

The background of the page is a collage of various hands made from crumpled paper in different colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink, brown, grey). The hands are arranged in a way that they appear to be reaching out or holding each other. In the bottom left corner, there is a small portion of a globe showing the Americas.

# Unpacking Identity on Global Programs

Tools to Help Students Prepare for  
Their Global Experiences - Exercise Guide



Global Engagement  
Santa Clara University

The following tips and exercises provide opportunities for individual reflection and meaningful collaboration before inviting students to help establish the norms and expectations that will guide their interactions abroad. As a result, you will get to know them at a deeper level, and students will begin to recognize this space as something different and exciting—a space where they are known and they matter.

## Journal Reflections

***Why should you consider having your students utilize a journal?*** A journal is an instrumental tool for helping students develop their ability to critically examine their surroundings from multiple perspectives and to make informed judgments about what they see and hear.

- Many students find that writing or drawing in a journal helps them process ideas, formulate questions, and retain information.
- Journals make learning visible by providing a safe, accessible space for students to share thoughts, feelings, and uncertainties. In this way, journals are also an assessment tool: you can use them to better understand what your students know, what they are struggling to understand, and how their thinking has changed over time.
- Journals also help nurture classroom community and offer a way for you to build relationships with your students through reading and commenting on their journals.
- Frequent journal writing also helps students become more fluent in expressing their ideas in writing or speaking. Below, we describe some of the many ways you can use journals as an effective learning tool in the classroom.

## Journal Procedures

Here are a few questions to consider when using journals in the classroom:

### 1. **What is your relationship with students' journals?**

Students are entitled to know how you plan on reading their journals if you wish to do so. Will you read everything they write? If they want to keep something private, is this possible? If so, how do students indicate that they do not want you to read something? Will their journals be graded? If so, by what criteria? (See more on grading journals below.) It can be impossible to read everything students write in their journals; there is just not enough time in the day. For this reason, you may decide that you will collect students' journals once a week and only read a page or two—sometimes a page the student selects and sometimes a page selected by the teacher. Other professors or program coordinators may never collect students' journals but might glance at them during class time/orientation or might ask students to incorporate quotes and ideas from their journals into collected assignments. You can set limits on the degree to which you have access to students' journals. Many professors and program coordinators establish a rule that if students wish to keep information in their journals private, they should fold the page over or remove the page entirely.

**2. What is appropriate content for journals?**

It is easy for students to confuse a class journal with a diary or blog because these formats allow for open-ended writing. You should clarify how the audience and purpose for this writing are distinct from the audience and purpose for writing in a personal diary. In most educational settings, the audience for journal writing is the author, the professor/program coordinator, and, at times, peers. We believe that the purpose of journal writing is to provide a space where students can connect their personal experiences and opinions to the concepts and events they are studying in the classroom. Therefore, some material that is appropriate to include in personal diaries may not be appropriate to include in class journals. To avoid uncomfortable situations, many professors and program coordinators find it helpful to clarify topics that are not suitable material for journal entries. Also, as mandatory reporters in most schools, you should explain that you are required to take certain steps, such as informing a school official, if students reveal information about possible harm to themselves or another student. Students should be made aware of these rules, as well as other guidelines you might have about appropriate journal writing content.

**3. How will journals be evaluated?**

Many students admit that they are less likely to share their true thoughts or express questions when they are worried about a grade based on getting the "right" answer or using proper grammar or spelling. We recommend that you don't grade journals because they are places where students are developing their thinking and writing, not demonstrations of skill or content mastery. There are many other ways to provide students with feedback on their journals, such as by writing comments or asking questions. Students can even evaluate their journals for evidence of intellectual and moral growth. For example, you might have students look through their journals to find evidence of their ability to ask questions or to make connections between what was happening in a country abroad and an event in their own life.

**4. What forms of expression can be included in a journal?**

Students learn and communicate best in different ways. The journal is an appropriate space to respect different learning styles. Some students may wish to sketch their ideas, for example, rather than record thoughts in words. Other students may feel most comfortable responding in concept webs and lists, as opposed to prose. When you introduce the journal to students, you might brainstorm different ways that they might use it to express their thoughts.

**5. How can journals be used to help students build vocabulary?**

Throughout a unit, students both encounter new vocabulary and develop a more sophisticated understanding of concepts that might already be familiar to them. Journals can be used as a place to help students build their vocabulary through the construction of "working definitions." The phrase "working definition" implies that our understanding of concepts evolves as we are confronted with new information and experiences. Students' definitions of words such as "identity" or "belonging" should be richer at the end of the

unit than they are on day one. We suggest that you use the journal, or perhaps a special section of the journal, as a space where students can record, review, and refine their definitions of important terms referred to in this unit.”

**6. How should journal content be publicly shared?**

Students are often best able to express themselves when they believe that their journal is a private space. We suggest that information in students' journals never be publicly shared without the consent of the writer. At the same time, we encourage you to provide multiple opportunities for students to voluntarily share ideas and questions they have recorded in their journals. Some students may feel more comfortable reading directly from their journals than speaking "off the cuff" in group discussions.

## **Activity Suggestion #1: The 5 R's of Change Abroad**

Discovering new and different cultures while abroad is one of the most exciting parts of travel. However, sometimes adjusting to new routines and ways of living can be very difficult to navigate initially. Thinking ahead will better prepare students to navigate such challenges.

Have your students reflect on each of the 5 Rs of Change for their situation. What are the changes they expect to face as they move between cultures? Encourage students to try being as specific as possible as they participate in this exercise.

## **Activity Suggestion #2: Identity & Our Community**

This activity uses names to help students consider the relationship between their identities and their communities. When we meet someone new, our name is usually the first piece of information about ourselves that we share. It is often one of the first markers of our identity that others learn. To begin, students reflect on their relationship with their names before considering the many ways in which a community, especially a classroom community, can impact an individual's sense of identity and belonging. Finally, they will discuss what specific actions everyone can take to foster an inclusive and welcoming classroom space.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. How do our names relate to our identities?
2. What is important to know about each other to learn together this year?

### **Learning Objectives**

Students will start to examine the sometimes conflicting factors that makeup identity and discuss ways that they can participate in creating a welcoming classroom community for all.

### **Connection Questions**

1. What words or phrases does Jennifer Wang use to describe her identity? What words or phrases does she use to describe her attitude toward her identity?



2. What does Wang mean when she says “the ‘Jennifer’ clashing with the ‘Wang,’ the ‘Wang’ fighting with the ‘Jennifer’”? What examples does she provide to support this description of her name?
3. What might your name tell others about your identity? What stories about you or your family might your name reflect? What about your identity is simplified, hidden, or confused by your name?

## “Orientation Day”

At the age of seven, Jennifer Wang came to the United States from Beijing, China with her family. At seventeen, she wrote an essay entitled “Orientation Day.” It is a response to a familiar experience: introducing oneself to a group of strangers. Wang writes in part:

*Something about myself? How do I summarize, in thirty seconds, everything, which adds up and equals a neat little bundle called, Me? How do I present myself in a user-friendly format, complete with “Help” buttons and batteries? Who am I, and why do I matter to any of you?*

*First of all, I am a girl who wandered the aisles of Toys “R” Us for two hours, hunting in vain for a doll with a yellowish skin tone. I am a girl who sat on the cold bathroom floor at seven in the morning, cutting out the eyes of Caucasian models in magazines, trying to fit them on my face. I am the girl who loved [newscaster] Connie Chung because she was Asian, and I’m also the girl who hated Connie Chung because she wasn’t Asian enough. . . .*

*During that time I also first heard the term “chink,” and I wondered why people were calling me “a narrow opening, usually in a wall.” People expected me to love studying and to enjoy sitting in my room memorizing facts for days and days.*

*While I was growing up, I did not understand what it meant to be “Chinese” or “American.” Do these terms link only to citizenship? Do they suggest that people fit the profile of either “typical*

*Chinese” or “typical Americans”? And who or what determines when a person starts feeling American, and stops feeling Chinese?*

*I eventually shunned the Asian crowds. And I hated Chinatown with a vengeance. I hated the noise, the crush of bodies, the yells of mothers to fathers to children to uncles to aunts to cousins. I hated the limp vegetables hanging out of soggy cardboard boxes. I hated the smell of fish being chopped, of meat hanging in a window. I hated not understanding their language in depth—the language of my ancestors, which was also supposed to be mine to mold and master.*

*I am still not a citizen of the United States of America, this great nation, which is hailed as the destination for generations of people, the promised land for millions. I flee at the mere hint of teenybopper music. I stare blankly at my friends when they mention the 1980s or share stories of their parents as hippies. And I hate baseball.*

*The question lingers: Am I Chinese? Am I American? Or am I some unholy mixture of both, doomed to stay torn between the two?*

*I don’t know if I’ll ever find the answers. Meanwhile, it’s my turn to introduce myself. . . .*

*I stand up and say, “My name is Jennifer Wang,” and then I sit back down. There are no other words that define me as well as those do. No others show me being stretched between two very different cultures and places—the “Jennifer” clashing with the “Wang,” the “Wang” fighting with the “Jennifer.”<sup>2</sup>*

## Drawing Connections:

Jennifer Wang asks several questions about the terms Chinese and American. How would you answer the questions she poses for herself? Record your responses in a journal and share your thoughts with your peers. What do your responses have in common? What new questions do they raise? Is Wang Chinese? American? Is she a combination of the two? Why does she describe the combination of the two as “unholy”? To what extent is Wang’s struggle to define her identity unique? To what extent is it a struggle that other Americans share?

## **Activity Suggestion #3: Self-Reflection on Identity**

Identity charts are a graphic tool that can help students consider the many factors that shape who we are as individuals and as communities. Use identity charts to deepen students’ understanding of themselves, groups, nations, and historical and literary figures. Sharing their identity charts with peers can help students build relationships and break down stereotypes. In this way, identity charts can be used as an effective community-building tool.

### **1. Exploring the question, “Who Am I?”**

Before creating identity charts, you might have the group brainstorm categories we each consider when thinking about the question, “Who am I?”—categories such as our role in a family (e.g., daughter, sister, mother), our hobbies, and interests (e.g., guitar player, football fan), our background (e.g., religion, race, nationality, hometown, place of birth), and our physical characteristics. If it doesn’t come up in discussion as you generate your group list of categories, prompt students with questions that help them think about the following ideas:

1. Some aspects of our identities are consistent over our lives; others change as we gain skills and have different roles in life.
2. Some aspects of our identities feel very central to who we are no matter where we are; others might feel more like background or depend on the situation.
3. Some identities are labels that others put on us, While others see us as having that identity, we don’t.

It is often helpful to show students a completed identity chart before they create one of their own (see example section below).

Alternatively, you could begin this activity by having students create identity charts for themselves. If you plan to have them share their identity charts with a partner or in groups, they must know in advance. Any students who don’t feel comfortable sharing their identity charts can elaborate on one or two facets of their identity but keep their charts private. After discussing their charts, students can create a list of the categories they have used to describe themselves and then apply this same list of categories as a guide when creating identity charts for other people or groups.

### **2. Create Identity Charts for an Individual, Group, or Nation**

First, ask students to write the name of the character, figure, group, or nation in the center of a piece of paper. Then students can look through text(s) for evidence that helps them answer the question, “Who is this person/group?” Encourage students to include quotations from the text(s) on their identity charts, as well as their interpretations of the character or figure based on their reading. Students can complete identity charts individually or in small groups. Alternatively, students could contribute ideas to a class version of an identity chart that you keep on the classroom wall.

### **3. Starburst Identity Chart**

Use the Starburst Identity Chart activity in the student workbook to help students visualize the difference between factors that they feel make up their identities (arrows pointing out from the center) versus labels that others place on them (arrows pointing into the center). Because we may agree with some ways that the outside world views us and disagree with others, there may be some overlapping ideas between the two sets of arrows. Students can also use examples from texts to create Starburst Identity Charts for characters and historical figures to help express the complexity of their identities.

#### ***Starburst Identity Chart Reflect Questions:***

- What is the most important part of your identity? What is a story that explains its significance to you?
- What is one thing that you want other students in the class to know about your identity, and why?
- What is one way that how you think about yourself is different from how others might describe you?
- Who is a historical or fictional figure that you identify with or admire, and why?

## **Activity Suggestion #4: “Don’t Misunderstand Me!”**

After unpacking self-culture/identity as well as how we form judgments and perceive others, have the students take a few moments to reflect on previous experiences or future scenarios where they may be misunderstood by a fellow peer, a parent/family, or even an educator. What are the truth about them and this moment of misunderstanding?

This is a confidence-building activity to show students that no matter how others may perceive them, they hold the truth about who they are. Remind students that there is nowhere in the world 100% free of ignorant people. Whatever happens, don’t let the possibility of discrimination prevent them from experiencing the life-changing benefits of living abroad.