22 - Selecting pictures and 'realia' for language activities: some guidelines

Aim: This tool suggests points that you should bear in mind when selecting pictures and realia for use with refugees, and ideas for obtaining and storing them.

A valuable resource

Pictures and realia (real objects) can be an invaluable resource for language activities, especially with students at elementary levels. They can provide:

- a non-verbal stimulus to support interaction between volunteers and refugees, and between refugees.
- a means of easily conveying the meaning of new words (vocabulary).
- ways of familiarising refugees with features of their new country or community.
- motivation and interest, bearing in mind that refugees can select and use their own pictures during language activities.

Providing variety

Pictures are available in various forms:

- Photographic images that can be downloaded or shown on the internet, copied from books, cut out from magazines and brochures, or created with one's own camera/mobile phone.
- Drawn or painted images, in cartoon or 'artistic' style, that can be found on the internet, copied or cut out of comics and other publications such as art gallery leaflets and postcards, or drawn on paper or on a board.
- Representational signs and symbols that can be found in public places, on doors (e.g. toilet doors), or as emoticons on mobile phones etc.

Finding suitable objects

Realia are easy to find, for example at home in the kitchen, in an office, in one's own pocket or bag, etc. Pictures of real objects can be used to replace them when necessary.

Suggestions for making your own resource bank

It is a good idea to build up a 'library' of pictures and realia that can be used again and again. If you and your colleagues do this, you should think about how you will store and organise your resource bank so that you can find what you need quickly.

If a laptop, monitor or projector is available, it may be used to display pictures and realia. For flexibility of use, however, realia and pictures that can be selected, shared and passed around can be more motivating.

Selecting resources with care

As with other resources that might be useful for language support activities, particular attention has to be paid to the content and quality of pictures and even the nature of real objects. The following questions need to be considered when choosing resources and preparing to use them with refugees.

1. What cultural associations does the picture (or real object) have? Could it be offensive to individuals from other cultures? Could it lead to the need for complicated or controversial explanations?
2. Is the picture or real object suitable for the intended purpose? Will it help you to organize an activity or introduce new vocabulary, or serve as a stimulus to interaction?
3. Is the picture/object relevant and interesting? Will it stimulate refugees, will it add to their understanding in some way, or will it be hard to interpret or relate to their experience?
4. Is the quality good enough? Is it clear and easy to understand, large enough, in good condition, or, in the case of drawn images, clearly recognisable?
5. Is the picture worth keeping? Will it be valuable to you or other volunteers for use in the future? Can it be made more permanent, for example by sticking it on cardboard with adhesive or laminating it?
6. Can the picture be used from a legal point of view? Is permission required to download and use it? Does it need printed acknowledgement?

For further suggestions on using pictures in your language support activities, see for example, Tool 35 *Ideas for learning basic vocabulary: everyday life* and Tool 36 *Basic vocabulary to express opinions and emotions*.