

Orientation	Pre-Departure
Session Overview	Students are prepared for dealing with tough questions about the US. Includes hints on how to diffuse the emotional side of a question and to discuss rather than argue.
Participants	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students <input type="checkbox"/> Host Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Host Siblings
Format	<input type="checkbox"/> Highly Active / Interactive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Some Activity / Interactivity <input type="checkbox"/> Independent
Duration	45-65 minutes
Group Size	Any size
Minimum Staffing	1 facilitator
Materials Needed	Handouts: <i>"Tough Questions about the US"</i> and <i>"Hints: Let's Discuss, Not Argue"</i> Flipchart, pens
Preparation	Read through all of the material and make sure you are comfortable discussing it; make notecards or highlight suggested questions to ask students in group discussions.
LOOP standards achieved	<p>Culture:</p> <p>Students will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be aware of the influence of culture on people 2. Understand that cultural references are relative <p>My Culture:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be aware of their own cultural background (values, behaviors, objects that are part of it). 2. Be aware of the way they might be perceived by others / prejudice and stereotypes. <p>The Other Culture:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be aware that they will have to take on challenges (be comfortable about the exchange experience not always being comfortable).

	<p>2. Understand how to explore differences between cultures.</p> <p>Adaptation: Understand that differences cannot be judged in terms of right or wrong. It's just different.</p>
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INTRODUCTION: (5 minutes)

Assume I am someone in your host country and I say to you (pick a student) ‘We’ve heard how easy your schools are. How can such a great nation have such a poor school system?’

Let the student try and answer. Let someone else try also. Then try another question (off “*Tough questions...*” handout).

Info for Facilitator

- Bullets represent talking points or instructions.
- ✓ Checkmarks represent key points or take aways.

ACTIVITY 1: Meet the Critics

Discussion (10 minutes)

- You will likely meet people who have a greater knowledge of world affairs than you do.
- Many people may also know a lot more about the US, in the form of politics, statistics about US society, news on current trends, etc. than you do.
- Thinking about the sample questions I asked you, why are these questions so hard to answer?

When they attack the U.S., you become defensive; half-truths are confusing and difficult to deal with; don’t know what is really being asked.

Group Work (10 minutes)

- Split the groups into pairs, pass out both handouts (“*Tough Questions about the US*” and “*Hints: Let’s Discuss, Not Argue*”)
- Have each pair pick a question and decide together how they might best handle it, given the hints provided.

Circulate and help students focus on how to handle the questions—do not give factual information. It is not important to learn each person’s views on the subjects, just to see how they would field the questions.

Report Back (10 minutes)

Have 2 or 3 groups report back to the group what the question was and how they decided to handle it. Ask for comments from the group.

ACTIVITY 2: Drill Line (10 minutes)

- Have students get into a straight line, with you facing them at the front of the line.
- Tell them that now they can show off what they just learned from *Lets Discuss, Not Argue*.
- Tell them to answer as quickly as possible; you're only giving them 10 seconds.
- Fire questions from *Tough Questions about the U.S.* at each student, after 10 seconds, tell them to go to the back of the line.
- Go through the line of students for 10 minutes, it's OK with ask questions not on the sheet that are your own critical questions.

This is meant to be a fun activity! Usually, students start giggling while in line and come up with silly answers. Encourage them to have fun with it.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: Contemporary World Issues (additional 20 minutes)

Introduction

When I was overseas I was constantly asked why the U.S. supported this or said that or was spending money on 'x.' (Try to draw from your own experience. Talk about what you thought of world affairs before exchange vs. during and after exchange.)

Info for Facilitator

A recent returnee should lead this session.

Part 1: Identify Current Issues (5 minutes)

On a flipchart you label "Current Issues"...

- Have students name some of the most important issues facing the world today. List them on the flipchart.
- Encourage the student to investigate some of these issues before they leave.

Part 2: Pick an Issue (10 minutes)

- Have students pair up and discuss how they think their host country may view this issue.

Part 3: Identify Resources (5 minutes)

On a flipchart you label "Resources"...

- Have students name some of the resources they have for learning more about this issue. List answers on the Flip

Answers May Include:

newspapers, magazines, books, evening world news, news analysis TV programs, documentaries, lectures, experts on the subject, Internet, etc.

chart.

- **Remind students that they should be watching for particular points of view.** Most of what they read or hear will NOT be objective, but they will be the views of someone/some group with a particular point of view.
- Therefore they should not use only one source of information. It will also mean that they may not find a very objective picture of their host country's views - they may have to wait until they get there.

WRAP-UP (5 minutes)

Encourage students to share how it felt to go through this session.

Ask students:

- How did this session prepare you for your exchange?
- What do you know about your host country and how they may view Americans?

TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT THE U.S.

Here are some typical questions you may hear overseas.

1. We've heard so much about how easy your schools are. How can such a great nation have such a poor system of education?
2. Why is America always interfering in other countries business when you have so many of your own problems at home?
3. Why do you put old people in homes for the aged? Don't you care about your elderly?
4. Why are Americans so nationalistic? You always think you are the best.
5. How can such a rich country as America have so many homeless people?
6. Why are Americans so ignorant of the world?
7. How can you talk so much about human rights when you have racial problems in the U.S.? (OR ...when the U.S. still supports the death penalty?)
8. Why don't you have health care for everyone? In our country, health care is provided at low or no cost.
9. Yours is such a violent, crime-filled society (Consider school shootings). Why don't you ban handguns?
10. Why do so many women work in your country? Do they really believe all that Women's Rights stuff?
11. American are so wasteful. Why do you, for instance, use four times more oil per person than we do? Don't you have any consideration for the rest of the world's resource needs?

LET'S DISCUSS, NOT ARGUE

1. **Repeat the question you hear.** In doing so it (a) gives dignity to the question being asked and (b) confirms that you've heard the question really being asked.
2. **Try to understand the basis for the question.** Why was it asked? Is it really the question the person wants to ask? Where did the perception come from? Where did the questioner get the information? Ask some questions to clarify the issue.
3. **Draw from your own experience.** Most generalizations are subject to misunderstanding and argument. Use words like "In my experience," "From what I've seen," etc.
4. **Look for broader social implications.** Move the question away from it being an American "problem" to a universal problem of human beings all over the world that has definite manifestations in the U.S. In trying to explain the issue, you might ask about similar/related problems in your host country. This may be a way to open up conversation.
5. **Be reasonable.** Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer. Suggest ways to find an answer.
6. **Separate yourself personally.** It's OK to separate yourself from political decisions and policies that are not necessarily yours. One approach might be, "Yes, a lot of people might agree with you, but..."
7. **Don't argue.** When a discussion becomes emotional, pride is involved, listening ceases, and one feels a moral obligation to "win".
8. **Don't be defensive.** Rather than saying "NO!" or "You're Wrong!", try beginning with "Yes, but...."
9. **Be aware of the politeness level of your speech.** If the discussion is taking place in the host language, be aware that your speech may be more confrontational and impolite than you expect, and try to be careful about how you phrase your thoughts.