

## Packing and Unpacking Cultural Baggage Visualization

Imagine that you are about to leave for a trip that will take you away from home for two years. You have been planning this trip for a long time. It has been your dream to visit and study in another country. You have worked hard at school to get the marks you need to be sponsored financially. Your tuition costs will be paid, so long as you are academically successful. However, if you do not succeed in your program, all of the money will have to be paid back. You will be the first person in your family to travel outside of your country. You are full of anticipation about the things that you will see and do in the new country. You have read about the country and know that the education will have high standards.

As the time approaches for you to prepare for your journey, you take out a special suitcase purchased for just this trip. It has many compartments and has room to hold many things. Imagine packing your suitcase with all of the things that you would like to take that would represent you and your culture. What would you put into your suitcase if you knew these would be the only connections with your culture for two years? What things would you want to have with you to remind you of who you are and where you are from? Begin to pack your suitcase with the symbols of culture that will help you on your journey.

Now, imagine that your plane has landed in the new country and you have lived there for three months. The time has been very busy with getting settled into a new school, learning about the city where you live, and trying to stay caught up with school work. Even though you have been busy, time seems to pass slowly. It is only three months since you left home, and you wonder how you will make it to the end of the first year, let alone two full years.

One day, you go to get something from the closet of your bedroom, and you notice your suitcase, the special suitcase that you packed when you left home. You realize that, when you left home, there was only room to bring certain things about yourself and your culture. You look at those things fondly. But time has passed, and you begin to miss other aspects of your life at home. Imagine that you could repack your suitcase with the things that you miss now. What other things would you add to your suitcase? What are some examples of food or beverages that you miss? What are the special foods that your family used to eat together that you really enjoyed? Does this bring sights or sounds to your imagination? What if your suitcase could be expanded beyond things to consider people? What relationships would you miss the most? How has that impacted your current sense of support or loneliness? Are there some things that you used to do, or activities that you enjoyed at home, that you wish you could have packed? What about special places that you miss visiting? What places do you wish you could have as part of your experience in the new culture? What other aspects of expressing yourself do you miss? Do you miss talking in a certain language or relating to people in particular ways? What activities, which are not available to you now, used to help you feel capable and confident? As your suitcase expands to include these aspects of culture, remember that it is only through contact with another culture that we truly begin to appreciate our own culture.

Now imagine that the two years have passed and you are preparing to return to your home country. As you begin to pack your suitcase, remember to choose carefully. There are many aspects of your life in the foreign culture that will not be available to you in your life at home. What do you want to pack to bring back with you for the future?