

Raising Questions and Bringing the Learner's Background into the Classroom

Directions: this activity was previously used in SIOP workshops for adult ESL educators. Columns “Concept” and “Course” represent the context for corresponding questions, and column “Questions and Task” presents examples of questions that can be asked to tap into students’ background knowledge.

Concept	Course	Questions & Task
U.S. Customary System of Measurement (American System)	GED	How long is your foot? Using a tape measure with both metric and American system units, measure your foot to find out how many inches and centimeters it is.
Three branches of the U.S. government and separation of powers	Civics/Citizenship	Who makes laws in your country? Who administers the laws? Who makes sure the laws are being followed? Draw a diagram of the government system in your country and explain it to the class.
U.S. Customary System of Measurement (American System)	Culinary Arts	When you cook a special dish from your country (or region, or family) do you follow a recipe? Do you use measuring utensils or do you add ingredients without measuring? Bring a special dish from your country and explain how you made it. If possible, bring in the measuring utensils you used as well.
Checking a patient’s vital signs	Health Care Professionals	When you visit the doctor, who checks you in? Who takes your vitals? How does he or she do this? Make a list of your experiences with the process of doctor’s visits, either here or in another country.
Over-the-counter medicine	Beginning ESL	What do you do when you have a headache? Look in the bag and choose one of the empty pill bottles that might help a headache. If you don’t see the one you want, draw a picture of the medicine you take. What other things might you do for a headache?