

Introduction:

Growing up in Taiwan, I was used to seeing my teachers' feedback in red. In fact, when I became an elementary teacher in Taiwan, I also used red ink pens to grade students' assignments. Red ink pens were the go-to pens when grading assignments for teachers. I do not recall any of my teachers or colleagues using other color ink pens for grading. Red ink pens were for grading. It was the tradition! However, I did not know using red ink pens to provide feedback could create anxiety for students, even when the feedback was positive and encouraging, until I was teaching a graduate-level research methodology class in the United States. Students needed to provide me with hardcopies of their research proposals. It was 2010 when learning management systems were not used for assessments. To give students feedback, naturally, I followed my own tradition and used a red ink pen to grade students' proposals. One could find a lot of texts and circles in red on those papers that I graded. I thought students would appreciate the feedback and the amount of effort that I put in to helping them to improve their proposals. On the contrary, students were nervous and intimidated by the feedback in red. One student shared with me how he felt before he started reading my feedback in red. I did not know red had a negative connotation until then. In my culture, red means happiness and prosperity. I started paying more attention to colors and tried to understand how colors were incorporated in different cultures.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Explain how color is viewed and/or incorporated in their own cultures.
2. Identify and explain the similarities and differences between their own cultures and their peers' cultures in regard to meanings of color.

Time:

1 hour and 10 minutes.

Group Size:

Small group.

Materials:

A computer/tablet; Participant Instructions (in [Downloads](#)); Article readings (in [Links](#)); Color wheel (in [Links](#)); Optional: Dry-erase markers (in different colors) and dry-erase board or colored chalk and chalk board; Post-it notes.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Openness

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

Activity Instructions:

Prework

1. Instruct participants to review the following articles:
 - How Translating Colors Across Cultures Can Help You Make a Positive Impact https://eriksen.com/marketing/color_culture/
 - Cultural Color – Cultural Meanings of Color and Color Symbolism <https://www.empower-yourself-with-color-psychology.com/cultural-color.html>
2. Ask participants to reflect on the following questions:
 - Were you surprised by the articles? What surprised you and why?
 - Did the articles accurately portray color meaning in your own culture?

In-class Activities

1. Group discussion following prework (10 minutes).
 - Ask participants to share their reflections on the articles using the prework reflection prompts to guide the discussion.
2. Think-pair-share discussion (25 minutes).
 - Ask each participant to identify one color that has a special meaning in his or her own culture and share it with a partner.

- Instruct each partner to introduce the color and share the story their partner shared with them with the whole group. He or she can use the prework reflection prompts to add to the discussion (e.g., discuss what surprised them).
3. Group discussion (25 minutes).
- Ask participants to look at each individual color on a color wheel and articulate the similarities that they have learned about the colors through other participants' stories.
 - Using the same color wheel, ask participants to articulate the differences that they have learned about the colors through other participants' stories.
 - As a group, create a color cultural map that illustrates the color similarities and differences shared by the group. If you have a dry-erase or chalk board at the front of the room, you can use colored dry-erase markers or chalk to draw the color wheel on the board and ask participants to come up to the front of the room to fill in the color sections with their respective cultural meanings. You can also hand out post-it notes if you prefer to have participants write the cultural meaning of each color on a post-it note and add them to the large color wheel on the board.
 - Digital option: You can create a Jamboard with a digital color wheel and share the link with participants (if everyone has access to a mobile device/computer) so that everyone can contribute ideas to the board (See [Example](#)). You can instruct students to use the text box option in Jamboard to add their ideas to each color of the color cultural map, or they can use the virtual sticky notes.
 - Note: The Example link above is view only, so the facilitator will first need to make their own editable copy. In the top right corner, there is an icon with three vertical dots. Click that icon and then select "Make a copy." Rename the copied document to whatever is appropriate for the context. Click OK. You will then be directed to the new document. To ensure that anyone with the link to this new Jamboard copy has editing privileges, select "Share" in the top-right corner. Click "Change to anyone with the link." A new window will pop up with a drop-down menu that says "Viewer." Click that menu and select "Editor."
4. Group debrief (10 minutes).
- Using the critical reflection framework (What? So what? Now what?), ask participants to debrief the activity.
 - Ask participants to share how they would apply what they have learned through the activity.

Related Tools:

- [Language Coding](#)
- [Language Envelopes](#)
- [Language, Culture, and Perception: The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis](#)
- [Twenty-Five Questions](#)



Color in Culture

Celebrating Cultural Diversity through Color