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**CREATING ACTIVITIES AND MATERIALS FOR TEACHING  
AMERICAN STUDIES**

**MA thesis**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present thesis aims to analyze the creation of activities and materials for an American Studies CLIL course. The issue of culture lessons being rather passive and not engaging for high school learners urged the author to create a whole new course and design activities for active culture learning. The thesis begins with a literature review, describing the importance of learning culture and introducing some methods for making the learning active, whereas the empirical chapter describes the creating of the activities and analyses the feedback of 20 course participants. The activities were developed alongside the course itself, to employ a variety of different methods. A set of activities was constructed. The analysis approaches the creation of the set by topics, showing how the activities evolved during the teaching process. The activities were used with a group of students who, at the end of the course, gave feedback based on their personal preferences. The majority of students expressed their liking towards a more active course, whereas a couple of participants would have enjoyed a more traditional one.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AmS – American Studies

CEFRL – Common European Framework of References for Languages

CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

NCUSE - National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education

## INTRODUCTION

The National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education (2020) (hereinafter NCUSE) expects culture to be taught in schools. Not only are teachers required to include cultural diversity in their lessons, but also help learners develop a cultural identity. This means that a person who finishes secondary education must understand the different values that cultures have, respect one's own and foreign traditions, and preserve them. A high school graduate is expected to be a mature person who "has acquired the ability to carry on the social, cultural, economic, and ecological development of Estonia while personally being fully developed emotionally, socially, physically, and mentally" (NCUSE 2020). However, there are no specific guidelines on how this aim is to be achieved and teachers are given significant freedom in designing culture-related courses and activities. Passive activities have proven to demotivate students in culture lessons and educators should attempt to invent new activities that support active learning. Mostly, culture-related activities are integrated into EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching, but CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) courses can also be developed. However, because teachers often have to cram culture teaching into an already very crowded syllabus, they do not have time to think deeply about the notion of culture or the range of activities that would be required to support active culture learning that would support the aims listed in the national curriculum.

The curriculum does not provide a specific definition of culture, but one possible approach to teaching culture is to categorize it into two: big "C" and little "c" culture. According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), Lange (1993), Kramsch (2013), and many other scholars, big "C", also known as "achievement" culture refers to something significant, such as history, geography, literature, education, etc., that is, topics that have traditionally been covered in the culture corners of language textbooks, whereas culture with a small "c"

or “behavior culture” covers, for example, people’s habits, values, religion, relationships, etc., that is, the things that affect people’s everyday life the most. Mostly, though, schools tend to focus more on teaching big “C” culture.

Paragraph 10 point 3.4. in the NCUSE (2020) stresses that cultural identity is an important element in secondary education. The National Curriculum of Foreign Languages (2014) also emphasizes that learning about another country’s culture may help students not only expand their horizons but also achieve better language competence by experiencing various foreign situations. More and more schools in Estonia, both primary and secondary education institutions, are including specific cultural subjects into their curricula. Culture teaching is integrated into different contexts in schools: it is taught indirectly through different subjects but also in specifically designed courses.

Courses dedicated to culture teaching have different aims, depending on whether they are EFL or CLIL courses. Some of them are designed for learners to broaden their horizons and be able to compare their own country’s history to another or be familiar with some other nation’s literature. Other courses aim to offer a place for communication so that students would cope better when interacting with foreigners. Depending on the length and/or intensity of a course, different aspects can be included, but it has been stated that usually when culture is discussed, little “c” culture is spoken about the most (Kramsch 2013: 65-66). Although (intensive) culture courses dedicated to adult learners may be more focused on making the learners skillful tourists, courses in schools, especially upper secondary schools and universities, concentrate on the academic part of culture and lean towards the big “C” culture topics. Ideally, however, the two types of culture are combined, especially in CLIL courses, as students should understand the cultural traditions that have shaped the norms of everyday interaction. This is what the present thesis also wants to focus on.

The thesis grows out of the practical need to develop a course for teaching culture at the biggest high school in Tartu, Estonia that consists of only upper secondary education levels – grades 10 to 12. The institution has structured itself so that learners could partly assemble their curriculum themselves by selecting modules that interest them in addition to compulsory subjects. The school offers 22 five-course modules to choose from, one of them being *The English Language in the Changing World* (trans. *Inglise keel muutub maailmas*) where students learn about British and American culture, among three other subjects (KJPG 2018). The author of this paper was given the opportunity to teach an American Studies (hereinafter AmS) course and, therefore, chose to create a set of activities for teaching American culture. The subject has been taught for many years in the school and over time, different shortcomings have emerged. Also, no specific activities have been developed specifically for this program.

This thesis aims to analyze different methods of active culture learning and student response to a set of learning activities developed while simultaneously teaching a freshly designed course. The thesis hopes to answer the following research question: How to create an appropriate set of activities for teaching culture in a hybrid classroom? In order to accomplish the task, the literature review establishes the basics of teaching culture in general and developing useful learning materials. The empirical chapter, first, introduces the analysis of the old course and the updating of the learning outcomes, in the light of the discussions introduced in the literature review. Second, it explains how the new activities were created, describes their use in the course, and discusses student feedback on each activity. The chapter analyzes the activities in parallel with the teaching process to show how different methodological recommendations influenced the creation of the activities. In the conclusion, the experience of teaching the course and student feedback will be discussed in the light of

theoretical concepts on culture teaching. Conclusions of which activities support active culture learning will be made.



## **1. CHAPTER I – TEACHING CULTURE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

Until the 1970s, culture teaching was not directly associated with language learning as language was in large taught through the grammar-translation method. It was not important to necessarily understand the concept of “culture” but to know what the sentences in the target language meant and if they had anything to do with cultural aspects, that was considered a bonus. Only in the 1970s and 1980s did culture learning come to be associated with communication (Kramsch 2013: 64; Lange 1993). Nowadays, with the growth of immigration, a “pure” culture no longer exists, and people are forced to interact with others with different backgrounds. This does not only mean being able to talk to others and express oneself clearly enough but also respecting other people’s cultures. One might gain knowledge about them by traveling or networking, but the most logical and effective way is to learn it at school; therefore, teaching culture is a very relevant topic, especially in terms of foreign language lessons.

### **1.1. The Importance of Culture Teaching**

Since 2001 the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFRL) (2001) suggests that not only should schools focus on developing learners’ plurilingual competence, but also cultural competence. A language, no matter whether mother tongue or foreign, is not only a means of communication but also a representative of a culture (Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991: 13). Young learners do not oftentimes understand the value of culture learning and do not realize how much culture learning might affect their foreign language acquisition in a positive way (Jawas 2020: 560). Teachers have to show to

students the importance and usefulness of culture. For as long as young students do not truly realize *why* they need to learn something, they are not going to want to nor remember things (Brooks-Lewis 2010: 144). This work begins with defining culture. Overall, there is no single satisfying definition of culture, but everyone can, nevertheless, determine what it means to them personally (Lange 1998: 3). It is of utmost importance that learners understand the three major reasons for learning culture: being aware of one's own cultural background, accepting other people's cultural norms, and being able to explain one's own cultural behavior (Jawas 2020: 567, 570).

Culture and language learning are entwined as one depends on the other: language learning, language awareness, cultural awareness, and cultural experience all affect each other in some way; therefore, it is always better to learn about a culture through the target language (Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991: 14). Kramsch (2013: 63-64) also agrees that language structures, such as ways of speaking or beliefs, may help learners comprehend some cultural features. This means that not only do foreign language teachers have to teach a language, but also teach the target culture, either alongside language skills or as separate courses (Omaggio 1986: 361, Kovačs 2017:77).

Having to learn a language and its culture could be united as “intercultural competence” which means to develop one's understanding and acceptance of foreign cultural norms and traditions throughout one's life (Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991: 13, Hiller 2010: 148). Furthermore, culture should be taught in general because in addition to broadening one's horizons, it joins people from all over the world and being able to compare another culture to one's own is an important skill. Not only is it necessary to be culturally aware in school lessons, but also outside, be it when spending time with friends and family or meeting with a foreign ambassador, for example (Prasad and Lory 2019: 800). Whatever the topic, it is recommended to always compare and contrast the features of the home and target cultures

because it simply shows erudition, interest, tolerance, and respect towards other nations (Jawas 2020: 570). For that, though, learners must first understand the meaning of culture in general and what it entails; only then can they start analyzing it (Thanasoulas 2001). In general, culture is a combination of values and beliefs among people in one area (Kovačs 2017: 74-75).

Most culture courses are designed so that the learners would know how to behave as tourists when traveling, which is why many lessons are conducted on the little “c” part of the culture. However, in order to develop one’s own cultural identity and intercultural competence, big “C” culture should also somewhat be included in lessons (Kramsch 2013: 66). For that reason, not only should lessons be about asking for directions, knowing the traditional foods, and respecting local customs and religion, but they should also prepare learners for conversations about the history of the country they are visiting. Prasad and Lory (2019: 802) argue that not only do culture courses carry a huge role in cultural immersion, but so do schools in general by admitting children with a diverse cultural background into their list of students. Teachers could and should also make use of that when planning lessons because learners with different backgrounds most likely view things differently and this can add value to the lessons, about both small “c” and big “C” cultures.

## **1.2. Culture Teaching Methods**

There are two ways to teaching foreign culture: either to use learners’ mother tongue to teach about a culture through ethnography and anthropology, which means to listen to a culture’s story from the beginning of time, with emphasis on the listening, or approach the topic using the target language as an instrument: by interacting, students would get the sense of the target culture and develop their intercultural competence, combining everything with

language skills development (Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991: 13-14; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 1). Since learning a second language generally means talking about a foreign culture in addition to one's own, it is natural to include the target nation's cultural behaviors into regular language lessons, even if it is in small amounts. For example, if the general topic for a language course is "healthy lifestyles", learners should not merely discuss the names of different fruits and vegetables, but also debate eating and training habits all over the world since the definition of a "healthy lifestyle" may differ. This will develop learners' language skills but, as a bonus, train their critical thinking and cultural awareness. However, there would be more time to cover the specifics in a special culture lesson and when talking about a course specifically dedicated to a culture, it is best to cover it in the target language (Tomalin and Stempleski 1993). This way target language skills evolve in passing whereas the main topic – cultural aspects – are focused on. Kramsch (2013: 59) also suggests for teachers to consider the general goal of the course: whether it is simply to develop learners' language skills, give them guidance as tourists in a foreign place, offer the opportunity to become an academic in the field, or be able to work abroad. After the aim has been determined, only then can the culture course be further designed.

Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) suggest that culture learning, which is a complex matter, should be "task-oriented". This kind of learning includes working in groups, sharing personal experiences, doing role-play, etc. By doing so, students do not merely listen to the teacher, but the information is more likely to be absorbed, as it creates a new layer on top of the already gained knowledge base. It is fun not only for learners themselves but also the teacher because, firstly, it is new and something that is perhaps not done every single time, and secondly, teachers have a chance to get to know their learners on a more personal level. This suggests that culture courses are not valuable only to learners, but also to teachers who get to interact with their students.

Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) recommend using all sorts of realia to bring the target culture closer to learners. This means using textbooks and articles in newspapers, but actual tangibles from the countries in question also help to create a more authentic atmosphere. This could even bring excitement into the classroom when everyone who has anything to exhibit can bring it for a show-and-tell. Personal stories of experience always add more value to the lessons. Even if physical realia are unavailable, nowadays, with the use of technology, all kinds of videos and podcasts can also be used to add authentic material. All of this brings some variation into learning as well, which may make the information more memorable.

According to Omaggio (1986: 372-374), culture learning and its awareness can on a larger scale be separated into four sections or levels. The first one is the most superficial and covering the very basics of a culture, for example, introduces stereotypes and talks about tourism. For this, funny videos or simple discussions and comparisons already suffice. The second level presents more significant and subtle notes and involves discussions about conflicts in culture. This is where learners could practice their debating skills, for example. The third level is most commonly reached in culture courses and dives more into the intellectual analysis, offering activities suitable for the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy, where learners start actually accepting different cultural norms (Krathwohl 2002); whereas the fourth level of cultural awareness gives learners the viewpoint of an experiencer and allows them to empathize with native speakers of the target culture. This stage is oftentimes not reached in culture courses, though, due to lack of authenticity. Some schools can offer different exchange programs for learners or teachers, for example, for cultural and language immersion, but not all can afford that. For that reason, culture lessons should always include as many activities as possible, making it as authentic as it can be, and at the same time, not forget about incorporating speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills (Nunan 1989: 59-

60). Some educators have even considered culture to be a fifth “language skill” among the previously mentioned ones because of its importance and complexity (Kovács 2017: 74).

The most common method of teaching courses full of information, such as culture courses, has been giving lectures, but replacing them with alternative methods is increasingly preferred (Barbazette, 2013: 151). Sometimes telling personal stories from experience or letting students share theirs adds variation to lectures; the more interactive the lessons are, the better. Yasser and Amin Aminifard (2012) do not believe that note-taking is a very effective learning method because people do not normally have to listen and write at the same time. Stephens (2017), however, disagrees by stating that note-taking forces learners to think, analyze and rephrase what they heard, not only in lessons but overall. Therefore, many different methods can be applied, provided that the lessons are engaging but cognitively challenging.

### **1.3. Materials’ Designing**

A course can be built on speeches and personal stories, but the younger the learners are, the more interaction they need. High school students are at the age when listening to teachers might work, but suitable materials are necessary to keep learners’ attention. Some materials easily fit into the lessons, but other subjects lack specially designed materials, making it necessary for teachers to find some additional materials or invent something that would suit their syllabus. Sometimes available sources can be protected by copyright, though, making them complicated to use, or they do not qualify because the syllabus expects to approach the topics from a different angle. Because of this, new tools must often be created (Barbazette 2013: 65).

Prior to searching for suitable materials or creating them, a syllabus should exist or be created, too, because if a teacher is already required to design course materials, they should be as aligned as possible. Before constructing a learning tool, the creator must think about whether the final product helps its user to be informed, actually do something, or analyze and perhaps create something new based on that. If it is the case of being informed, the material should be targeted to *inform*; if it requires the learner to do something, the tool should indicate to *direct*; however, if the user wants to reflect on the material, it should *persuade* the reader (Barbazette 2013: 59-60). Barbazette (2013: 59-60) gives an example of changing a car tire. The informative part only describes the situation, the directive part gives the exact steps of changing a tire, whereas the persuasive way tells the reader to think about road safety. Transferring the “car tire” situation into a culture course, learners can either learn facts about a culture, do role-play and participate in pretending to be in the environment, or actually excel in a foreign situation leaning on the knowledge they have acquired in lessons. Materials used in lessons should help the learners achieve these goals.

Contemporary learning activities must be engaging, interactive, and be complemented with many multimedia elements. On one hand, they need to be comprehensible, but on the other, increase the level of difficulty so that students would put more effort into learning and practicing new skills and knowledge (Kiryakova et al 2014). This is of utmost importance at the secondary education level since teenagers tend to get bored very easily. Therefore, teachers must also consider including a variety of activities in their materials that are appropriate for the learners’ age and lean on the syllabus. For the activities to be proper, though, it is not only a matter of googling; teachers who create new sources should evaluate the appropriateness of the activities so that they would develop students’ cognitive, academic, and social skills (Holt 1993: 16).

With the development of technology and teaching methods, learning materials also have to stay current. For the past decade or so, learning has evolved hand-in-hand with different technological solutions. The year 2020 was a perfect example of how it is impossible to learn anything without technology and the use of the Internet. Teachers had to provide effective approaches to teaching everything remotely without losing the quality of education. Even when schools are again open, the technological solutions remain because they offer a bigger variety of activities. Therefore, incorporating gadgets into classwork improves learning quality – students are more easily motivated to participate, and the results may be better. However, it is crucial to note that learning results do not get better *only* because of the use of technology. It is the combining of technology and on-paper materials that makes learning the most effective (Hockly 2017: 12-13). Therefore, not all the materials should be digitalized, sometimes the old-fashioned way of writing on paper with a pen is also good for a change, not to mention the effect on learning outcomes.

As has already been stated above, learning about culture goes hand-in-hand with language acquisition. Therefore, when designing materials for a CLIL course, they should also include activities that improve language skills. One of the ways to structure a course like this is to consider three major aspects: natural sufficient input, opportunities for interaction, and a positive learning environment (Holt 1993: 48-51). All the activities in the lessons should create an environment so free that all students have enough courage to actively engage in conversations and express their own ideas while being offered cognitively challenging situations (Holt 1993: 48-51). Nunan (1989: 48-49) also stresses that not only should the course have a goal in general, but each assignment given should carry a purpose of its own. It is even possible to combine the aims, making the lesson full of engaging and informative activities. For example, when talking about culture, students could be asked to



search the web about a specific topic, combining the general acquisition of cultural knowledge, improving digital competence, and develop reading skills at the same time.

Created culture course materials should be authentic in more ways than one, for example, provide learners a sense of the real world during lessons and at the same time stay current with the changing world. For that reason, learning culture through different activities, especially interactive ones, is more useful than only completing exercises in a textbook. For the course to include meaningful content and also develop other skills, different methods should, however, be applied. For example, teachers should include role-play but also puzzles, gap-filling and matching activities, writing or listening exercises, different discussions, etc. (Nunan 1989: 47, 68). This was also the perspective that was used in designing the course that is going to be described in greater detail in the next section.

## **2. CHAPTER II – CREATING A SET OF ACTIVITIES FOR AN AMERICAN STUDIES COURSE**

When starting with a culture course, a teacher must be selective of what to include. It is easy to fall into stereotypes and generalize that for the entire nation (Kramsch 1994: 207). For example, people in the USA are generally considered to be unaware of other countries' cultures, obsessed with guns, and addicted to junk food, whereas these are only some people's opinions and do not apply to all Americans. For that reason, Kramsch (1994: 207) suggests that teachers should understand the difference between cultural reality and cultural imagination. Concurrently, educators are expected to give students more responsibility and be willing to embrace a more leading role when giving assignments, as opposed to dictating what to do (Moeller and Nugent 2014: 4).

The teacher in charge must decide, first of all, whether they would like to include lots of information in small detail or discuss fewer topics in more depth. Only then can they proceed to selecting materials. According to the homepage of the school (2020) where the course was designed, the school year has been divided into five terms, each seven weeks long. From Monday to Thursday, students go to school for 60-minute-long lessons, whereas Fridays are considered virtual e-learning days when learners are to spend 45 minutes on each subject they are taking that term. Therefore, considering the fact that the AmS course in this school only lasts for seven weeks, through which only 21 face-to-face lessons and seven virtual learning lessons are conducted, there is not much time to learn everything there is to learn about American culture.

In the previous years, the teacher had opted for lecture slides and note-taking and no particular textbook had been used so far. Students were supposed to demonstrate the

knowledge they had gained by making an oral presentation and by passing an open-book quiz at the end of the course (personal communication, September 2020). The culture classes had covered various topics, such as physical geography and landscapes; states in the U.S.; history from the Vikings until the 21<sup>st</sup> century; political system and presidential elections; constitution and the Civil Rights Movement; different ethnical backgrounds and regional cultures, for example, Rednecks; religious and cultural groups, for example, the Amish and Cajun; spoken languages and Spanglish; architecture; science and technology; food; music and the movie industry; media; sport and education (see Appendix 1). It seemed, however, too intense for 21 lessons, which is why the new course was to cover fewer topics but in more detail. The aim behind this idea was to not rush through everything, but to discuss less and actually comprehend some of the American cultural norms. To include both big “C” and little “c” culture, the author of this paper decided to divide the 7-week-long course into five categories, leaving enough time for students to learn about the topics, make their own presentations, and complete a final test. The five topics were chosen were based on the cultural importance and current relevance and they were as follows: geography, politics, people and language, education, and media and entertainment in the United States (see Appendix 2). With these subject matters, certainly not all important topics are discussed, but learners get at least some apprehension of both the big “C” and little “c” culture, the first being geography, politics, and education, the latter one people and language and media and entertainment. Ultimately, the NCUSE (2020) also wants schools to address both sides of culture.

The author of this paper decided to cover one topic per week, leaving the presentations and the final test to the end of the course. Additionally, the course was designed so that the first lesson of the week would be lecture-type, giving a general overview of what would be discussed, leaving the remaining two and a half lessons for more interactive

activities. The specific number of activities was not defined in advance, but the activities were developed in parallel with the teaching of the course and in response to the students' reactions to the previous activities.

In the previous years when AmS has been taught in the school in question, the syllabus (see Appendix 1) has targeted the course to be more of a language course. At the same time, very many topics were discussed in a limited amount of time. The course itself is entitled "American Studies" but the outcomes did not quite harmonize the contents. Initially, none of the four introduced points had any connections to teaching culture in particular. All of the learning outcomes aimed to educate learners in terms of language in general – grammar, useful phrases, independent use of language, decent bases for acquiring the B2 level of English. The author of this paper thought it best to include fewer topics in more detail and changed the learning outcomes in the syllabus, making it more of a CLIL course (see Appendix 2). In the modified syllabus the learning outcomes no longer only focus on linguistic aspects, but also expect learners to understand cultural norms in the USA and be able to compare them with Estonian ones; value different cultures and nations; use different standard linguistic forms and formulations rather appropriately; use different oral and written presentation types and develop their digital competence (NCUSE 2020). The course would discuss the norms and values through the topics of geography, politics, people and language, education, and media and entertainment – all of which were chosen after a careful consideration based on contemporary matters and most general values.

Specific activities were chosen and modified to the lessons after reading through some literature that suggested fun and useful methods. Throughout the course, learners demonstrated their knowledge by participating actively in lesson activities and discussions, performing in a group presentation, and passing an achievement test. The latter two assignments were graded ones, but not completing tasks of homework and being passive in

the lessons were also marked on e-school, affecting the final grade. For example, if a learner had not done their homework for the third time, it would have been a “1” and that would have lowered the mean. In addition, the learners were informed in advance that they would be answering a questionnaire at the end of the course and if they were to give thorough replies, they were promised consideration of improving the final grade. The questionnaire, which aimed to get learner feedback for the activities, was conducted in English and consisted of 38 questions that were categorized based on the topics covered in the lessons. Since altogether there were 22 participants in the AmS course and 20 of them answered the questionnaire, the author is confident the answers will suffice and reflect general views adequately.

When designing the AmS course for *The English Language in the Changing World* module, teachers most likely expect learners to be highly motivated since they have chosen this set of classes themselves, but it need not always be so. Every course needs an introduction, as people do not know each other yet and the course content and criteria for assessment should be explained. Hockley (2017: 32) states that using technology as an icebreaker is a good idea. Especially since learners nowadays are very dependent on their gadgets and perhaps feel more comfortable using those than talking in front of strangers. For that reason, the learners were initially asked what they associated with the word “America” and to insert keywords onto [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com). From their answers, a word cloud was created and at the end of the course the same cloud was brought to students’ attention and they were able to reflect on whether they still felt the same way. At the end of the course, 20 students responded to a questionnaire about the performed activities. All of them said that the word cloud exercise was fun, helped to “break the ice”, and get a better view of what others in the course also know. “Teachers spend too much time “telling” and not enough time “showing”,” states Freeman (2005: 101) which is why authentic examples are highly

important in learning and the course content was introduced through a picture activity when learners were supposed to guess the five topics that would be learned, by looking at the photos. This also seemed to have lightened the mood in the classroom and learners felt more comfortable being there, knowing what was ahead of them. Moreover, throughout the course, learners were encouraged to compare the target culture to their home with every discussed topic.

## **2.1. Geography**

One of the most important topics of big “C” culture is geography (Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), Lange (1993)). Whether it is memorizing the map of a country or knowing its regions in general, teaching geography in a foreign culture course is important because it creates a sense of understanding and helps to cope when interacting interculturally (Gersmehl 2014: 3). When traveling abroad, it would be useful to know how to get from point A to point B without asking for directions, but one’s knowledge about geography may also offer opportunities for conversation starters with locals, for example. Gersmehl (2014: 20) suggests approaching the subject “bottom-up”, meaning to make connections based on facts not to give lectures, and expect the students to understand their aims. However, in order to be able to make those connections, some sort of grounding must be given first. Because of that, the first lesson of the “geography week” of the course was still a lecture where students were introduced to both the physical and political map but also the regional differences of the southern, eastern, and western states. The learners were not required to write everything into their notebooks but worksheets with a gap-filling exercise, which was inspired by the *Viewpoint* textbook by Farley and Walters (2013: 134), was provided (see Appendix 3).

Geography is a very visual subject which is why it is useful for learners to study it through drawings and charts and since not all maps include everything, teachers need to

consider using various maps, for example physical, political, climatic, and choropleth maps, in their lessons (Scoffham 2017: 9). Oldakowski (2001: 245) suggests using maps not only to learn different locations by heart but to also draw logical conclusions from them and analyze them. For example, students are not required to know that the capital of Illinois is Springfield, but they should be able to conclude that since Oklahoma is closer to the equator than Montana, it might be warmer there at some points. He also claims that using maps as a learning tool or incorporating them into exercises can be of great benefit as they develop learners' spatial skills which in turn are a highly valued aspect because "they are key to comprehending more complex concepts within the discipline" (Oldakowski 2001: 245). In order to make the geography lessons more active, one of the activities the students were required to do, was to play an online game on [online.seterra.com](http://online.seterra.com) to learn the political map. Students were asked to identify the location of each of the 50 states while a timer was ticking. The assignment was not graded, but students enjoyed it. The game aimed to integrate technology into learning because playing an online game ought to give learners more motivation (Hockly 2017: 12-13). Even when asking the students: "Do you prefer practicing online or on paper?" every respondent said "online", two learners emphasized, though, that having a timer in front of their eyes caused some anxiety. Perhaps it would be more learner-friendly if there was no time limit and students could just play the game, yet, many students claimed to have memorized the location of smaller states better because of the game.

In order to step away from textbooks and bring some excitement into the classroom, students were also divided into groups to put together a jigsaw puzzle about the states. Approaching new topics via games is supposed to increase the ability to acquire new skills by 40% (Kiryakova et al 2014). Learning geography with puzzles is not only considered "gamification" as it includes elements from games but this can already be considered a "serious game" since the only aim is not to have fun but to actually achieve a determined

goal (Kiryakova et al 2014). In our case, the aim was to learn the position of the states in the USA. Out of the 20 learners who gave feedback at the end of the course, everyone said the activity was fun and some even mentioned they liked working in teams. Only 15% of the respondents did not think this helped them learn.

Another activity that students were asked to do as a team was to plan a week-long trip to the USA. The aim was to make them think critically and logically and create something new based on existing knowledge, as Bloom's taxonomy also suggests (Krathwohl 2002). Learners were supposed to consider the size of the country and sights they wanted to visit and propose a route that would be achievable. This assignment created some mixed feelings. Two out of 20 learners (10%) emphasized being able to compare the USA and Estonia in terms of size after doing this activity, but another two people (10%) found it "annoying" since the activity was time-consuming and learners were assigned to teams and they did not get to work with their friends. The majority (65%), however, found this assignment "beneficial" and "interesting", because it helped them remember the location of different states, learn about some new landmarks, and work on their time-management skill.

The learners were asked to choose their favorite topic out of the five and six out of 20 (30%) people chose geography. Some suggested including more talk about the climate and landscapes in the USA and perhaps discuss the states in more detail, but mostly the learners were happy with the knowledge they received from the geography lessons. However, teachers are expected to offer something to every learner type, some like visual aids and fun activities, others enjoy more structured lessons. Therefore, using games in learning, for example simple jigsaw puzzles, may give the people, who do not like reading textbooks, a chance to learn the same thing through having fun, whereas others would still



prefer something more traditional (Kiryakova et al 2014).

## 2.2. Politics

Politics is a big part of a nation's background. However, teachers often struggle with making it interesting for students. Since the AmS course in question was completed between late October and mid-December in the year 2020 and the presidential election in the United States of America was held in November of the same year, the topic of politics was without hesitation included in the course; it was only a matter of *how?* that needed determination because problems that other teachers have faced might not be connected to the topic itself but to the *way* it is taught.

The AmS course was scheduled so that the presidential election day would coincide with the “politics week” and similarly to the previous topic, this one was also started with a lecture-like lesson. Throughout the week, the learners also worked with a worksheet distributed by the teacher (see Appendix 4). Students were introduced to the three branches of the U.S. Government, two major political parties, and the specifics of presidential elections in general. These are generally the most discussed aspects of American politics and can easily be compared to the system in Estonia due to their differences. For example, it is interesting for Estonians to know that in the USA, people can directly vote for the president they would like to lead their country, whereas, in Estonia, the president is elected by the parliament. Once the groundings had been set, the learners were asked to approach the topic through many different activities.

To keep learners' attention when talking about a serious topic like politics, Beavers (2011: 416) suggests including famous comedians like Jon Stewart, Howard Stern, or Stephen Colbert into learning about politics as they address the topics of politics through a

humorous spectrum and may be more suitable for teenagers. Since all content that is published online is not always appropriate, though, teachers should ascertain the quality of certain videos before using them in lessons. After ensuring that these men provide acceptable content, a video searching assignment was given to the learners: they were asked to find one video on YouTube, made by one of the mentioned comedians, and analyze whether the topic discussed had been covered appropriately through comedy. More precisely, students were to determine whether covering the particular topic through humor was acceptable or tasteless and inappropriate. Not only did the students learn about different political matters through this assignment, but they were also developing their digital competence by searching for something when only given keywords, such as the general theme “politics” and the speaker’s name. Because the learners seemed to have enjoyed this activity, videos were included in future lessons, as well. At the end of the course, one of the students recommended using even more videos in the lessons.

In addition to humorous videos, cartoons, such as *The Simpsons*, are believed to push the boundaries, making it seem more acceptable to talk about delicate issues, such as politics. The animated series often features different political issues and politicians and for learners, especially the ones familiar with *The Simpsons*, it may be interesting (Woodcock 2008: 4). If nothing else, talking about cartoons in a politics lesson is a nice change for a regular lecture. Additionally, *The Simpsons* are known for “predicting” the future and watching an episode, which was made in 2019 about Donald Trump and Joe Biden, offered some conversation starters for the class. Because of this and by drawing inspiration from Woodcock’s article (2008: 13), using a cartoon episode to ask questions about a political situation, can inspire students to think along harder because the animation is already familiar to them – now they can use it for another, new purpose.

Similarly to politicians, students also have their own views on how the world should work and a fun way to discuss these opinions in a “politics” lesson is to have a debate. For this activity to succeed, learners must feel safe because they are not only talking about facts but they should be brave enough to voice their personal opinion (Stockdale 2020: 286). In the last “politics week” lesson, learners were asked to propose topic-related issues, which in their opinion deserve covering, that would later be discussed in a monitored debate. Two teams were formed, and the teacher acted as the discussion moderator. At first, participants were rather hesitant, however, once they warmed up, they launched into heated argumentations. Problematic topics such as gender inequality, racism, homophobia, abortion, and gun control were raised and everyone who wished was able to express their opinion, some more than others. Since participating in a debate requires good oral skills, some students may not feel too comfortable speaking. Thinking along and listening, on the other hand, are also important parts of language learning as it “broadens one’s horizons,” as one participant stressed. Another option would be to assign specific debating roles for participants, such as rating the speakers. Students with better speaking skills claimed to have truly enjoyed the activity, though, because they were able to speak for what they believe in, develop their argumentative, and language skills. Concern was expressed, however, that while people do learn more about each other with assignments like this, classmates with different views may not be so compatible after hearing each other’s political views through “heated arguments”. For this not to happen, teachers should listen carefully to what is being said and if necessary, intervene by ending the discussion. Another option is to prevent heated arguments by setting some boundaries beforehand; for example, some topics, as well as cussing and insults, can be prohibited.

As course designers and lesson planners, teachers must assure that their classes have something to offer for everyone, but with a controversial topic such as politics, they must be

careful with what they include; there is a fine line between comedy and mockery. The course participants were asked for their opinion towards including humor when discussing serious topics, politics included. Two out of 20 (10%) people claimed it not to be important, nine (45%) remained neutral on the topic, and another nine (45%) found it important or very important. On one hand, students said this way boring lessons become entertaining; two learners even emphasized that if a teacher is fun or uses amusing videos in class, it shows that they love what they are doing and this automatically increases learning motivation. On the other hand, many learners were concerned about the humor turning into insults. One says that it must not necessarily be humor that lightens the mood in the class, but a friendly atmosphere can already increase interest in tedious topics. Here is where teachers should ponder why learners find the topic not that interesting in the first place; perhaps it is not because of the topic itself but the way that it is usually addressed. Giving examples from real life and letting the 16- and 17-year-olds analyze the political features in the target culture and at home is crucial because this is the age when they are expected to understand the political landscape as they have already reached the legal voting age in Estonia.

Many youngsters usually find the topic of politics rather dull, but in the course feedback, several students claimed they enjoyed the lessons during that week. When asking “What is the ONE thing you will take with you from the course?”, a surprising number of nine people (45%) mentioned knowledge about American politics. In addition, a quarter of the respondents (25%) chose politics as their favorite topic out of the five. Whether it is due to fun activities, including very contemporary issues, or modern teenagers simply being more interested in foreign affairs these days, the topic of politics and its popularity, was one of the highlights of the course.

### **2.3. People & Language**

It is the people who live, have lived, and will live in a country and their customs that form a culture, which is the reason why it is of utmost importance that culture courses cover this part in their lessons as well. One cannot talk about a nation, though, unless they have some historical background. History is a difficult subject to teach in a foreign language class because of the uncertainty of what to teach. The fact that the American life is depicted everywhere might raise another concern: teachers do not know what to include because the information seems so “obvious” (Brooks-Lewis 2010: 139-140, 143). Since the AmS course is more than a language course, however, the first lesson of the “people and language week” was dedicated to history. The lessons in the high school in question are 60 minutes long; therefore, only a few key elements of the centuries-long history could be included. Brooks-Lewis (2010: 140) suggests beginning history lessons with a specific moment in time, allowing learners to picture a time frame of some kind. Thus, this AmS course began with Pilgrims, the actual discovery of America by Europeans, and British colonies.

After hearing the lecture about American history, students were given a worksheet (see Appendix 5) and asked to put the most important events onto a chronological timeline. Timelines are believed to help learners visualize and structure the material because the most important pieces of information are all in one place. They can be used before learning about a new topic, but for the timeline to truly cohere, it is recommended to draw timelines after receiving the context either by reading or listening (Brugar and Roberts 2014: 231). The questionnaire responses revealed that three people (15%) did not see any use in making the timeline and would have rather watched short videos or simply read, two people (10%) were doubtful since the activity did help them memorize the order of events better, but the dates were still “a blur”, whereas the rest of the respondents (75%) found the timeline drawing

useful. Some claimed to be visual learners, others like to have some structure while learning, and one even stated: “I actually think it is the easiest way to learn history.”

Having obtained knowledge about the historical background, students could proceed to learn more about the people and the language of the target culture. Knowing about events in the past may make learners understand why people act a certain way (Brooks-Lewis 2010: 145). For example, having heard from the lecture that in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century slavery was an everyday matter in the USA, they might understand why African Americans still feel pressured today; and that slaves came influenced the language. The same applies to Mexico, for example. Because many Mexicans have migrated to the States, Spanish is the second biggest language in the USA. Here is when Estonian learners can draw another parallel with the American culture since, similarly, many Russian-speaking people live in Estonia, making Russian the second most spoken language.

Learning about a culture in a foreign language means to also develop language skills. To develop reading skills, a text from the coursebook *Viewpoints: Literature, Society, Language, Art* (2013: 71) was used word-for-word in order to provide an authentic reading task. Another alternative to listening in lectures is collaborative learning which requires the students to put themselves in the shoes of the teacher and be willing to explain a topic to fellow learners. One of the benefits of this method is critical thinking (Awedh et al 2014: 18). This is why in addition to only listening to the teacher, the students had to solve exercises 3 and 6 on the *People & Language* worksheet (see Appendix 5) by searching for new information on their smart gadgets. Using contemporary technology in today’s lessons is believed to develop teamwork skills as well (Awedh et al 2014: 19).

Exercise 6 on the worksheet (see Appendix 5) was planned to be a role-play activity. Barbazette (2013: 173) describes role play as a way to “develop empathy” or “provide skill

practice” which is an important quality in understanding culture. Hiller (2010: 155) mentions another benefit: dialogues and negotiations are common in everyday life and an activity like this helps to practice them. There are five different ways to use role-play according to Barbazette (2013: 173): improvising, having specific roles with instructions, replaying actual life, dramatic reading, and creating one’s own scenario. To implement improvising and having specific roles at the same time, half of the students were supposed to be “people today” and the other half “people 100 years ago”. Out of 20 questionnaire respondents, three people had been absent on that day and could not comment, but only three other learners thought the activity was fun and helped them remember the differences that have occurred in a century. The remaining part of students said the activity was “pointless”, “a waste of time”, and “not fun, but helped memorize things better”. Perhaps it would have been a better idea to simply discuss the differences and have conversations about the native Americans, as one student suggested.

To discuss the dialects spoken in the USA, learners had some worksheet exercises, but they were also supposed to do group work. They were divided using the jigsaw or mosaic method, which means to first separate people into main sections and later form mixed groups from the main sections (Kilic 2008: 111). The main sections were the East, the West, the South and students were to discuss the specifics of the dialects. The questionnaire reflected that although at first, it had been difficult for students to start talking because some of them felt “awkward” and “shy”, the overall view on the assignment was positive. One of the biggest perks the students saw was saving time – instead of discussing the three dialects in a lecture, they were able to hear each other’s opinions and have discussions while only doing a third of the actual work. In the feedback, a student suggested that it would have been even more fun to try speaking in the dialects themselves. Overall, *People & Language* was not

the most favored topic of the five, as only two learners (10%) claimed to have enjoyed this topic the most.

## **2.4. Education**

For the following two weeks, the school was sent on distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The author of this paper was, at first, disappointed because now the activities could not have been designed as planned, but after some consideration, she started seeing the positive sides of the situation. Technology has already become and will become even more a part of our lives and education system and hybrid learning is the new norm. Therefore, the “education week” was a forced, yet a perfect opportunity to design online activities for the AmS course.

The first lesson of the week was still a lecture and could easily be conducted via Google Meet; during the second and third lesson, different online opportunities were taken advantage of. One of the activities was solving and creating cyberhunts. A cyberhunt is an Internet-based activity where learners go online to hunt for answers. For this, a specific website should be given where the information is searchable (Du Plessis and Webb 2011: 1191). So that the learners would initially understand what cyberhunts are, an explanatory cyberhunt was made for them to complete on Google Forms (see Appendix 6), after which students were asked to create their own cyberhunt activities. They were allowed to use any site but Wikipedia and having already listened to a lecture, they also had some background knowledge. This method is called *learning-by-design* and allows learners to operate on a higher cognitive level (Du Plessis and Webb 2011: 1194). In the course feedback questionnaire, students split into three groups of opinions – nine students (45%) claimed completing cyberhunts is better for learning because it takes less time, it is more fun, one has to read more and through that learns more, and because it is easier. Eight students (40%) leaned more towards creating cyberhunts because not only can one be creative, it also



develops digital competence more and one has to work through a lot of material and be certain that it is correct. Three people, however, could not decide which option is more beneficial because both are equally developing.

To learn about the higher education system in the USA, students were offered a chance to escape from a virtual escape room; it is yet another activity that has gained rapid popularity during remote learning and can easily be created on Google Forms. For a person who has never done this, it can be rather challenging at first, but there are many YouTube tutorials that are easily understandable. A virtual escape room is an online version of an actual escape room where people have to solve different puzzles and get clues in order to leave the place (Vergne et al 2020: 2845). For this AmS course, the escape room had questions about the American higher education system; the game included different questions based on videos and reading, but there were also fun solutions in case the questions were answered incorrectly. For example, to begin with, players had to choose a virtual door to enter and if the one they chose was incorrect, either Donald Trump, Joe Biden, or a ghost welcomed them. This would ideally not only come as a surprise but also trigger some memories about some already learned topics. The video-based questions asked players to listen for different facts, for example, the length of university attendance or the differences between community colleges and Ivy League universities. The reading exercise, for example, expected players to read about what foreign students have to do in order to learn in an American higher education institute, and then answer some multiple-choice questions. To open the escape rooms, the escapees had to go on this link: <https://forms.gle/YJYVtU9kJiL26h1P8> and it ended with people having to enter an escape code, which was “Ivy League” and it was an answer to a riddle. At the end of the course, 15 students (75%) stated they enjoyed the virtual escape room because it was fun, gave a great overview of the topic, and was different from usual activities, whereas five students (25%)

did not enjoy the escape room because it did not help them learn since playing one game does not fix the knowledge yet; and on the contrary, they did not find it fun.

A total of four learners (20%) chose “education” as their favorite topic, but one thing that some students were missing, was actual interaction with American students of the same age, perhaps it could be arranged next time.

## **2.5. Media & Entertainment**

The Grunwald Declaration on Media Education (1982) states:

We live in a world where media are omnipresent. An increasing number of people spend a great deal of time watching television, reading newspapers and magazines, playing records and listening to the radio. /.../ The school and the family share the responsibility of preparing the young person living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds. /.../ The greater integration of educational and communications systems would undoubtedly be an important step towards more effective education. (Grunwald Declaration on Media Education 1982)

For this reason, media was one of the five topics included in this AmS course – to allow learners to think critically when reading or hearing news from different media platforms. 90% of American teenagers use social media every day but it is important to know the differences between mass and social media (Hall and Allsop 2018: 7). Fake news that spread quickly on social media can easily lead people away from reality and by knowing the background of certain media platforms, problems related to falsified information can hopefully be avoided.

During the final week in November of 2020, the school was still on distance learning, therefore, the topic of *Media and Entertainment* was also to be taught online. In addition to the already-familiar lecture, where students heard about the concept of mass media and learned about some of the most popular media channels in the USA, the teacher tried to create something new and exciting, without repeating last week’s activities.

The students in the AmS course were given a task (see Appendix 7) to watch three videos: a 24-hour news channel, a clip from the *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* show, and a video called *How Fox News Covered Melania Trump vs. Michelle Obama*; all available on YouTube. The learners were then asked three questions: *Can this be considered media? Why (not)?*; *What is the aim of such media?*; and *Who is this media targeted at?*. After 25 minutes of individual work, everyone gathered on Google Meet to discuss different opinions and everyone agreed that while there is serious news, a part of the media industry is dedicated to entertaining, as, for example, the Jimmy Kimmel show does. Since the students had previously expressed their sympathy towards including videos in the lessons, they happily completed this activity as well.

Not only do some news entertain people, but there is a whole business sector in the USA dedicated to entertainment and that is called *Hollywood*. In order to develop learners' listening skills, an exercise from *Viewpoints* (Farley and Walters 2013: 116-117) was used as a listening task. Students heard about Hollywood and its history. As expected, this was not a very favored activity: only three students (15%) claimed to prefer listening over reading because it makes them more focused due to the limitation of hearing something once or twice; 16 learners (80%) would choose reading over listening because it allows them to work in their own pace and go back for information if necessary. One student did not have preferences. To discover even more about Hollywood, students were separated into three breakout rooms to discuss either different film studios, movie genres, or famous actors. 11 students out of 20 (55%) enjoyed working in teams, mentioning that although it can be stressful to search for information themselves, it was fun, different from usual activities, and offered a sense of team spirit. Two emphasized that doing group work online is definitely more difficult, however, than working in the classroom because this way some people in the group may not contribute that much. The remaining nine students (45%) said that although

working in teams to get answers to questions is important, looking for information can be challenging since they do not know which website offers reliable facts; they would, therefore, rather just listen to the teacher.

In terms of media and entertainment, students would have liked to also examine the differences between media publications in America and different European countries, explore more examples of daily news, analyze how biased American media is and how some publications tend to be too liberal, and talk more about Hollywood and movies. Overall, though, learners were happy with the activities they got to do, especially since they were on remote learning, and with the knowledge they received; three learners even chose *Media and Entertainment* as their favorite topic.

## **2.6. Course Conclusion**

The final two weeks of the course were to conclude everything that had been learned throughout the previous five weeks and to check the knowledge with an achievement test. Week six was “presentations week” when students made group presentations covering the key elements they found important from the five topics, performed pretended scenarios between Republicans and Democrats and about the stereotypical differences between people in the East, the South, and the West. They also explained the week-long road trip they had planned with their team. Prior to making the presentations, students received the requirements (see Appendix 8) and were expected to follow the criteria in order to get a positive mark. Since the biggest emphasis in the learning outcomes of the course was on the knowledge about American culture, students were not graded based on language skills but the content and presentation skills. They were to speak freely about all the five topics and give additional examples to them, act out two imaginary scenarios, and present the road trip

they had previously planned as a team. Group presentations are considered to be a beneficial learning method because not only can the workload be shared, students exchange opinions and learn through peer discussions, improving their communicative skills. Performing in front of an audience can also help with non-educational aspects, such as overcoming anxiety (Andrew and Tran 2019: 116, 124).

The final week of the AmS course was to revise for and complete the final achievement test which included questions about all five topics that had been covered. In the revision lesson, the most important parts of the five topics were quickly discussed, but then students were asked to create a crossword with an answer key; later the papers were exchanged for solving. Studies have shown that creating crosswords before a test can improve the results (Nicol 2020: 3). Students are required to analyze the information they have and use it so that it could be understood compactly. Most of the learners said themselves that creating the crossword helped them revise since they had to form questions “outside the box” and being creative is generally fun. The creating was found to be more difficult than the solving, but four students found the activity entirely pointless, saying it was “tedious”, “boring” and “annoying”. An activity like this can be time-consuming and might, therefore, not suit everyone. The test (see Appendix 9), however, was rather capacious, including questions about all the learned topics. Students were given a 5-minute revision time and the remaining of the lesson was dedicated to the test.

Initially, the plan was to spend the very last lesson of the AmS course discovering interesting facts about various topics to broaden the teenagers’ horizons and ask for course feedback on Friday during the independent learning day. Due to all lessons being canceled on the Friday, the last lesson was dedicated to receiving the feedback instead. This, however, meant that there was no more time for the fun facts. In the course feedback questionnaire, students were asked what they thought the course was lacking and what other topics they

would have liked to cover. Some would have liked to discuss cuisine and music, others suggested sports and landmarks. At the beginning of the lesson that occurred on November 26, 2020, Thanksgiving was briefly mentioned and students could play a Thanksgiving-traditions-themed Kahoot, but it was also proposed by the students that more traditions and holidays were included in the AmS lessons. The next time the author teaches another AmS course, these suggestions will be taken into consideration.

## **2.7. Assessment, the achievement of learning outcomes, and overall feedback**

Throughout the course, learners only received two grades – one for the oral group presentation and another for the final test. For different activities, learners received oral feedback in discussions and written feedback on the worksheets throughout the course, but grades were not given. The aim was to draw students' attention to the information they had remembered correctly and falsely so that they could either feel certain about themselves or try to rethink and remember things the right way. At the beginning of every lesson, learners could discuss what they remembered from previous lessons and with homework assignments, learners were provided feedback either via comments on worksheets or virtual comments on Google Docs. Students develop differently and, therefore, it is useful to give them time to adapt rather than rushing into assessing them (Moeller and Nugent 2014: 5). Both of the grades were received at the end of the 7-week course. This way the previous five weeks could be spent on the learning and not worrying about being graded. Also, the presentation was supposed to be of significant help when it came to revising for the final achievement test, which is yet another reason the assessed assignments were performed so closely in time. In the end, the course grade was formed by the mean and was rounded up in favor of the student, especially if the feedback questionnaire had been filled thoroughly.

The AmS course aimed to achieve all of the set learning outcomes. By listening to lectures, students could get an overview of the geography, cultural norms, and other unique features in the USA and were able to compare them with Estonia in different discussions and exercises. The debate, for example, allowed learners to realize what the candidates of the presidential election in the USA must feel; the mosaic group assignment was to give the learners a better understanding of what the dialects sound like; the road-trip group assignment aimed to help the students grasp the vastness of the USA. The learners were guided to value different cultures and nations through debating and discussion activities. At the beginning of every lesson, the previous lessons' topics were discussed and compared with Estonia, which encouraged learners to realize the differences and similarities between the two cultures. Although orals skills were not assessed, the course expected learners to participate actively in conversations, making them use different standard linguistic forms and formulations. In addition, the lesson dedicated to different dialects, offered a chance to expand one's vocabulary in terms of regionally used phrases while being able to distinguish them by sound. Finally, in all of the lessons, students used different oral and written presentation methods by participating in discussions, completing the worksheets, presenting in front of the class, and passing the final test. Digital competence was also developed throughout the course with many different activities, especially the ones performed while on distance learning (Talviste 2020). Therefore, all the learning outcomes were achievable. The achievement of the learning outcomes was measured both directly through the presentation and the final test and indirectly through discussions.

Everyone passed the course – out of 22 participants eight received a “5”, six received a “4” and the remaining eight received a “3” – and the general attitude towards the AmS course remained positive. A surprising number of seven (35%) emphasized that they enjoyed the lectures the most because they were informative and interesting. This may be because

learners either truly like listening better or because they are used to this type of learning method and doing anything else would be out of their comfort zone. One of the students mentioned how nice the classroom atmosphere was and the majority of the respondents (60%) said the activities were engaging, “versatile”, and “different from all of the other school work”. For further improvements, one student recommended making smaller quizzes in between and some suggested including more topics. Many students, however, mentioned that different lessons are fun for different students; if classmates are not actively participating, it might ruin the experience for others, too. In terms of the activities, to the author’s surprise, only one student liked learning things remotely, everyone else preferred being in the classroom where everybody could be involved and communicate. Although one learner even advised using fewer activities next time because they were a bit *too* creative at times, the majority of the course participants were content with the activities that were done and with the knowledge they received.



## CONCLUSION

Culture learning, in combination with foreign language learning, is becoming increasingly important. Schools have started to add separate culture teaching courses into their curricula to develop the plurilingual and cultural competence of learners (CEFRL 2001). Teaching and learning about different cultures is complex because culture itself is a combination of many aspects. Learning about foreign traditions is especially difficult (Tomalin and Stempleski 1993; Kovačs 2017). There are many approaches to teaching culture, but they are often separated into two: big “C” and little “c” culture, significant and everyday aspects from each other (Kramsch 2013). The combination of the two types makes a culture course the most valuable, though. The topics can be made enjoyable by including a variety of activities in the lessons (Holt 1993; Tomalin and Stempleski 1993; Kiryakova et al 2014).

The whole process of using the set of activities was experimental as the course and activities were constructed right before the course started and developed parallel with the teaching of the course. The course period also covered distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. This, in turn, gave opportunities to experiment with online activities, too, in addition to classroom-based ones. For that, the present thesis is structured so that the overview of activities is shown within the teaching process.

The author wanted to make the activities as active as possible, to keep teenagers interested in learning about American culture. Five topics – geography, politics, people and language, education, media and entertainment – were chosen for the course on the basis of their topicality and the activities were designed based on suggestions from reading literature. At the end of the 7-week course, via a questionnaire, participants of the course were asked

for feedback about the done activities and according to the learners, the activities were indeed very active, some even said *too* active.

Each of the five topics started with a lecture-like lesson, followed by more active lessons. To the author's surprise, 35% of the respondents liked the lectures, whereas 60% of the learners preferred the more engaging activities, saying that these lessons had been different from others. During geography lessons, which were voted the most interesting ones by six learners out of 20, activities such as online and jigsaw puzzles were used, in addition to planning a road trip with a group. All the learners claimed having enjoyed the group work assignment. The second most popular topic – politics, which was favored by five students out of 20 – included different video-watching assignments and a debate. While the debate made students doubt the friendly classroom environment, the videos were approved with the comment that while politics is indeed a serious topic, teenagers are already old enough to comprehend it, making it unnecessary to include humorous videos only. In the third place of students' preferences was the topic of education with four votes. This topic was covered remotely and different online activities were used. Through a cyberhunt and a virtual escape room, learners could understand the American school and higher education systems. The majority of learners liked these online activities because they had offered them a good overview and a diversity from usual assignments. Media was the fourth favorite topic and, similarly to education, it was covered remotely. Since videos had previously been enjoyed, they were included now, too. In addition, a group assignment and a listening exercise were used. The majority of learners would have liked to read instead of listening and approximately half of the students liked the online group exercise. The least appealing topic of the five was people and language; only two students chose that. In these lessons learners first heard about American history and were then introduced to the three most common dialects. First, they could hear the different dialects through a video after which a mosaic

method group assignment was used. The learners liked the activities but would have liked to act out some scenarios themselves, using different voices.

The aim of the present thesis was to understand how to create a set of activities for teaching culture in a hybrid classroom. The author did not want this to be merely an EFL course but more of a CLIL one because CEFRL (2001) recommends developing learners' cultural competence in addition to being plurilingual. Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991: 13) suggest calling the combination of culture and language learning "intercultural competence". While teenagers today may understand the importance of foreign languages, they do not often appreciate the seriousness of culture learning (Jawas 2020: 560). Therefore, the created activities were aimed to be rather active either by making the learners think along or physically do something. Also, since learning is suggested to be "task-oriented" (Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), all the activities were supposed to carry a specific goal. By keeping the lessons passive, learners lose interest and may no longer interest in the subject at all.

Since the main aim of the AmS course was to make learners understand the differences between Estonian and American cultures, the created activities tried to focus on the aspects that differ or coincide the most. For example, the road-trip assignment was supposed to make the learners think about the size of the countries and the virtual escape room was to show how much the American higher education system is different from the one in Estonia. Students were given different video-related assignments because authentic materials are supposed to create a supportive learning environment (Tomalin and Stempleski (1993). Since teachers ought to consider the differences in learners' needs and abilities, more challenging activities such as debating and role-play were included in addition to lecture-like lessons that were supposed to be easier for learners because they could simply listen and take notes (Krathwohl 2002; Barbazette, 2013: 151; Yasser and Amin Aminifard 2012).

Because learning and teaching are constantly evolving, the materials used should also reflect that. Since the year 2020 was challenging in the educational field, the combination of on-paper and electronic learning was unavoidable and as Hockly (2017: 12-13) puts it, it is one of the most effective learning methods, too. It improves learners' digital competence, as well, which is why many online activities were included. Culture learning is closely entwined with language learning (Kramsch 2013: 64; Lange 1993), due to which many of the activities aimed for learners to communicate with each other. On many occasions, they were assigned to groups because of this, all the topics were spoken about in group discussions, and learners were supposed to perform in front of the class with their presentation. Whatever the activity, though, each of the tasks was targeted to create an active and positive learning environment as Holt (1993: 48-51) suggests.

The general attitude towards the performed activities remained positive. Most students liked having many options for acquiring new knowledge; only one said the lessons could have been a bit more passive. Student feedback showed that they sometimes prefer more quiet lessons to active ones. Not all people need the activities to be fun, today's youth is already mature enough to appreciate serious learning methods. Change always pushes people out of their comfort zone which might be one of the reasons why some course participants wanted mellower lessons. Students are used to gap-filling exercises and listening to lectures and doing anything else may seem unusual. Simultaneously, high school students are already at the age when they understand the value of different learning methods. All in all, the created activities included something new for every learner while still offering an already familiar environment.

Considering the student feedback in combination with the teacher's opinion, the most engaging and useful activities were the ones where students could discuss different matters. Completing worksheets can be an additional activity, which most likely helps to consolidate

information, but hearing how others have understood things and explaining your own ideas helps to fix it the most. Given the fact that culture is a complex matter, it is important to comprehend it, not only be able to fill gaps. Therefore, the more there are discussion activities in a culture course, the better. Thus, the author believes that the debate, group presentation, and mosaic activity were the most useful for acquiring cultural knowledge. However, since students expressed the need for a sense of certainty, some lectures are also necessary for culture courses. On the other hand, since some of the activities were perhaps a bit too active, some role-play assignments could be excluded, providing learners a few lessons more in their comfort zone. All in all, though, since learners were content with the majority of the activities saying that these lessons were different from other lessons, it can be said the activities were suitable and perhaps presented the information more memorably.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### ÕPETAJA TÖÖKAVA

Õpitulemused

Kursuse lõpetamisel õpilane:

- 1) oskab üsna õigesti kasutada tüüpkeelendeid ja moodustusmalle,
- 2) kasutab tuttavas olukorras grammatiliselt üsna õiget keelt, ehkki on märgata emakeele mõju,
- 3) oskab õpitud keelendeid iseseisvalt kasutada tasemel, kus tehtud vead ei takista mõistmist,
- 4) lisakursuse lõpuks on õpilane omandanud vajaliku keelelise korrektsuse kõige olulisemates punktides, et edukalt jätkata õpinguid gümnaasiumis saavutamaks B2 taset

**KURSUSE NIMETUS:** Ameerika kultuurilugu

**KLASS:** inglise keele mooduli kursus 11. klass

**ÕPPEMATERJAL:**

Jaotmaterjalid  
Filmid ja katkendid telesarjadest  
Erinevad teabekeskonnad  
Isamaterjalid, kodused tööd  
paljundatud lehed õpikust Viewpoints –Literature, Society,  
Language and Art by Ann Farley, Betty Walters

**Tundide arv nädalas: 3 x 75 minutit, kokku 21 tundi**

Kursuse eesmärk on omandada mitmekesisest sõnavara ja kultuuriloolisi teadmisi; kinnistada meeskonnatööoskusi ja suulist esinemisoskust võõrkeeles ning arendada seeläbi **sotsiaalseid ja IKT alaseid pädevusi; kursuse jooksul arendatakse ka kultuuri- ja väärtuspädevusi ning õpipädevusi.**

Õppetegevus: Õpitavat keelt kasutatakse tunnis aktiivselt: loetakse ja kuulatakse autentseid tekste, kasutatakse mitmekesiseid ülesandeid. Keeletasemele vastava sõnavara omandamiseks ning keerukamate keelekonstruktsioonide kasutamiseks ja kinnistamiseks kasutatakse ülesandeid, kus saab rakendada suhtlemisoskust ja erinevaid keeleregistreid. Õpilased õpivad nägema seoseid ning jälgima oma keelekasutust. Iseseisvate tööharjumuste kõrval kinnistuvad paaris- ja meeskonnatöö oskused: 1) meedia- ja audiovisuaalsete materjalide kasutamine; 2) iseseisev lugemine ning kuulamine; 3) loovtööd (nt lühiessee, retsensioon, kokkuvõtte); 4) ettekanded ja esitlused; 5) arutelud erinevatel teemadel; 6) teemakohaste mõistete äratundmine, omandamine, kaasamine aktiivsesse keelekasutusse.

Hindamine: Kursuse jooksul hinnatakse kaks korda õpilase teadmisi kirjalikus vormis ja kahte esitlust. Peale iga kolme teemavaldkonna läbimist antakse tagasiside ja hinnang õpitule. Koostatakse ettekanne Ameerika kohta (PPT, Google Drive, Prezi, Mindomo), teema valib õpilane õpetaja poolt antud valikutest või enda poolt valitud teemal. Väljundiks on esinemine kooli võõrkeelsel kultuurikonverentsil. Kursuse võtab kokku lõputöö

Kursuse lõpetamisel õpilane:

- 1) oskab üsna tüüpkeelendeid ja moodustusmalle ning uut teemakohast sõnavara (õpipädevus)
- 2) oskab kasutada erinevaid esitusviisi ning on saanud arendada digipädevusi
- 3) oskab õpitud teemasid kasutada inglise keele tundides
- 4) õpilane on omandanud sotsiaalseid pädevusi (grupi- ja rühmatöö)
- 5) õpilane väärtustab erinevaid kultuure, rahvuseid (kultuuri- ja väärtuspädevus)

Õppenädal (3 ainetundi)	Teema	Õppesisu	Hindamine	Metoodika/Märkused
1.	Sissejuhatus kursusesse Geograafia Ameerika erinevad maastikud	Ülevaade teemadest, iseseisva töö osast, hindamisest Füüsiline kaart; osariikide kaart; pinnavormid Tuntuimad loodusobjektid	Jooksev teadmiste kontroll- USA geograafia kohta (pinnavormid, osariigid, loodusobjektid); koduste õpiülesannete kujundlik hindamine- selle läbi saab ettekujutuse ka õpilase õpioskustest ning kasutakse positiivse mõjutusvahendina. Näiteks kodus tehtud ülevaade kuulsast loodusobjektist, täidetud poliitiline kaart jne.	Loeng Paaristöö- osariikide kaardi täitmine tunnis IKT vahendid – videoklipid erinevatest teabekeskondadest Klipid tuntumatest looduslikest objektidest
2.	Maastikud Ajalugu Poliitiline süsteem	Ülevaade USA ajaloost alates Viikingitest kuni 21.sajandini Ajaloolistest sündmustest mõistekaardi koostamine Poliitiline kord (3 tasandit) Presidendid - presidendivalimised	Jooksev teadmiste kontroll- erinevate ajaloetappide nimetamine; koduste õpiülesannete kujundlik hindamine – ülevaade ühest USA presidendist MINDOMO mõistekaardi esitus- eesmärk anda	Loeng ja arutlus Paaristöö ja rühmatöö- mõistekaartide esitlemine IKT- <i>Mindomo</i> programmi tutvustus Video presidendivalimistest koos selgitustega (Trump vs Clinton)
3.	Ajalugu Etniline taust	Lühiülevaade ajaloost ja tuntumatest geograafilistest objektidest Kuulsamad poliitikut valitsusorganid ja valimissüsteem; võimude lahusus Põhiseadus Inimõiguste liikumine (M.L.King)	Jooksev teadmiste kontroll- eesmärk korrata tööks; koduste õpiülesannete kujundlik hindamine- M.L.Kingist suurepärase ülevaate eest Esitluste hindamine (eesmärk on hinnata eelnevate tundide jooksul hinnatud teadmisi - õpilased saavad ka kordamisküsimustikud)	IKT- Mindomo- ülevaade teatud ajaloo perioodi kohta Loeng Arutlus IKT vahendid- videoklipid USA poliitikutest
4.	Etniline taust	Erinevad etnilised rühmad Afroameeriklased Latiinod Huvitavad grupeeringud ( <i>Rednecks</i> ) Religioossed rühmitused (Amiisid, mennoniidid) Erinevad kultuurilised piirkonnad- <i>Cajun</i> 'i ja kreooli kultuur Kordamine tööks	Kirjalik teadmiste kontroll: USA Geograafia, ajalugu, poliitika, etnilised rühmad - Eesmärk: kas õpilasel on eelnevalt õpitu kinnistunud)	Loeng Arutlus IKT- KAHOOT (viktoriini küsimustele vastamine)
5.	Keeled <i>Spanglish</i>  Arhitektuur  Teadus- tuntuimad teadlased ja leiutised  Toit ja erinevad piirkonnad (4)	Keeltepaabel Ameerikas- <i>Spanglish</i> ja 3 keelepiirkonda Ameeriklaste kodude arhitektuur- koloniaalstiil, <i>Queen Anne style</i> ; <i>Ranch-style</i> ; treilerpargid Teadus ja teadlased- Edison, vennad Wright'id, Henry Ford jne.- panus tänapäeva teadusesse 4 erinevat toidupiirkonda; tuntuimad söögid- juustukook jne.	USA toidukultuur, kuulsad teadlased, arhitektuuriobjektid- kujundlik hindamine tunnis;	Loeng Arutlus IKT- erinevad teemat illustreerivad videoklipid
6.	Muusika  Filmitööstus  Meedia  Sport  Haridus	Muusikastiilid Afroameerika juurtega muusika (džäss, bluus) Filmiajastud Erinevad meediaväljaanded: tuntumad ajalehed ja ajakirjad; muud meediakanalid 5 populaarseimat spordiala Haridus: kõik astmed Ülikoolid, korporatsioonid <i>Ivy League</i>	Kirjalik teadmiste kontroll. Eesmärk- kas on omandatud kultuuriloolise ülevaate USA teadussaavutustest, filmitööstusest, meediast- ajalehed, ajakirjad; peamistest spordialadest ja haridussüsteemist	Paaristöö Loeng Arutlus IKT- erinevad teemat illustreerivad videoklipid; KAHOOT
7.	Esitlused  Kokkuvõte	Esitlused	Suuline esitus- õpilane oskab rääkida enda valitud teemal 5 minutit USA kultuurist, loodusest, haridusest või teadusest.	Kirjalik analüüs IKT- KAHOOT Esitus

## Appendix 2

**Department:** Foreign languages

**Module:** The English Language in the Changing World

**Course:** American Studies

**Form:** 11

**Duration:** 3 x 60 min face-to-face lessons + 1 x 45 min independent work per week, 7 weeks per term, total 21 academic hours + 7 h e-learning

**Learning materials:** handouts, slides.

**Students are required to have:** notebook, pen, binder or folder.

### Learning Outcomes:

1. Students get an overview of the geography, culture norms and other unique features in the USA and compare them with Estonia.
2. Students value different cultures and nations (cultural and value competence).
3. Students use different standard linguistic forms and formulations rather appropriately.
4. Students use different verbal and written presentation ways and have developed digital competence.

### Graded activities:

- 1) presentation;
- 2) test.

**Evaluation:** The final grade is a sum of the group presentation, test result, active lesson participation and execution of homework activities.

Week of Term	Topic	Learning Content	Evaluation
1	Course introduction Geography of the USA	Overview of the topics and grading. The physical and states maps of the USA. Sights.	Discussion about the geography of the USA. Verbal evaluation, no grading.
2	The political system of the USA	The political situation in the USA. Presidential Elections of 2020.	Discussion about the political situation in the USA. Verbal evaluation, no grading.
3	People and language	Americans' ethnic background (connection with history). People 100 years ago vs now. Dialects and <i>Spanglish</i> .	Discussion about the people and language in the USA. Verbal evaluation, no grading.
4	Education in the USA	School system and <i>Ivy League</i> universities.	Discussion about the American school system. Verbal evaluation, no grading.
5	The media and film industry in the USA	Different media publications: popular newspapers and magazines; other media sources. Hollywood.	Discussion about the media and film industry in the USA. Verbal evaluation, no grading.
6	The comparison between the USA and Estonia – 5 previous topics Presentation	Learners' presentations: overview of the topics, comparisons with Estonia. Speaking, listening, analysis. Consolidation of the topics.	Group presentations – graded activity.
7	Course conclusion	Revision and quiz. Course conclusion.	Course evaluation quiz Course analysis

WEEK	DATE	LESSON AIM	ACTIVITIES	Homework
1	Oct 26	Course introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher introduction</li> <li>Warm-up game (What connects with "America"? - mentimeter)</li> <li>Course introduction (shorturl.at/aefD9)</li> <li>Team division (Flippity)</li> </ul>	Create an online chat where you can discuss the matters of this course with your new teammates. Get to know each other.
	Oct 27	All 50 states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Geography - Lecture (60 min)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PowerPoint + notes</li> <li>Most important states</li> <li>East vs West vs South</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Check your knowledge about all 50 states here: <a href="https://online.seterra.com/en/vgp/3003">https://online.seterra.com/en/vgp/3003</a> . Remember your score and time.
	Oct 29	Sights to see	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HW check</li> <li>All 50 states – puzzle (20 min) – 7 teams</li> <li>Sights to see (7 teams – 7 states – one sight) (10 min)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation – where? What is it? Why visit? (30 min)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	With your team, plan a realistic one-week-long hiking/shopping/road trip (etc.) where you cover as many states and see as many sights as possible. Create a choropleth map to emphasize which states you would be spending the most time in or where you would see the most sights.

2	Nov 2	Political system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HW check – How many states are you visiting? What is the highlight? (10 min)</li> <li>• Politics – Lecture (50 min)</li> </ul>	Find one video on YouTube about American Politics (either by Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, or Howard Stern) and answer the following questions: 1. Whose video did you watch and what is the topic covered? 2. How is the topic approached? 3. What is your opinion on the topic and the used method? Take notes and be ready to discuss it in class.
	Nov 3	Political system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revision (previous lesson) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Group discussion [benefits of discussion + white noise]</li> </ul> </li> <li>• HW check – approaching politics via the humorous spectrum (15 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Jon Stewart</li> <li>◦ Stephen Colbert</li> <li>◦ Howard Stern</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Government &amp; Politics Worksheet ex 5-6 (30 min)</li> <li>• Elections 2020 vs 2016 – similarities and differences – what to look forward to? (15)</li> </ul>	<p>Watch the presidential election. Pay attention to the fact that due to Coronavirus, people are allowed to vote through regular mail and, therefore, the actual results may not be clear until November 7.</p> <p>Familiarize yourself with the <a href="https://fivethirtyeight.com/webpage">https://fivethirtyeight.com/webpage</a>. What options does it give? What is the most interesting aspect of the site?</p>
	Nov 5	Elections 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simpsons in politics <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnwKKjTFU3U">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnwKKjTFU3U</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ August 2019; Do you recognize the song? (West Side Story – “America”)</li> <li>◦ Could there be a hidden meaning behind the video?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 2016 vs 2020 <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSdq6Ixm4c">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSdq6Ixm4c</a></li> <li>• Debate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Who should elect the president?</li> <li>◦ Students’ ideas</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Watch the video <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn-h78tuNiU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn-h78tuNiU</a> , determine what the actual event was, google it and into your Google folder write a review about it, expressing your opinion towards the situation, too.
	Nov 9	American history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politics conclusion: 5 days in 5 minutes <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwka-mG1ke4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwka-mG1ke4</a></li> <li>• Lecture – American History</li> </ul>	With the help of <a href="https://www.ushistory.org/">https://www.ushistory.org/</a> , draw a timeline into your notebooks about the most important events (10) in American history.
3	Nov 10	People then and now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HW check (timeline)</li> <li>• Worksheet ex 3-6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/100-years-ago-today-1920/">https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/100-years-ago-today-1920/</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Collect worksheets to check writing</li> </ul>	
	Nov 12	Dialects and <i>Spanglish</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check ex 6 on the worksheet</li> <li>• National language ≠ English (does not exist)</li> <li>• Spanglish <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Whose colonies were established before the British? → Spanish</li> <li>◦ Which country is below the USA? → Mexico → Mexican Spanish</li> <li>◦ <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVnJ4odvHc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVnJ4odvHc</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Dialects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NriDTxseog">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NriDTxseog</a></li> <li>◦ Mosaic teams – East vs West vs South (characteristic features) - POSTERS</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Be creative and try to draw an outline of the American map onto an A4. Watch the video <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcxByX6rh24">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcxByX6rh24</a> and try to map the characteristics of each state. Once finished, draw some conclusions from it.
	Nov 16	Educational system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pictures of HW – upload.</li> <li>• Lecture – Education.</li> </ul>	
4 <i>distance</i>	Nov 17	School system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a cyberhunt? <a href="https://forms.gle/rBVwr1jvgByXfjd26">https://forms.gle/rBVwr1jvgByXfjd26</a></li> <li>• Education - cyberhunts → solve</li> </ul>	Solve another team’s cyberhunt.
	Nov 19	Higher education and Ivy League universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual escape room <a href="https://forms.gle/9pvZ7nitX4eESUsT7">https://forms.gle/9pvZ7nitX4eESUsT7</a></li> </ul>	Think about what a dream school in the USA would be like – no matter if it is a public or private school or a university. On <a href="https://www.canva.com/">https://www.canva.com/</a> create a poster for that school and on <a href="https://www.loom.com/">https://www.loom.com/</a> create a 2-minute promotional video for it, showing the poster and talking about it.

5 <i>distance</i>	Nov 23	American Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remind presentations (requirements on Google folders)</li> <li>Lecture - American media</li> </ul>	Familiarize yourself with different American news channels, newspapers, and magazines. Be ready for a discussion.
	Nov 24	Newspapers and magazines Television (media)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media analysis               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3 videos + notes</li> </ul> </li> <li>Webinar               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is this even media? Why (not)?</li> <li>What is the aim of such media?</li> <li>Who is this media targeted at?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	1) A 24-hour news channel 2) Jimmy Kimmel Live  3) How Fox News covered M. Trump & M. Obama
	Nov 26	Hollywood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is Thanksgiving?</li> <li><i>Viewpoints</i> pg 116-117 ex 1 (<i>The Magic of Hollywood</i>)</li> <li>Teamwork (studios, actors, genres)</li> </ul>	
6	Nov 30	Presentations	Teams I, II, and III (15 15 15 min)	
	Dec 1	Presentations	Teams IV and V (15 20 min)	
	Dec 3	Presentations	Teams VI and VII (15 20 min)	
7	Dec 7	Revision		
	Dec 8	Quiz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Q&amp;A (15 min)</li> <li>Test (45 min)</li> </ul>	
	Dec 10	Course Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test feedback</li> <li>Word cloud (lesson no 1) reflection</li> </ul>	Those, who were absent, give feedback for the course. The form closes on Friday at 15:00.

## Appendix 3

### Geography

1. Listen to the lecture about the geography of the USA and fill the gaps using the words from the word bank. Some words are left over.

people, landscape, houses, rivers, lakes, mountains, craters, plains, Everest, Elbert, New York, Washington D.C., East, West, South, North, stereotypes, uptight, at ease, silent, independence.  
13, 15, 30, 50, 80, 200, 500.

Comparing to Estonia, the USA is huge. About \_\_\_\_ Estonias would fit into it. The \_\_\_\_\_ in the USA is rather diverse; there are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. Partly because of the landscape, about \_\_\_\_\_% of the population lives in the East of the country. The highest place on the continent is Mt. \_\_\_\_\_ which is 4401 meters high. There are \_\_\_\_\_ states in America and the capital of the USA is \_\_\_\_\_. It is often considered a state although it is actually not. There is a big difference in the cultures of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ regions and people in one area have certain \_\_\_\_\_ for another area. For example, people in NYC are considered to be more \_\_\_\_\_ while people in LA are thought to be more \_\_\_\_\_.

The flag of the United States has \_\_\_\_\_ stars that represent all the states and \_\_\_\_\_ stripes that represent the first British colonies that declared \_\_\_\_\_.

Activity inspiration: Farley, Ann and Betty Walters. 2013. *Viewpoints. Literature, Society, Language, Art*. London: Black Cat. (page 134 ex 2).

2. Your teacher is going to give you a states' map puzzle. First, separate the "bigger" and "smaller" states into two piles. From the smaller ones, try to guess which is the closest to Estonia in size.

The state that is approximately as big as Estonia: \_\_\_\_\_

With a team, put together the puzzle, if you get stuck, use the map on the teacher's table.

3. With the use of the Internet, find a sight to see in each state. Write here the most interesting ones to see.

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## Appendix 4



### Government & Politics

**Listen to the lecture about the politics in the USA.**

1. Take notes. How does the government in the USA form?

*Think about how it resembles (or not) the Estonian government.*

2. Complete the table with some keywords you hear about “democrats” and “republicans”.

DEMOCRATS 	 REPUBLICANS

3. How is a presidential “ticket” elected in the USA? How is it different from the Estonian version? Compare the two in the table below, feel free to adjust it to your needs.

the USA	Estonia

4. **Homework:** Find one video on YouTube about American Politics (either by Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, or Howard Stern) and answer the following questions:

1. Whose video did you watch and what is the topic it covered?

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2. How is the topic approached?

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3. What is your opinion on the topic and the used method?

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5. Knowing the process how an election day is set, predict the following three presidential election days:
- a. November 3, 2020
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_
6. Choose 10 states in the USA and find the number of districts within it, with the use of the Internet.

What does this number show in terms of presidential elections?

Using the website <https://fivethirtyeight.com/>, who are these states most likely to vote for?

7. Find some differences and similarities between the elections this year and the previous one in 2016.

<b>2016</b>	<b>2020</b>

8. Gather and write down different ideas from the class about topics (related to government or politics) that may rise controversial thoughts. One by one go through the topics and debate them with your classmates.

## Appendix 5

### People & Language

1. Listen to the lecture about American history and take notes in your notebook. As you listen, try to draw some parallels with Estonia.
2. Onto the timeline, place ten most important historical events in chronological order.



3. There have been \_\_\_\_\_ presidents in the U.S. history. Work in groups and with the use of the Internet, find information about four most influential American presidents.

President	Why him?

4. In your opinion, what are 10 most stereotypical characteristics of an American?

5. Read the text and write a short paragraph comparing American and Estonian traditions among teens. Feel free to include personal experience.

**Summer Camps: an American tradition for kids**

Like kids from all over the world, Americans are highly hi-tech in their hobbies. However, summer camps are still very popular. They have been an American tradition since 1861, when the first summer camp was founded in Connecticut. Today there are over 12,000 summer camps where 11 million American kids aged 6-16 years enjoy a truly rounded experience.

Most summer camps are set in beautiful natural landscapes, where campers usually live in wooden cabins or tents. Camps offer a range of activities: campcraft (skills needed to survive into the wild), nature study, arts and crafts, sports like swimming, climbing ropes, horse riding, hiking, canoeing as well as singing, storytelling and campfire cooking.

*Farley and Walters 2013: 71*

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6. Work in teams. Team 1 is “people in the U.S. 100 years ago” and Team 2 is “people in the U.S. today”. As many as there are people in your group, find characteristics about the era, using the Internet. Walk around in the classroom and talk to the people either from the past or future, mark down what you hear in order to get a full picture of people then and today.

7. Try to guess and fill the gaps.

The national language in America is \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are the two most common languages in the USA and because of that, \_\_\_\_\_ is created. Because America was colonized and the natives there had their own language, many words in the Standard American English are \_\_\_\_\_-words. For example, “kindergarten” comes from \_\_\_\_\_, “ketchup” origins from \_\_\_\_\_ and “zombies” originally come from \_\_\_\_\_.

8. Try to match the common American slang words to their meaning.

BAIL

GO TO SLEEP

A BUCK

TALK BAD ABOUT SOMEONE

CRASH

CAR

FOR REAL

FINISH

WHEELS

GO HOME

BUSTED

LAZY

COUCH POTATO

DOLLAR

GIVE THE COLD SHOULDER

HONESTLY

TO TRASH

GET CAUGHT

WRAP UP

IGNORE

## Appendix 6

### What is a cyberhunt?

Let's find out what it means to cyberhunt.

\* Required

1. Your name is... \*

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2. According to <https://et.glosbe.com/> "cyberhunt" in Estonian means. \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ kübara hunt  
☐ küberrebane  
☐ infootsing  
☐ küberjaht  
☐ Infoküttimine

Go to this link and get answers to the following questions.

<http://www.mandela.ac.za/cyberhunt/whatisacyberhunt.htm>

3. What is the definition of "cyberhunt"? \*

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4. What is the difference between vertical and horizontal cyberhunt? \*

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5. What are the two aims of cyberhunting? \*

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#### TASK

Based on what you just learned - the general concept of cyberhunts - create your own cyberhunt on your Google folder. You should include at least 15 questions about the American education system and two websites. Exchange your Google forms link with a friend and complete his/her cyberhunt. Provide helpful feedback and give some finishing touches to your own cyberhunt based on the notes you received.



## Appendix 7

### Media

1. You are going to watch three videos; take notes and think about:

Can this be considered media? If yes, what type? If no, why not?

Who is the target of this type of media?

How is the topic approached?

What is the aim of such media?

24-hour news [1](#); Jimmy Kimmel Live [2](#) ; Fox News [3](#)

Be ready by 8:25 and join the webinar.

## Appendix 8

### Group Presentations

In your presentation:

1. Cover the key elements that were discussed in our classes.
2. East *vs* West *vs* South – act out a scenario between the three stereotypes.
3. Democrats *vs* Republicans – act out a dialogue that might happen between the representatives of the two parties.
4. Explain the road trip you would take with your team across the USA.

\* 5. Write an email to your teacher, using proper formal letter writing requirements, and let him/her know what exactly your part in the group presentation was.

**Appendix 9**

Achievement Test  
American Studies

- 1. Listen to the audio clip and decide whether the accent you hear is Southern, Western, Eastern, or simply Standard American.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

- 2. Please describe in keywords every three regions in terms of the people and their language.**

EAST

WEST

SOUTH

- 3. Where approximately in the U.S. is it possible to go rock climbing? Why?**

- 4. Which part of the U.S. is the most populated? Why?**

**5. Please draw a scheme of the U.S. constitution. How many branches does it have and what does it include?**

**6. Either draw a scheme or write a paragraph about how the presidential elections in the U.S. work.**

**7. Please mark on the timeline five important events in the U.S. history with dates. If you can add information to them, you may earn some extra points.**



**8. What does *No Child Left Behind* mean?**

**9. What is Common Core?**

**10. Please compare public and private schools and homeschooling.**

PUBLIC	PRIVATE	HOMESCHOOLING

**Similarities:**

**11. In keywords, please sum up the definition of media in the U.S. You may also draw another scheme.**

**12. \* Write a paragraph comparing American and Estonian culture in terms of the five aspects we covered during the course. (geography, politics, people & language, education, media & entertainment)**

## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Eliseta Talviste**

### **Creating Activities and Materials for Teaching American Studies [Tegevuste kogumi ja õppematerjalide koostamine Amerikanistika kuruse jaoks]**

Magistritöö

2021

Lehekülgede arv: 72

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Märksõnad: kultuuri õpetamine, Ameerika kultuur, Amerikanistika, materjalide loomine, tegevused, õppemeetodid, keeleõpe, võõrkeel, kultuuripädevus, digipädevus, suhtluspädevus, hübriidõpe, distantsõpe, digiõpe, lähiõpe, põimõpe

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