

POPULAR CULTURE MANIFESTATIONS
OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

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We all have our guilty pleasures –that ‘beach book’ we secretly read in the dead of winter, the reality television show that we don’t want anyone to know we watch, the pop song whose lyrics we would never admit we know by heart– but why do we feel guilty?

(Katherine Larsen, 2012: 4)

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INTRODUCTION

This book focuses on the multifaceted concept of popular culture, the various manifestations of popular culture in the English-speaking world, exploring a wide range of techniques to teach popular culture through comics, TV series, and popular literature.

The term popular culture is comprehensive. The denotations associated to the word “popular” tend to be regarded with approval or affection as it relates to manifestations suited to or intended for the general masses.

The notion of culture comprises different elements that encapsulate racial, ethnic, religious, or linguistic diversity. Culture is also an intertwined system of values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms that give meaning and significance to both individual and collective identity. Basically, it is the “glue” that connects people, as it brings them together; it is an entity we identify with, and consequently, something we belong to. The word culture does not only involve a lifestyle but a context where languages play an all-important role. Culture is also the context within we behave, think, live, feel and relate to one another. Culture refers to concepts, ideas, customs, skills, or the arts by means of which groups of people identify themselves.

Teaching a foreign language entails going beyond the language itself to incorporate key cultural elements of the country/ies where the language is spoken. In this sense, English as the lingua franca or international language nowadays has a special status. Even though the use of English in international contexts may not be related to English-speaking countries, people need a point of reference when speaking about themselves and their own environment and, for this reason, the study of the cultures of English-speaking countries keeps being relevant in foreign language teaching.

Since both language and culture are bound together, I firmly believe that there needs to be a balance between the study of the target language and the analysis of the cultures where this language is spoken.

On the one hand, popular culture comprises everyday objects, actions and events that affect how people believe and behave. Sometimes individuals are not aware that messages are sent to tell them what is appropriate or inappropriate, in fashion or old-fashioned, or polite or impolite. On the other hand, television programmes, films, songs, commercials,

cartoons, comics, and television series, among others, have an influential role on people and the way they see life and, consequently, help shape people's identity and behaviour.

Popular culture is everywhere: on TV, on the radio, or in books. Since popular culture is an influential phenomenon, the use of its manifestations (comics, advertising, music, television series, cinema or popular literature) to design pedagogical materials may give way to engaging and insightful tasks for students. I strongly believe that the creation of materials based on these premises is likely to be attractive to youngsters because young people tend to spend a considerable part of their time listening to music or watching films or series.

The goal of this book is to make the reader aware of the power of popular culture manifestations of English-speaking countries, as the reader can draw inspiration from the various manifestations analysed in Chapter 2 to devise pedagogical materials and address current social issues in class. Therefore, pedagogical materials based on manifestations of popular culture in the English-speaking world can engage students either in the learning or the use of a foreign language. Popular culture manifestations are a reflexion of reality and depict issues that affect current society. In Goleman's view (2006: 84), the different manifestations of popular culture might offer people opportunities to enhance their social intelligence through critical analysis, making them aware of the world and the society in which they live.

This book is divided into 4 chapters. After Chapter 1, this introduction, Chapter 2 explores the multifaceted concept of popular culture and some of its most relevant manifestations: publicity and promotion, comics, popular literature, films, television, music, the Internet as a means of advertising films and series, graffiti, body art, and food. Chapter 3 is devoted to the teaching of popular culture through comics, TV series, and popular literature, focusing on language, topics, characters, and pedagogical aspects. Chapter 4 contains a general conclusion of the previous chapters.