

Build Cultural Knowledge

Most of us have experienced dining in a restaurant and using our background knowledge to inform what we do. We wait to be seated, we order from a menu, and we pay for the meal after we've finished it. If the waiter is good, we might add a 20-percent tip as a gesture of appreciation. However, if we included a tip after dining in Japan, it would be considered an insult to the waiter!

Building cultural knowledge is as essential as building background knowledge in our work with immigrant and refugee students who are learning a new language and are adjusting to a new culture and society. As you help your newcomers build cultural knowledge, consider these questions:

1. What are the cultural and social differences between their home countries and America?
2. How was their schooling here different from the schooling they received in the countries they left? What were the expectations for teachers, parents, and students?
3. What are some of the possible cultural hurdles that you see as they adjust to a new life in America?