

Title: Cultural Literacy

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Abstract: E.D. Hirsch published his first edition of Cultural Literacy (1987), in which he argued that to participate fully in society, a person needs more than basic literacy, that is, the ability to read and write. He offered in his book 5,000 terms that he thought culturally literate Americans should recognize. The list included dates, historical persons, historical documents, figures of speech (idioms, metaphors), terms from science, among others. As teachers teaching Chinese to American students, we often focus on helping students develop their literacy towards Chinese culture, and rightly so. In this talk, however, I will focus on applying the same principles onto ourselves regarding our understanding of the American culture. We will discuss the importance of being culturally literate being a language teacher, especially for those of us who immigrated here, examine how culturally literate (or illiterate) we are towards American culture, and finally share tried and true ways to build up our competency. On a day-to-day scale, this knowledge may benefit us in creating more relevant and engaging lesson plans, but on a larger scale, a culturally thoughtful curriculum.

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