Some Suggestions for Encouraging Thoughtful Cross-Cultural Inquiry and Exchange

Out of Eden Learn promotes cross-cultural inquiry and exchange by inviting young people to learn about and from other people’s stories and perspectives. These people may live halfway around the world or just down the street. Our model also emphasizes exploring one’s own culture and seeing the familiar with new eyes. As we undertake this work, we are guided by the understanding that cultures are fluid, hybrid, and complex. We see cultures as extending far beyond, though certainly including, topics such as flags, food dishes, or attire. Paul Salopek’s *The River of Culture* illuminates this view.

According to many students and educators, the opportunity for cross-cultural inquiry and exchange is a large part of what makes Out of Eden Learn so engaging. Further, we believe that offering young people opportunities to engage in thoughtful cross-cultural inquiry and exchange is particularly important today. We collectively face a range of issues that will require a capacity and inclination to engage critically and collaboratively with other people to address them, even at a time of increasingly intolerant and divisive public discourse in many parts of the world. Our aspirations are that Out of Eden Learn will help young people to develop:

- Respectful curiosity about their own and other people’s lives, identities, and values
- Enhanced understanding of cultural complexity and human diversity
- The capacity and inclination to respectfully reach out to other human beings and to communicate sensitively and effectively across real and perceived differences
- Self-awareness of their own perspectives and how they might be similar or different to those of other people
- Ability to probe and critically examine their own taken-for-granted assumptions, preconceptions, and stereotypes

Meeting these aspirations can be challenging for all of us and should be considered a lifelong endeavor. In an attempt to support students, we have designed Out of Eden Learn activities in ways that encourage students to slow down and consider the world from multiple viewpoints. We seek to help students avoid generalizations and simplifications and to be reflective about their understandings of their own and others’ cultures.

Our community guidelines highlight principles that we see as important for building a respectful and safe space for cross-cultural inquiry and exchange. We also imagine that you have many strategies or resources of your own that you can use to help guide students, particularly ones that encourage your students to engage in critical thinking and reflection. Below are a few additional resources that may be helpful.

- **Circle of Viewpoints**: This modified thinking routine asks students to consider a topic from multiple perspectives. It could be used to help students imagine the variety of ways in which people experience the world, even within one local community, and to share their stories in a
way that is attuned to this complexity. The routine could also be used when students are reading dispatches from Paul or work from other students to help them consider how people might experience the same event or piece of work differently.

- **What Makes You Say That?**: This thinking routine asks students to make explicit their process of interpretation. It could be used when looking at a post by Paul Salopek or from a peer. By asking students to reflect on how they are building understanding, you can help them to avoid making ungrounded or hasty assumptions about others or what they have posted.

- **The Danger of a Single Story**: In this TED Talk (available in 44 languages), author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the tendency to interpret the dominant story of a culture as its only story and how this can lead to harmful overgeneralizations and misunderstandings. Both a video file and text transcript are available to share with your students. Watching or reading this talk could be a powerful entry point into a class-wide conversation about dominant narratives, media portrayals, and stereotyping.

As we continue to engage in this important work together, we look forward to hearing about other approaches you are using to support your students’ cross-cultural learning. Let us know what you find helpful!