with and share their responses as a group. As a class, they then analyze the cultural relevance of a selected text using an online tool. After completing this full-class activity, students search for additional, relevant texts and write reviews of the texts they choose. Selected texts can be any nonfiction or realistic fiction piece: books, documentaries, television programs, or films. This lesson can be especially powerful for English language learners. <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/assessing-cultural-relevance-exploring-1003.html>