

Culture Bytes – Complete Collection

The following is a compiled collection of the Culture Bytes found in the Curriculum. It includes 8 Culture Bytes.

Culture Bytes are snapshots of cultural information. They include basic information for working cross-culturally, information about the newcomer experience, stories, and explanations of common misunderstandings. They are a tool for instructors to check their own assumptions regarding the concepts introduced by *Roots and Connections*.

Culture Bytes work in combination with the Personal Connections activities and the Community Knowledge and Skills Assessment Tool (found in the toolkit). These resources help instructors and volunteers estimate the cultural distance being bridged by participants, and adjust expectations and lessons accordingly. Culture Bytes are designed to highlight “culture general”² generalizations and patterns.

Getting to Know You Culture Byte

Identity is central to this curriculum because the experience of settlement, adaptation (adjustment), and integration are, at their core, questions of identity. Adaptation is a natural human instinct to seek internal balance in the face of change. Moving from one culture to another is fraught with change, impacting each and every part of a person’s identity in some way.

Roots and Connections is designed to help instructors and community members support newcomers at this intersection in their lives. It does this through a culturally integrated process by providing introductory community information and facilitating relationships, supported with insightful cultural knowledge presented as “Culture Bytes.” In unit one identity wheels and Personal Connections activities are introduced to help make the orientation process more welcoming by intentionally exploring aspects of identity.

Identity is complex and dynamic. It is made up of ethnicity, culture, gender, personality, roles and relationships. Some aspects of identity will be supported and accepted by the host culture, while others may conflict with the host culture’s norms and expectations. The adaptation process is a complicated negotiation of identity.

For example, gender roles are more separately defined in some cultures than in others. In Canada, women have fought for equal rights and access to roles that may have been more typically male in the past. Men today often take on roles that were previously considered to be for women. For newcomers coming from more traditionally patriarchal societies, this may present a new reality. For women, sometimes this opens a whole new world of possibilities, and the shift in roles can cause tension in families.



People who move from one country to another (or even from one part of the country to another, or from an urban to a rural area) may have a lot of difficulty adjusting to their new environment. Not only are they learning a new language, they are also learning a very different way of life. Some people may go through phases where they feel frustrated and humiliated.

Issues they may be facing could include:

Loss in status

People who were respected in their former communities may feel they are now labeled as “immigrants,” especially when they find themselves working in jobs well below their education and experience level.

Loss of established support systems

For many newcomers, extended family members were their traditional source of support in everyday life. When a family moves to Canada and leaves these connections behind, it can result in a strong sense of loss. This is especially felt in times of difficulty (i.e. illness, financial difficulties or culture shock), which can be even more challenging when there are no family members or close friends to call on for support.

Feelings of isolation may result when a parent is required to stay home and take care of the children. Without a job or the opportunity to take language classes, an individual with limited language skills may feel like a prisoner in her own home.

Frustration with the inability to do simple tasks

Imagine standing in front of a bus and not knowing how to get on and pay. Do you enter by the front or rear door? Do you pay when you get on or get off? In some countries, passengers pay when their ride has ended and they are leaving the bus. In some countries, a conductor collects the fares after passengers are seated. The way you signal to get off the bus may be different. Imagine trying to ride a bus without the proper change or without knowing the purpose of the fare box and bell cord. Not only is language difficult, but procedures are confusing as well. It is frustrating to feel incompetent when you are trying to carry out common everyday tasks.

Threats to cultural identity

Canada is a multicultural country but there is still an expectation for those outside mainstream society to become acculturated. Keeping traditions and raising children in the manner learners feel is best may be more difficult than they anticipated. Traditional parent-child relationships can be dramatically altered when children know more English than their parents. Having to depend upon one's children for assistance can cause problems as it may undermine parental authority. In some situations, it can even result in parental abuse.

Culture shock

Culture shock refers to feeling disoriented and threatened as the result of being in a culturally new environment. In this foreign environment the safety net of familiarity has vanished. Depending on how long learners have been in Canada, they will be in one of four stages of cultural adjustment⁷, as described below.

Students in the second stage are probably the most difficult to facilitate because they may be particularly negative. Keep in mind that they may be experiencing culture shock. Each stage lasts a different length of time for every individual, but in general, the stages are:

- **Stage 1 – Excited!** During the first stage, the new country is interesting, the people are friendly and helpful and the future looks promising.
- **Stage 2 – Problems!** School, language, shopping – everything is difficult. Things that were simple back home require more effort in the new country. It seems hard to make friends. At this point, newcomers may begin to believe that the local people are unfriendly. Homesickness begins and along with it complaints about the new country. This is the stage we hear referred to as “culture shock.”
- **Stage 3 – Recovery.** The newcomer begins to use the language more fluently, so communication with local people becomes easier. Customs and traditions become clearer and slowly the situation passes from impossible to hopeful. Minor misunderstandings which were stressful in Stage 2 become manageable.
- **Stage 4 – Stability.** Eventually newcomers begin to feel more at home in the new country. What they do not like about their new country no longer makes them so dissatisfied and unhappy. Life has settled down and they are now able to find humour in the situations in which they find themselves.

In *Roots and Connections*, we emphasize the need and responsibility of both the host society and the newcomer to learn from each other in order to create an inclusive, just community. “Cultural identity wheels” are tools for reflecting on and talking about the variety of places an individual’s identity intersects with new and different cultural norms, values and expectations. Identity wheels are referred to throughout the orientation as additional layers of identity, norms and expectations are uncovered.



Community Culture Byte

Traditionally a *community* was defined as a group of interacting people living in a common location. However, the term has evolved to mean a group of individuals who share characteristics, regardless of their location or degree of interaction. Today there are sports communities, religious communities and even virtual communities. If individuals develop the feeling that they belong to a group and they must help the group they belong to, then they develop a sense of community.

The communities we live in are composed of individuals, families and institutions that organize systems, agencies and organizations to work together for the welfare of people within and beyond their borders. Each community is governed by a set of formal laws and unwritten rules. For newcomers, these are some examples of experiences that may be different or new.

1. Elections.

In a democratic society such as Canada's, leadership is determined by voting. Every three years there is a municipal election. You must be 18 years old and have resided in Alberta for six months to be able to vote in a municipal election. You are eligible to vote in the area you are residing in on election day. It is important to orient newcomers to the three orders of government as a first step toward their capacity for full participation and active citizenship.

2. Garbage and recycling.

Within Canada, the process of garbage disposal varies from one community to another. In some countries, the process is further advanced than in Canada. In other countries, the system of waste disposal is not organized like ours and newcomers will need to learn what is expected for different types of waste. In Alberta there are guidelines for what to do with used batteries, expired medications, broken electronics and other waste material.

Some processes used in Alberta are the blue bag system for recycling (with specific instructions for what can go in); recycling centres; bottle depots; special places to dispose of batteries, tires and oil; recycling fees added to the purchase price of electronics, etc.

3. Tipping.

The word tips originated in England from "to insure prompt service." It is now a custom and expectation to tip service providers in restaurants, taxis, hair salons, etc. This custom may be new to some people and can feel a bit intimidating or confusing. People need to know how much, when and who to tip.

4. Housing.

Houses around the world have both similarities and differences and reflect cultural norms and values through design and layout as well as expectations for upkeep. Newcomers with a larger cultural distance or those who are unfamiliar with the style of housing in Canada

may be unfamiliar with many things about their new home. If you are working with someone with a large cultural distance, then the following examples are areas where the individual may need orientation:

- Familiarity with hot and cold water and how to use the shower
- How to keep a home clean, what cleaning products to use and the dangers associated with chemical cleaners
- How to use the appliances
- Different types of power outlets and light switches
- The importance of the smoke/fire alarm, what it sounds like when it goes off, how to turn it off and how to take care of it
- How to adjust the heating
- Safety in winter, using heaters, reducing drafts and dangers of CO2 poisoning
- Rental contracts, what happens if you get evicted, avoiding a bad reputation (improper upkeep, damage, etc.) and landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities

5. Library services.

Newcomers need to know how to get a library card, access the Internet, borrow books in languages other than English, avoid overdue fines, etc.

6. Licensing.

Newcomers need to know what requires a licence or permit (pets, car, home renovations, serving alcohol, business, etc.) and where to get that information.

7. Public services.

In some countries, it is customary to give gifts or bribes to public officials in order to get things done. This is not the way we do things in Canada. People need to find out the proper procedures for dealing with institutions and know how to ask for help or guidance.

8. Neighbourliness.

What are the norms and expectations for getting to know your neighbours? People who come from more collectivist community oriented cultures may find the private individualist lifestyle practiced by many Canadians to be strange and unfriendly. The lines between public and private vary from culture to culture as well as the concept and definitions of friendship and the rules and norms regarding building relationships.

Education Culture Byte

Beliefs about the purpose of education vary even within one cultural group. No single definition of *education* is agreed upon by all, or even most, educators. The meanings they attach to the word relate to complex beliefs arising from their own values and experiences. There are, however, some patterns that distinguish values and beliefs about education from



one culture to another. In this Culture Byte we will explore some of the ways culture impacts education and how this plays out in the family.

For many families, the reason to move is to provide a better future for their children. There is pressure on the children to succeed in order to realize the parents' dreams. The generation gap between parents and children can be difficult for newcomers to Canada. While adults do change, they keep with them many of the attitudes, beliefs and values they learned as children in their country of origin. However their children, who grow up in Canada, tend to adopt a more Canadian viewpoint. This can make parents feel alienated from their children and can create tension.

The children of newcomers face the difficulty of being expected to conform to patterns of behaviour from their country of origin at home, while conforming to Canadian norms at school. They must find a balance between respect for family traditions and the pressure to conform at school. This process takes time, patience and understanding.

Many students come from cultures that value more traditional schooling in which memorization and accuracy are measured through testing. Children learn not to question authority, teachers take a more authoritarian role and play is considered to be fooling around and not part of serious study. In some countries, the school and teachers play a central role in discipline and education is left entirely up to the school.

In Canadian educational settings, newcomers are likely to notice a focus on individual thought, problem solving, creative thinking and questioning in an informal classroom structure. They may wonder if their children are receiving what they understand to be a "good education."

The amount and type of participation in their child's education expected from parents both in the school and at home may be different for newcomers to your community. Teaching choices and behaviours reflect cultural values and in the Canadian schooling system, newcomers may see these values expressed through behaviour. Newcomers may feel confused or frustrated due to a contrast between their beliefs and expectations about "good education" and what they see happening.

Finance Culture Byte

Money was developed independently in many parts of the world to fulfill a variety of purposes and the concept of exchange is common to cultures around the globe. Many things have been used as money at different times in different places, such as seashells, beads, tea, fish hooks, fur, cattle and even tobacco. Although all cultures use some form of money, there are differences within cultural groups. For example, the tradition of giving money (how much, when, why, to whom and the significance or expectation for reciprocation) varies within and between cultural groups.

Culture influences people's relationship with money as well as their spending or saving behaviours. The various categories you recognized in your identity wheel will provide clues to where you learned and developed your own expectations about money. Consider these questions about money to explore where your values and beliefs may be rooted:

- What is your earliest memory of money?
- What messages about money did you learn growing up?
- Who controlled money in your family? How was that done?
- How did your family contribute to the needs of others?
- What happened when money was scarce?
- Was there a strong connection between money and your sense of self?
- How did your family prepare for the future?
- How did they deal with financial crises?
- Was money talked about openly or was it a secret not to be discussed?
- Did you have to earn your own money or did you have an allowance?
- Was money used as power and withheld as punishment?

If you take a closer look, you can observe a lot about mainstream cultural values and general cultural patterns with respect to money by reflecting on advertising about banking, the way banking is set up and advertising in general.

When you enter a financial institution in Canada you are likely to see advertisements for products such as RRSPs, RESPs, GICs, loans, mortgages and chequing and savings accounts. These products indicate a value in saving for the future and imply that people are generating enough wealth to have "extra" money to put away and that the government is involved. People trust banks to keep their money because a deposit insurance is also provided by the government. The convenience of ATMs (including drive-through ATMs) for do-it-yourself banking are reflections of our fast-paced, time-limited, task-oriented culture.

In the past it was normal to have a relationship with your banker. Today, you can avoid going to the bank altogether and do your banking by phone or online. If you do go into the bank to talk to a teller, you are expected to stand in line and wait until a teller is available to serve you. Employees behind the counter may be dressed in business suits but they may also be wearing fairly casual clothes—especially if it is Friday. Chances are they will call you by your first name, demonstrating a value for informality. Finally, when it comes to modern consumer habits, you can see that advertising encourages us to buy now and pay later, indicating an orientation towards immediate rather than delayed gratification.

Consider these two descriptions of relationships to money in Canadian culture and consider how this culture has changed with time and prosperity.



Save for a Rainy Day

Those who grew up in the Depression learned to save for a rainy day and did not spend money unless it was absolutely necessary. If you grew up in a household where someone had memories of poverty, you probably learned to save everything from pieces of string to empty yogurt containers.

You probably wore hand-me-down clothes and used very old clothes as rags just to get every last bit of use out of them.

Buy Now and Pay Later

After the war, attitudes towards money changed. There was a shift toward immediate gratification and consumerism became the accepted style. The idea of “buy it now and pay for it later,” became more common. Money was readily available, at least by credit and credit cards appeared in every wallet. Those who grew up in Boomer households learned how to spend, but not necessarily how to save. They might defer maintenance on buildings and spend income on other items, such as entertainment or automobiles. This type of spending reflects the belief that tomorrow is uncertain and we should enjoy today.

The following examples of behaviours associated with personal finance provide a scaffold for understanding the experiences and perspectives of newcomers and for considering your own values and beliefs.

Decision making: Gender roles have a place in how decisions about financial matters are made in a family. In some cultures, the decisions are made equally; in others, they are made by the male head of the household and in still other cultures it is the women who manage the family finances. In Canadian society, women have fought hard for gender equality in many roles and the lines between gender roles are sometimes less clearly defined. In other cultures these lines are clearly defined and people may be reluctant to cross them.

Old age security: Consider these two examples that demonstrate different views of family relationships and expectations about financial security in an individual's senior years.

- I am expected to take care of myself when I am old, so I have a pension plan, investment portfolio, savings account and I work with my financial planner. Freedom 55! I have a retirement plan and know how much money I will probably need. I expect to live on my own for as long as I can and then I will probably move into a retirement home. I know my children will be very busy so I don't expect them to take care of me.
- My children will take care of me in the future so I invest my money in them. I expect my children to live with me until they get married and start their own household. I expect to live with one of my children when I am old and my children will care for me.

Past banking experience: Due to experiences of financial crises and currency devaluations, some first-generation immigrants may not trust the banks and as a result may prefer to carry cash rather than deposit their money in the bank. It is not uncommon for people to keep cash hidden at home or to carry it with them. This increases people's anxiety about money and the possibility of being robbed. Furthermore, some newcomers may have had limited experience with banking in their home country, depending on their circumstances. So in addition to language barriers, some newcomers come to Canada with very little banking experience and a sense of distrust.

Credit: Canada is a credit society. Many people use only cards to pay for things and will not carry cash. Other places in the world are almost entirely cash oriented and credit is used only for big items or not at all. Misunderstandings and a lack of experience about ways to manage credit cards can lead to a false sense of the availability of cash, resulting in damaged credit ratings. Also, many people are not familiar with the risks associated with payday loan companies.

Sending money home: Many newcomers struggle with the expectations or requirements of sending money back home to family. Chief among their needs are inexpensive and user-friendly remittance services to enable them to send funds to family or friends back home. Pressures due to the cost of living and the need to send money back home make it difficult to save money and get ahead.

Health Culture Byte

As humans, we share many things in common no matter where we come from in the world. Our environment affects our physiology, anatomy and psychology in many of the same ways. Bones break, bodies become sick, if we are cut we bleed and what we do and eat affects our growth.

There are also some important similarities and differences within cultures. In Canada, values around health and wellness inform the way health care is delivered, the promotion of healthy lifestyles, treatment protocols and our understanding of wellness. There is a predictable way doctors' offices look and operate and there are certain things we have come to expect from pharmacies or hospitals and those who work there. Beyond these similarities we can also see a range of differences of values and beliefs within our own culture about health and the definition of wellness. Some people eat only vegetables, others take daily vitamins and others have a glass of wine each day for their health.

Newcomers sometimes have difficulty accessing the care they need not only because of language barriers but also because of different perspectives on health, medical care and expectations about diagnosis and treatment.



This Culture Byte provides a framework for understanding how culture can influence a person's experience of health and wellness. It will help you to understand some ways in which the norms and expectations in Canada might not line up with what newcomers have learned to expect. It is also important to check for equivalent concepts. You can do this by asking if there is an equivalent word for something in the learner's language. (For an exceptional example of how concepts do not translate across cultures, look at *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, by Anne Fadiman.)

There are three major categories of health belief systems⁹. In Canada, health care is based on a biomedical system of health and illness. This means that when you are ill it is either the result of something exterior such as bacteria, viruses, or germs, or it means that something in your body is not working well, causing you to be sick. Additionally, there are many preventive treatments in place that some newcomers may be unfamiliar with and perhaps reluctant to access.

A second belief system regards disease as the result of a supernatural being—a ghost, an evil spirit, a witch or a sorcerer. A third system explains sickness as a result of cold, heat, winds, dampness and an upset in the basic body elements. In this explanation, illness results from an imbalance between hot and cold elements of the body. People who follow this system believe that all foods, medicines, conditions and emotions can be ascribed hot or cold qualities.

These differences in belief systems will result in different ideas about how to treat and prevent illness. Examples of how culture impacts aspects of health and wellness can help you check your assumptions about what “common knowledge” is and how a person's view of the world will influence behaviour. The following examples of behaviours associated with health and wellness provide a scaffold for understanding the experiences and perspectives of newcomers and for considering your own values and beliefs:

- **Health beliefs.** Do people believe in taking medication (pills, etc.) to feel better?
Do people believe in talking to a psychiatrist or psychologist?
- **Health-seeking behaviour.** In Canada, there is an emphasis on health promotion and preventive measures such as getting a check-up once a year. This may seem odd to some newcomers who are accustomed to seeing the doctor only if they are ill.
- **Expression of pain.** People of all cultures have similar emotions such as happiness, sadness and anger. Cultures do, however, vary in the way emotions are expressed. People from some cultures are very demonstrative and the expression of positive and negative emotions might include laughter, shouting, fist shaking, yelling, large gestures and easily identified facial expressions. People from other cultures tend to show minimal levels of expression. This applies to the expression of pain as well, which can make it difficult to recognize an individual's experience of pain.

⁹ Samovar L. and Porter R., *Communication Between Cultures*, 5th ed. Thompson and Wadsworth, 2004.

- **Breaking bad news.** In Canada, patients are considered to be autonomous individuals, and will therefore be given information about their illness. They may also have a personal directive such as DNR (do not resuscitate).
In Canadian hospitals, patients are required to sign an informed consent form before a procedure can take place. In other cultures, information regarding a person's illness may be withheld from the patient or may be told first to the head of the family rather than the patient. It may also be up to someone other than the patient to provide consent.
- **Decision making.** Who makes the decisions? In some countries, the head of the family makes decisions rather than the patient.
- **Gender considerations.** In some cultures, it is unusual for a male doctor to look after a female patient and vice versa. Male physicians in Canada will usually call another person into the examining room before examining a woman's private areas.
- **Customs and practices.** People have many cultural differences regarding pregnancy and childbirth, death and dying, visiting a person in the hospital, etc.
- **Disclosure.** Privacy laws in Canada restrict disclosure of patient information to close family members only.
- **Time.** Orientation to time can influence whether a client shows up on time for appointments, takes medication on schedule and returns for follow-up visits. It can also influence the amount of time a health-care professional spends with a client. In Canada, doctors often do not expect to spend a lot of time developing rapport or discussing the causes and cures of illnesses with a client. In many other cultural contexts, patients expect doctors to spend time building a relationship and discussing the details of their illness.

As well as beliefs about health and illness, newcomers may face additional barriers at the patient level⁹. These may include:

- Limited finances
- Fear of stigmatization (e.g. mental health, wearing glasses, etc.)
- Lack of understanding of the system
- No health care or insurance
- Lack of experience for understanding scheduling and appointments
- Competing life demands (work, family, communication, school, housing)
- Gender barriers
- Discrimination
- Communication problems resulting from language barriers



Recreation Culture Byte

People play games, tell stories, find ways to relax and participate in sports all over the world. Recreation, leisure and free time are influenced by cultural expectations and context. In countries where the climate is warm and there are more dense populations, people tend to congregate outdoors, sit at cafes, play chess in the park or exercise. Many cities around the world are designed with a central square that draws people together, which is different from the design of most towns and cities in Alberta.

The concept of “free time” is also not the same across cultures. In many places, the things that people do in their “free time” in Canada are embedded in daily life or associated with everyday activity (i.e., going for a walk). Leisure time and free time may be new concepts that will become a part of newcomers’ lives as they adapt to Canadian customs.

In many cultures, socializing is an important form of recreation. The wonderful parks and open spaces in Canada provide excellent opportunities for large family or community gatherings. However, when it comes to recreational facilities and organizations, there may be some things that are taken for granted in Canada that may be new or unfamiliar for newcomers. The following are some newcomers’ perspectives on using public recreation facilities in Canada. The responses come from a focus group conducted by the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op in Edmonton.

1. The school is often the centre of extracurricular activities for children in rural areas. Students and their parents are often asked to fundraise for out-of-town trips, expenses incurred on these trips and uniforms. This expectation for participation may be unfamiliar, and due to other pressures on their time, parents may find it difficult to participate. Also, some parents may be uncomfortable with the idea of out-of-town trips or an event that requires their children to sleep away from home.
2. Sports in Canada have been formalized and institutionalized, making them more difficult to access due to cost, scheduling and registration procedures. Kids cannot just join in a scheduled game at a scheduled competition. They can, however, make up teams and play freely in any park.
3. Participating in organized sport requires transportation.
4. Muslim women often feel uncomfortable at public swimming facilities.
5. For many newcomers, facilities like those available in Alberta communities were accessible in their home country only to the elite and therefore the experience of using them may be new and unfamiliar.
6. Fitness equipment is unfamiliar and people may feel too shy to ask how to use the equipment, especially when there are language barriers.

Safety Culture Byte

The desire to avoid danger and keep safe is common throughout the world. It is natural to want to protect ourselves from harm and hurt. In this Culture Byte, we will explore how culture influences the ways people interpret, understand and manage risk, danger and the challenge of staying safe. Differences arise from diverse cultural contexts, climates, geography and social and political conditions, resulting in different responses to risk. It is important to keep differences in mind when helping newcomers orient themselves to the safety expectations and standards of their new community as well as new risks they may not be familiar with. Cultural differences are explored in this Culture Byte through the following brief stories.

Cold

It was so cold and I just could not get warm. I am afraid to go outside because of the cold. Today I had to go to an appointment so I put my jacket in the oven to warm it up before putting it on. I've done it before but this time it caught fire. I was really scared...

Winter is filled with safety hazards and Canadians have learned to adapt. Newcomers who are not familiar with this kind of climate may not know all the risks and how to be prepared.

Police

A young man saw a police car and his instinct was to run, even though he had done nothing wrong.

In Canada, the police want to project an image of being those who protect society and work for the citizens to keep them safe. Generally when people see a police car they may slow down if they are speeding, but they are not afraid. The relationship and view of police is not like this for some newcomers. Module 3: The Role of the Police, is an opportunity for you to help the newcomers in your class learn more about police in Canada and for the community police to establish a relationship with the participants in your class.

Children

When our baby was born, the hospital wouldn't let us take her home until we had a proper car seat for the car. I was really surprised. I also found out that I needed a car seat for our three year old.

Keeping children safe requires an understanding of the dangers present. In Canada, certain laws are in place to protect children from harm and these may not be familiar to some newcomers.

Home Alone

I had to work last weekend and when I got home I found out that the neighbour had called social services and they had come and taken my children. I was so afraid. Why did they take my children? Back home I often leave my six year old at home to take care of the two year old.

Different cultures have different definitions about what a child should be expected to do at what age. In some countries, children as young as six years old are responsible for looking



after younger siblings. When people live in close-knit communities, children are able to move freely without direct parental supervision. In Canada, this is often not the case. In Alberta, there is no legislation giving a minimum age when children can be left at home alone without adult supervision; however, if a parent does leave a young child at home and something bad happens, then the consequences are severe.

Ouch

My wife and I were fighting and I got carried away and was too physical. My daughter called the police and they put me in jail. Now I am not even allowed to go home. I don't understand. In my country this is a private matter between my wife and me. The government would not get involved. The system is confusing here—I don't understand why I can't go home.

Abuse is a problem for people in all walks of life, whether Canadian-born or recent arrivals. Those who suffer from abuse need comfort and support; however, it is particularly important that newcomers know that this support exists since many of the mechanisms we have in Canada may not exist in their native country. You may want to discuss the idea of “public responsibility” with learners. In Canada, it is expected that the government can (and should) get involved in situations where children or spouses are being abused.

“The relationship between the family and the government is markedly different in Canada from many other countries. Canadians have come to expect that there are good reasons why there should be intervention in the family cases of violence, abuse or neglect. In some cases, newcomers must recognize that aspects of life which they may think of as private are illegal in Canada.”¹²

Shopping Culture Byte

Food

Food shopping varies from place to place in the world. With our large homes, fridges and freezers, many Canadians are accustomed to buying food for the week in one shopping trip. If there is something on sale, it can be purchased in bulk and stored in the freezer or pantry. It is also popular to buy food items in bulk at wholesale stores.

In some parts of the world, however, going to market is a daily event and foods are eaten fresh. If you go to a grocery store in Canada you will find many products that are processed and packaged.

There is also a label on the back with nutritional information and Canadians are encouraged to use these labels to make healthy food choices. Newcomers with specific diet restrictions can check these labels for ingredients that they are not able to consume (e.g., sugar).

¹² Rutten-James, Myrina. *English as a Second Language Tutor Training Kit: Tutor Training Manual*. Regina Public Library, 2003. p. 29.



Culture influences consumer behaviour in a number of interesting ways:

- The length of time it takes to make a decision
- The number of senses used in making a decision
- Culturally influenced shopping behaviours
- Types of foods eaten

Prices

For many newcomers, money is a big issue. Government sponsored refugees will have to pay back the government for their travel expenses to Canada; some families are sending money home to family left behind; there are a lot of costs associated with settling; and the cost of living may seem very high. As newcomers settle, find work and figure out how far their dollar can go, money will be a central concern.

Flyers

Grocery store flyers are a common sight in Canadian towns and cities. They tell us what is on sale and encourage us to come to the store to shop. Prices can vary from store to store, so many people look through the flyers to find the best deals and then plan their shopping accordingly. This is one strategy people in Canada use to save money. Many Canadians use a freezer. People buy foods on special and have them on hand whenever they need them.



Clothes

Clothes are a necessity, but they also tell us a lot about culture and about the groups we belong to. Many factors affect the clothing worn by different cultural groups. Some factors include region, beliefs, climate and gender. Canadian clothing has dramatically changed over the years. In the early days, when the first colonists arrived, women's clothing covered every area of the body except the hands, neck and face. It was considered shameful for a woman to show her ankle.

With the arrival of the 20th century, women began to break free from the old constraints and, in just a century, Canada has seen a drastic shift in its view of women and appropriate clothing.

Today, Canadian culture is very complex and consists of many subcultures that can be broken down into decades and regions. For example, the Roaring 1920s, the Hippie 1960s and the Pop Culture 1990s all showcased specific subcultures of Canada, each with their own style.

In this particular decade, Canadians wear styles associated with urban, punk, gothic and many other lifestyles. Clothing can also be broken down by region. Today in Alberta you can see everything from cowboy boots and ball caps to turbans and hijabs.

Refunds and Exchanges

Exchanging something you bought or getting a refund is a practice that may be unfamiliar to some learners. They may have come from places where there is less competition or less availability of goods. For these learners, getting used to the idea of exchanges and refunds is the first step. Then they need to learn the rules associated with it, including "reading the small print."

In Canada, not all stores have the same rules. Some stores give refunds, but many stores only allow customers to make an exchange. If a customer does not have the receipt, most stores do not give refunds. If clothing has been worn, it will not be accepted for refund or for exchange.

However, if there is a problem with the clothing that you bought, most stores will allow you to exchange it. There is usually a time limit for when the clothing can be returned for a refund or an exchange. If "final sale" is written on the receipt, the store will not give you a refund or let you make an exchange. Always find out the store's rules before you buy anything!