

EAL & NEW ARRIVALS · GRADES 1–6

Celebrating Our Class Cultures

Five activities that build belonging

Why this matters

EAL children have often been told, directly or indirectly, that their culture is something to leave at the door. The opposite is true. Children who feel their culture is valued at school do BETTER academically and emotionally — and they teach the whole class something important. These five activities are simple, low-prep, and put cultural and linguistic diversity at the centre of class life.

Activity 1 — The Flags Wall

MATERIALS: World map, sticky notes, string, pins. **WHAT TO DO:** At the start of the year, ask each child where their family is from. (For most, just one country. Some may have several.) Each child draws or prints a small flag of that country and pins it to a class wall around a world map. Connect each flag to its country with a piece of string. **IMPACT:** A class with 28 flags from 12 countries SEES its diversity every day. It becomes the class's identity, not an afterthought.

Activity 2 — Word of the Week

WHAT TO DO: Each Monday, ask one child (rotate through the year) to teach the class a useful word from their language. Could be 'hello', 'thank you', 'friend', 'family' — anything. Display it big on the wall: 'This week's word: NAMASTE (Hindi) — hello'. **IMPACT:** Every child gets a moment as expert. The class hears languages it would never otherwise hear. Bilingual children realise their language is interesting, not weird.

Activity 3 — Culture Share Day

WHAT TO DO: Once a half-term, have a 'culture share' afternoon. Children can bring (in any combination):

- A small item from their culture (a piece of clothing, a flag, a photo, a postcard)
- A food they like to eat at home (small pieces, allergy-checked)
- A song or dance from their culture
- A short story about their family or where they come from

No pressure. Children who don't want



to share don't have to. Children who AREN'T from a different country can share family traditions, regional things, anything that feels meaningful. IMPACT: Sharing food in particular is magic. Children try things they've never seen. Bilingual children become hosts for an afternoon.

Activity 4 — Bilingual Book Display

WHAT TO DO: Set aside one bookshelf or one corner of the book corner for bilingual books — the same story in English and another language. Many publishers now do these (Mantra Lingua, Letterbox Library). Even one or two books in each of your class's main home languages is enough. For children who can read in their L1, the matched English+L1 books let them read and re-read until both languages click. For everyone else, they're simply interesting. IMPACT: A child whose home language is Polish will FIND a Polish book on the shelf and feel something. Their language exists at school. It matters.

Activity 5 — Family Photo Wall

WHAT TO DO: Ask every family in the class to send in one photo — of their child with their family. Or with their pet. Or in a place that's special. Put them up on a wall, all together, with the child's name and 'My family / My home'. MOST IMPORTANTLY: don't single out the EAL families. EVERY child contributes a photo. Every family is represented equally on the wall. IMPACT: Children whose homes look different from the dominant culture see themselves on the wall, sitting beside everyone else. Their home is normal here. So are they.

What NOT to do

Some well-meaning approaches actually make EAL children feel MORE singled out. Avoid: • 'Today Sofia is going to teach us about Poland.' (Singling her out for being from somewhere) • 'Tell us about your country.' (Children from any one country don't represent it — they just live there) • 'Why don't you eat ___ at lunch like normal children?' (Truly happens, sadly) • Themed weeks where 'multicultural day' is one day and the rest is unmarked. The implication: most days, the dominant culture is THE culture. The goal is for difference to feel like the WALLPAPER of the class — not a special event.

