

# **Eric's Intercultural Experiences**

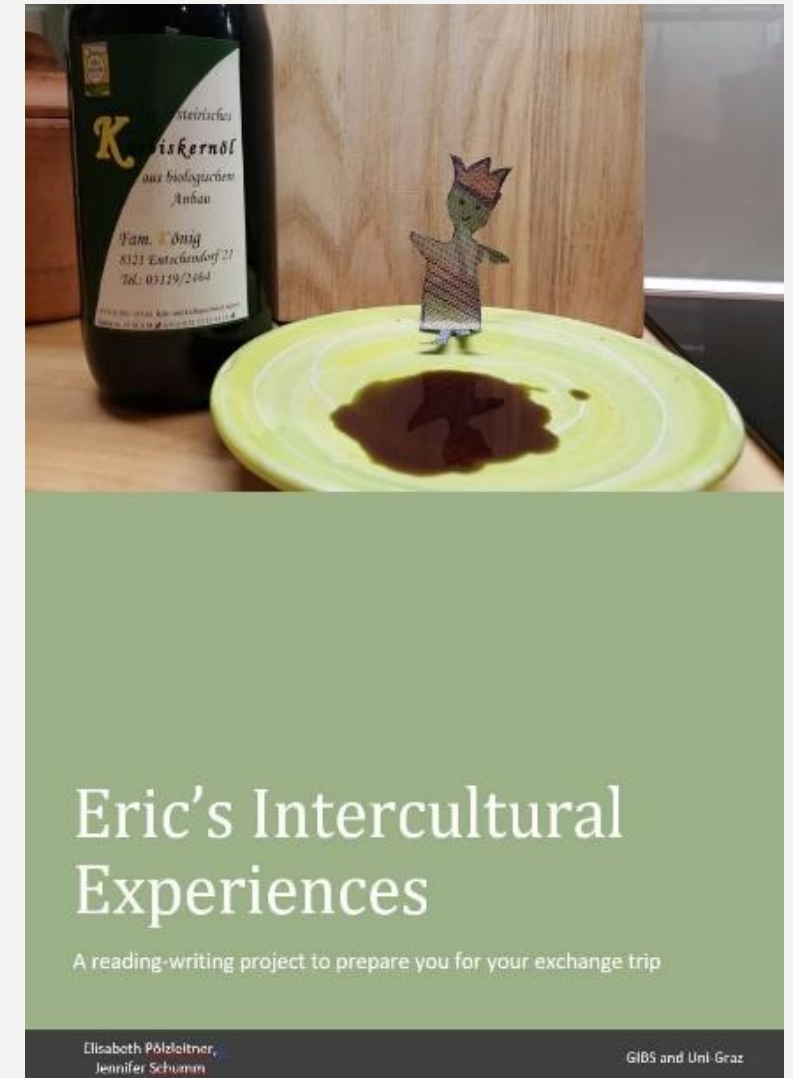
**A Reading-Writing Project to Prepare Language  
Learners for an Exchange Trip Abroad**

Jennifer Schumm and Elisabeth Pölzleitner



# OVERVIEW

- **Theoretical Framework**
- **The Story 'Eric' by Shaun Tan**
- **Teaching Goals of Reading-Writing Project**
- **The Project Tasks**
- **Teachers' Observations**



## Eric's Intercultural Experiences

A reading-writing project to prepare you for your exchange trip

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# The Language Learner

“The learner does not simply acquire two distinct, unrelated ways of acting and communicating. *The language learner becomes plurilingual and develops interculturality*”.

“The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language *are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to inter-cultural awareness, skills and know-how*. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences.”

(Council of Europe- CEFR, 2001: 43)



# Language Teaching



“Thus, developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching involves recognising that the aims are:

- to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence;
- to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures;
- to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours; and
- to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience.”

(Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002)

# Intercultural Competence Model

- **Attitudes:** curiosity, openness, decentering
- **Knowledge:** of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country
- **Skills of interpreting and relating:** ability to interpret a document /event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to those in one's own
- **Skills of discovery and interaction:** ability to acquire new knowledge of cultural practices; ability to operate under the constraints of real-time communication
- **Critical cultural awareness:** ability to evaluate critically perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures

(Byram, 1997)



# Intercultural learning during a stay abroad

“While intercultural experience is likely to enhance participants’ intercultural learning and personal development in many ways, immersion itself does not guarantee success” (Hua, 2014, p. 159).



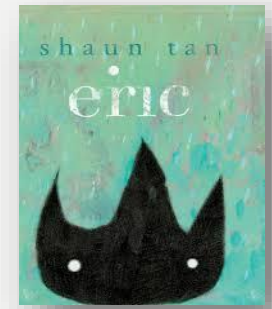
Recommendation: “well-trained cultural mentor” (Vande Berg et al., 2009, p. 32)

# 3 phases of preparing learners for class trips (Byram et al., 2002)



- 1. Preparatory Phase** - learners “externalise their thoughts, anxieties and excitements about their visit” (p. 14)
- 2. Fieldwork Phase** - “opportunity for withdrawal from the demands of being in a new environment, an opportunity for reflection alone and together with others” (p. 14).
- 3. Follow-up Phase** – “the emphasis should be on further reflection on individuals’ experience during the visit and, by sharing and comparing, on an attempt to analyse and conceptualise what has been experienced as a basis for understanding (some aspects of) the other environment and the people who live there.” (p. 15)

# Input: Eric by Shaun Tan (2008)

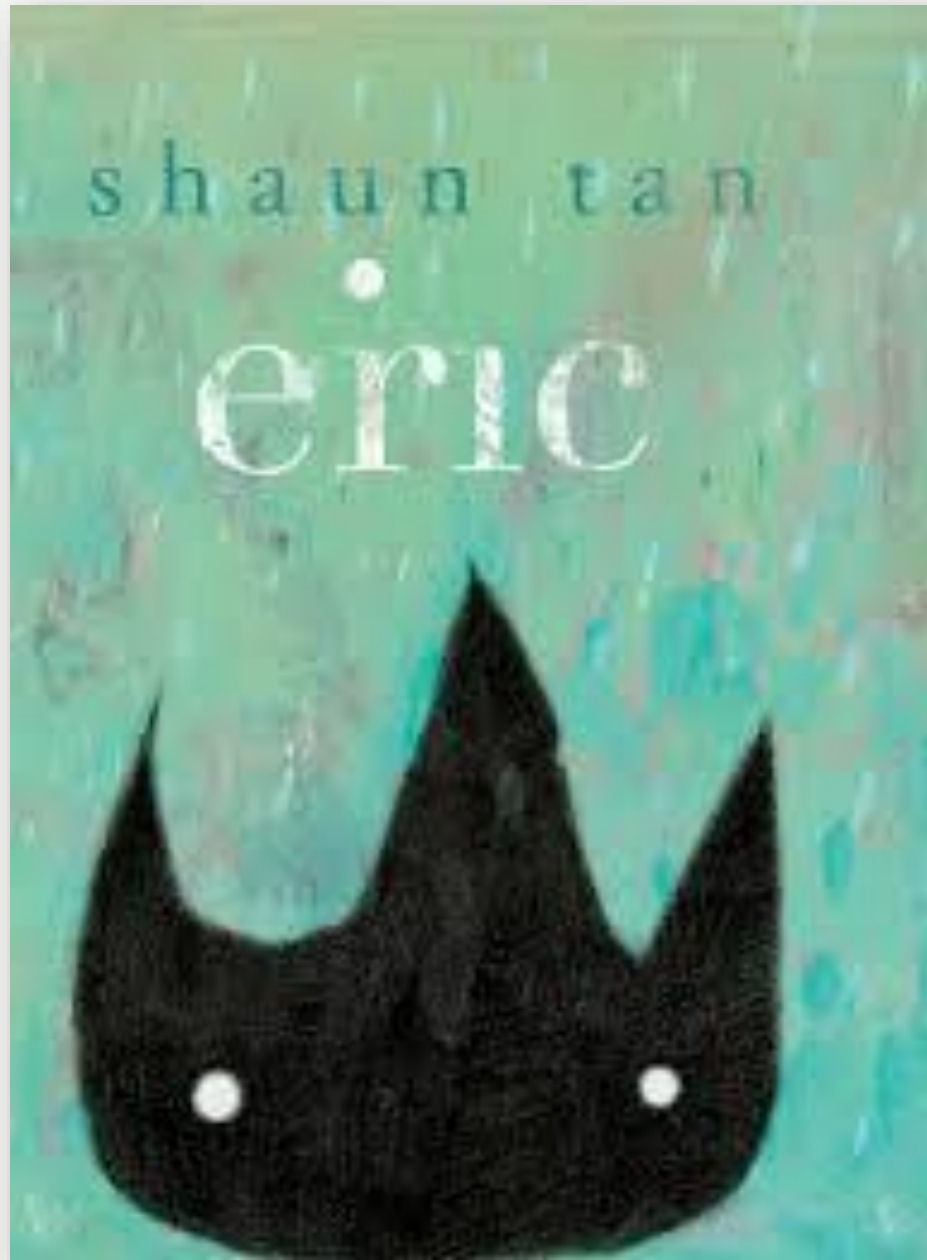


Why a picture book?

Pictures and minimal words create more questions than answers

“[A] successful picture book is one in which everything is presented to the reader as a speculative proposition, wrapped in invisible quotation marks, as if to say ‘what do you make of this?’” (Tan, 2001)





# THE STORY



eric



some years ago we had a foreign exchange student come to live with us. We found it very difficult to pronounce his name correctly, but he didn't mind. He told us to just call him "Eric."

We had repainted the spare room, bought new rugs and furniture, and generally made sure everything would be comfortable for him. So I can't say why it was that Eric chose to sleep and study most of the time in our kitchen pantry.



"It must be a cultural thing," said Mum. "As long as he is happy." We started storing food and kitchen things in other cupboards so we wouldn't disturb him.

But sometimes I wondered if Eric *was* happy; he was so polite that I'm not sure he would have told us if something bothered him. A few times I saw him through the pantry door gap, studying with silent intensity, and imagined what it might be like for him here in our country.



Secretly I had been looking forward to having a foreign visitor – I had so many things to show him. For once I could be a local expert, a fountain of interesting facts and opinions. Fortunately, Eric was very curious and always had plenty of questions.

However, they weren't the kind of questions I had been expecting.



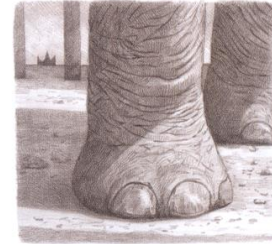
Most of the time I could only say, "I'm not really sure," or, "That's just how it is." I didn't feel very helpful at all.





I had planned for us to go on a number of weekly excursions together, as I was determined to show our visitor the best places in the city and its surrounds.

I think Eric enjoyed these trips, but once again, it was hard to really know.



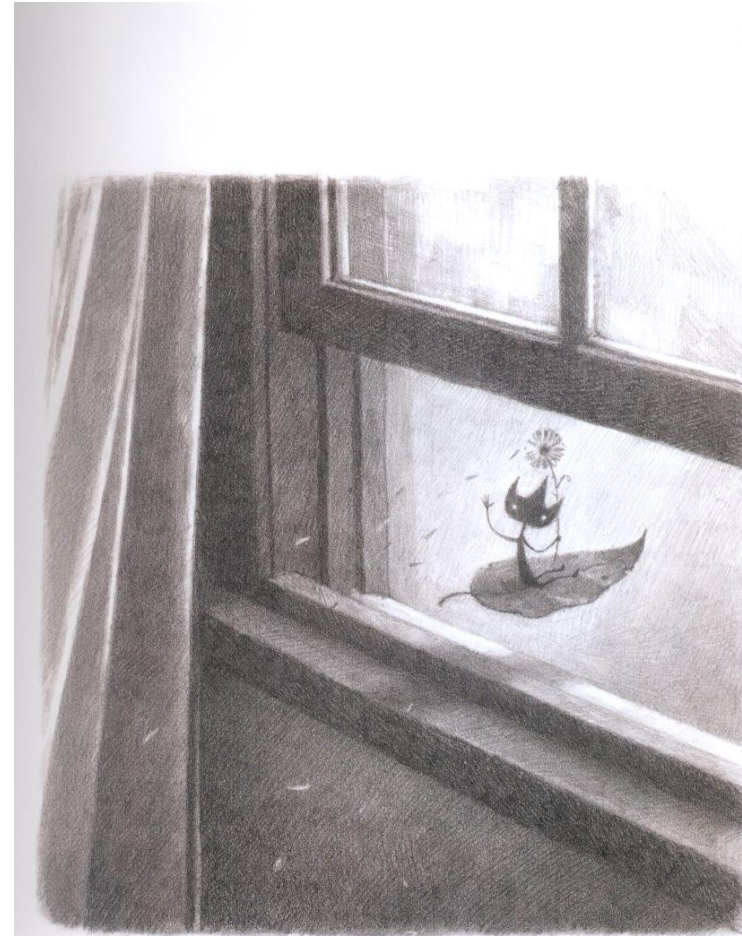
Most of the time Eric seemed more interested in small things he discovered on the ground.



Nevertheless, none of us could help but be bewildered by the way Eric left our home: a sudden departure early one morning, with little more than a wave and a polite good-bye.

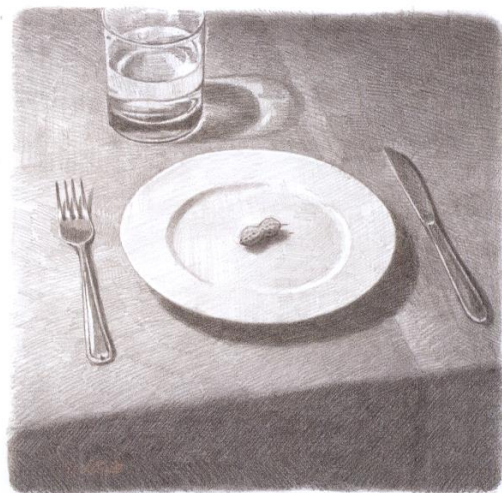


I might have found this a little exasperating, but I kept thinking about what Mum had said, about the cultural thing. Then I didn't mind so much.



It actually took us a while to realize he wasn't coming back.





There was much speculation over dinner later that evening. Did Eric seem upset? Did he enjoy his stay? Would we ever hear from him again?

An uncomfortable feeling hung in the air, like something unfinished, unresolved. It bothered us for hours, or at least until one of us discovered what was in the pantry.

Go and see for yourself: It's still there after all these years, thriving in the darkness. It's the first thing we show any new visitors to our house. "Look what our foreign exchange student left for us," we tell them.

"It must be a cultural thing," says Mum.



# Eric's Intercultural Experiences

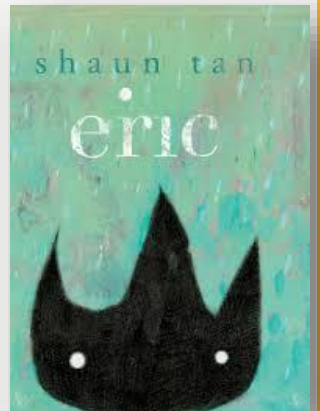
A reading-writing project to prepare language learners for an exchange trip abroad

- **Participants:** 15-year-old students in Austria preparing for class trips to Spain or France.
- Class trips to France and Spain lasted a week and followed by return visits of the foreign students at the Austrian school
- **Project:** cross-curricular carried out in learners' first and second foreign languages
- The main part of the project was carried out in English (learners in 5th year of learning the language), smaller parts were done in the learners' second foreign language (learners in 3rd year of Spanish or French).

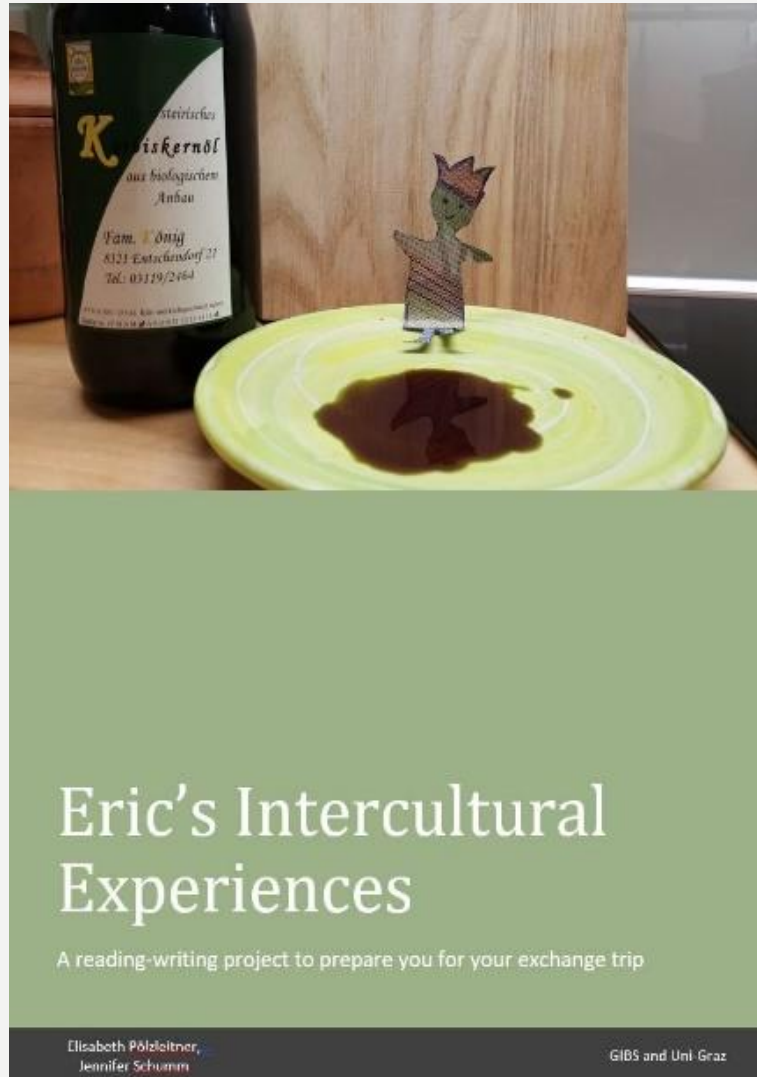


# The Main Teaching Goals of Project

- to develop learners' curiosity about new cultures and experiences
- to raise learners' awareness of cultural aspects of their everyday lives
- to challenge learners' attitudes including preconceived notions and stereotypes
- to develop learners' understanding of the various layers of "culture" (surface culture, deep culture) and their influence on human behavior (universal / cultural / personal dimensions of human behavior)
- to develop learners' skills of interpretation (observing, comparing/contrasting)
- to improve learners' story-writing skills in English (L2)
- to teach the language of "thank-you cards" and "describing personal experiences" in the learners' L3 (French or Spanish)



# THE PROJECT TASKS



## Eric's Intercultural Experiences

A reading-writing project to prepare you for your exchange trip

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“Secretly I had been looking forward to having a foreign visitor – I had so many things to show him. For once I could be a local expert, a fountain of interesting facts and opinions. Fortunately, Eric was very curious and always had plenty of questions.”

**What kind of questions would you have expected from Eric?**

# TEACHER'S OBSERVATIONS FOR TASK 1

The student

- Everyday
- Question
- Question

**“Fortunately, Eric was very curious and always had plenty of questions. However, they weren’t the kind of questions I had been expecting.”**

What is your WIFI-password?

What time do we have to get up?

How do we get to school?

Where will we have lunch?

Where can I get a tram ticket?

# Eric's questions

What kinds of questions do you think Eric actually asked? Look at the pictures taken from the story and speculate what kind of questions Eric might have asked.

switching perspectives

Gender roles

Typical foods eaten  
at special occasions

Attitudes and  
behaviors concerning  
the environment





# THE CULTURAL ICEBERG

## Before the trip:

Students draw cultural icebergs for AUSTRIA and for the country they are going to visit.

## After the trip and the return visit of their exchange partner.

Students add new findings to their icebergs.

## SURFACE CULTURE

Food and Eating Habits  
Music  
Literature  
Games  
Celebrations and Customs  
Dance  
Dress  
Arts and Crafts

manners and etiquette  
concept of beauty  
facial expression and eye contact  
body language and touching  
showing emotions  
attitudes towards elders and children  
punctuality and time  
religious belief  
tone of voice  
cleanliness  
nature of friendships

## DEEP CULTURE

role of group and individual  
competition or cooperation  
gender roles  
definition of obscenity  
core values



paella  
 tortilla de  
 patatas, ensalada  
 rusa, chorizo,  
 jamón serrano, bacalillos  
 arroz con leche  
 dinner and lunch late  
 red dress with white dots  
 flag - red & yellow hot, warm  
 toros, flamenco, tango, vamos  
 a la playa, Picasso,  
 fútbol **palm trees, always warm**  
always late, time isn't  
 valued, chaotic, loud,  
 speak very fast & really  
 loud, constantly on their  
 phone, groups, eat like  
 Americans and late, share  
 a lot of emotions, will **never say please**  
 teacher by first name, a **or thank you**  
 bit impolite, greet → two kisses **only to superior**



Snails  
 Eiffel Tower  
 at school until 18 o'clock  
 they are not good at  
 speaking foreign  
 languages  
 recycle but not as much as in  
 Austria  
 dinner together  
 don't talk about religion in public  
 eat a lot of cheese, butter,  
 pancakes  
 not much organised  
 don't use plates  
 when having  
 breakfast



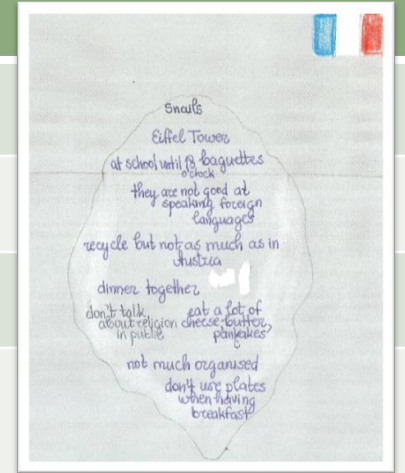
## The Learners' Perceptions and Expectations BEFORE the Trips.

<b>Austria</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Spain</b>
<b>Food</b>	<b>Food</b>	<b>Food</b>
Kaiserschmarrn, Germknödel, Wiener Schnitzel, Mozartkugeln, Sachertorte		Tortillas, paella, potatoes, spicy food
<b>Dress</b>		
Dirndl and Lederhosen (and hats for them!)		
<b>Music and Arts</b>		<b>Music and Arts</b>
Mozart and Beethoven (and other German), folk music, traditional Austrian folk dance, Vienna Opera Ball		Dance, Tango, Flamenco, bullfights
<b>Sports and games</b>	<b>Sports and games</b>	<b>Sports and games</b>
Skiing, soccer, card game (Skat, Schnapsen)		Swimming, beaches
<b>Celebrations</b>	<b>Celebrations</b>	<b>Celebrations</b>
Christchild (rather than Santa), Bleigießen		

Surface Culture

## Icebergs AFTER the Trips

Greetings	Kissing, number of expected hugs...
At home	Taking off shoes, drinking tap water,
Food	No dark bread
Table manners	How to use knife and fork in different cultures Bowls for tea, no plates for breakfast,
Time	Concept of time, being on time, being late, dinner times
Politeness	Respect towards teachers, use of firstnames, saying thank you not expected,
Showing emotions	Spanish people seemed to show their emotions (+/-) more openly
Volume, Speed and Tone of Voice	Higher volume and speed as well as more emotional modulation among Spanish peers
Religion	Not visible in France, crosses forbidden in school. Spanish students wearing crosses and practicing their Catholic religion very visibly.





**Awareness of  
health issues  
and socio-  
economic status**

**Personal**

**Inherited and  
learned**

**Not all French  
people wear  
designer clothes,  
they actually go to  
school in jogging  
pants.**

**Cultural**

**learned**

**Universal**


**inherited**

**The host family  
explains Eric's  
strange behavior by  
saying:**

**„It must be a  
cultural thing.“**

**Now do the same for  
your host families  
and friends abroad.**

**(Hofstede, 1997)**

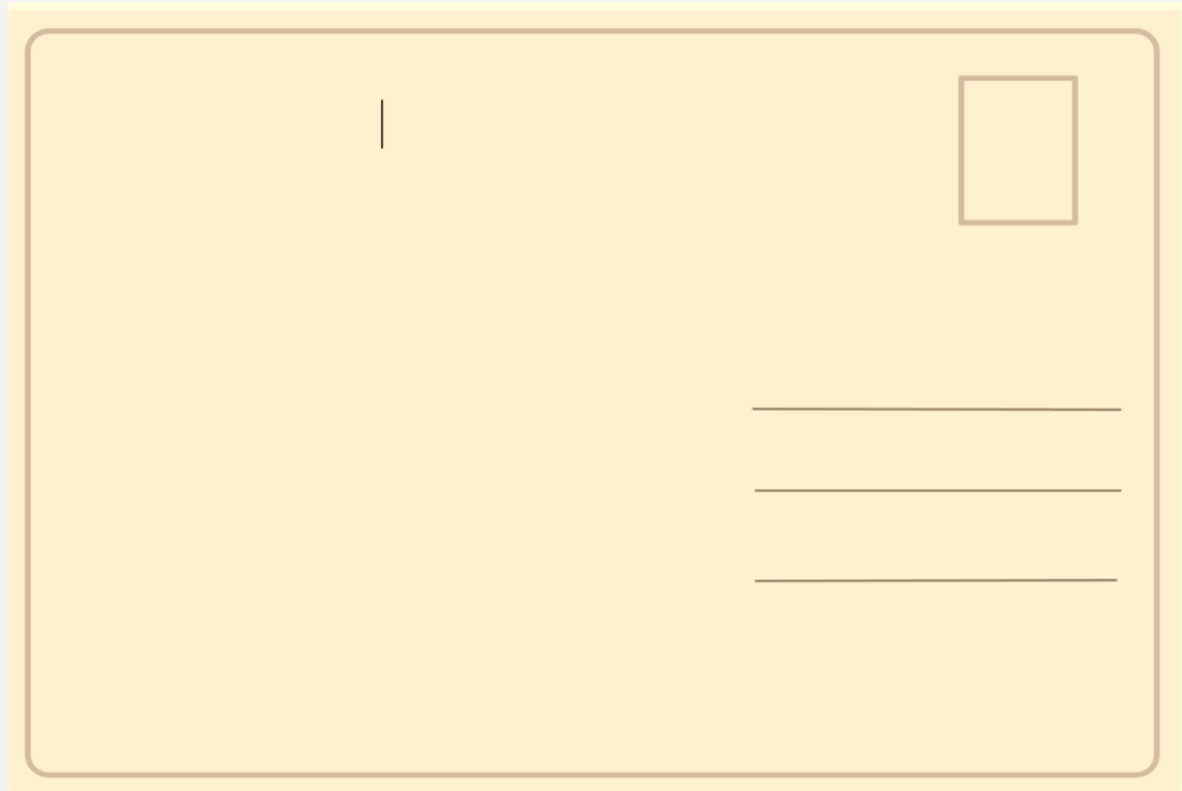


**After Eric leaves, the family isn't really sure whether he enjoyed his stay or not. However, when they open the cupboard where he had slept and studied, they got their answer.**

- **How did Eric say „thank you“ to his host family?**
- **Why do you think this page is in color?**
- **How do people show their gratitude in Austria/ your culture?**
- **How do people say „thank you“ in France/Spain?**

# WRITING A THANK YOU CARD

Say **THANKS** for 2-3 specific things that your host family has done for you.



A blank yellow postcard template. It features a vertical line on the left side for an address, a rectangular box in the top right corner for a stamp, and three horizontal lines on the right side for a message.





# STORY WRITING

## Slipping into Eric's Mind and Walking in his Shoes

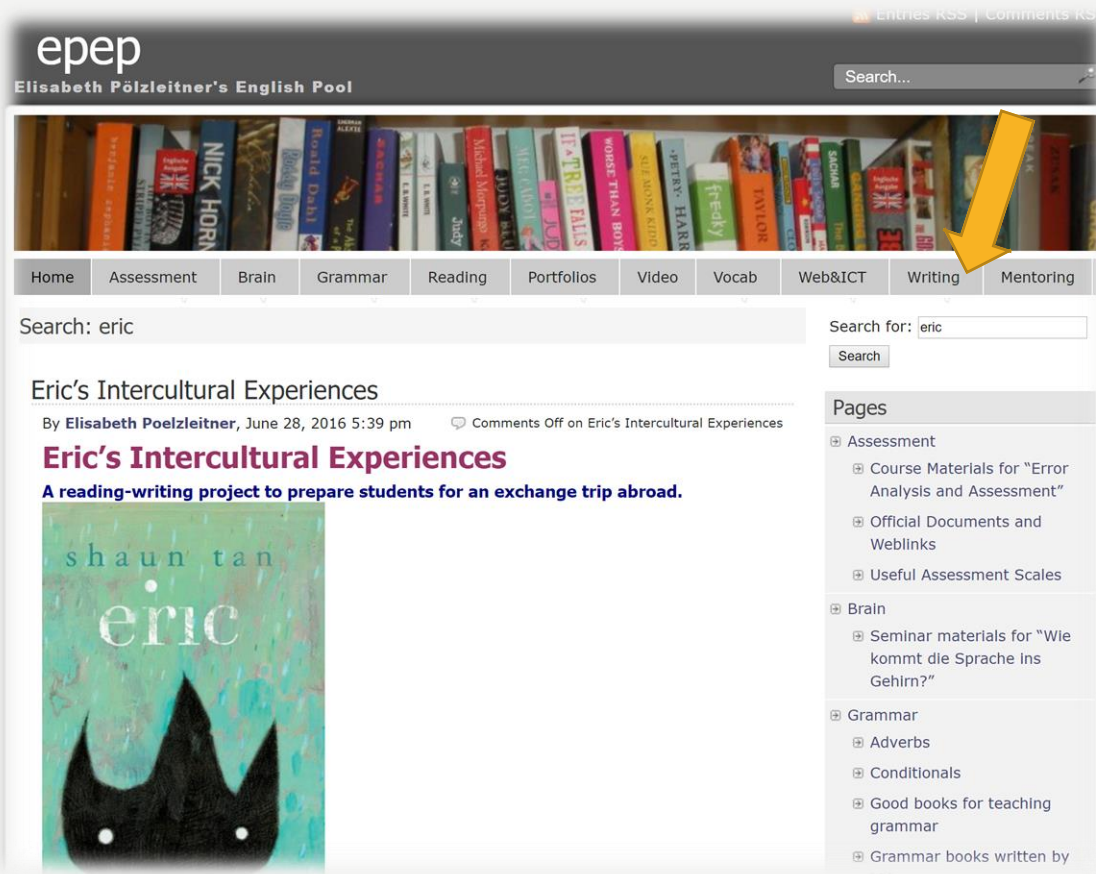


# Find the students' stories here

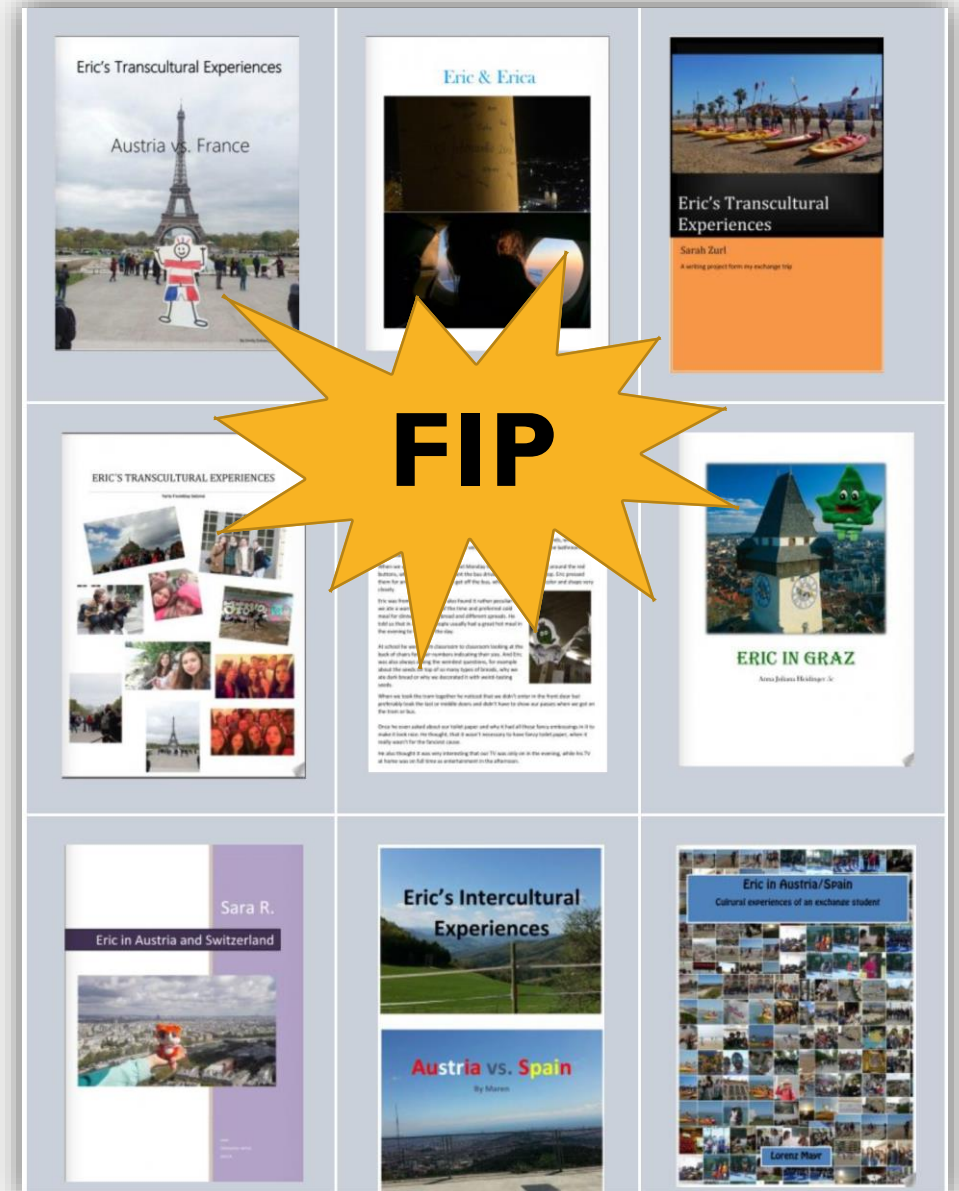
Find all the project details, materials and student products on

[www.epep.at](http://www.epep.at)

Search for: eric



The screenshot shows the homepage of the epep website, titled "Elisabeth Pölzleitner's English Pool". A search bar at the top right contains the text "Search...". Below the header is a navigation menu with tabs: Home, Assessment, Brain, Grammar, Reading, Portfolios, Video, Vocab, Web&ICT, Writing, and Mentoring. A yellow arrow points to the "Writing" tab. Below the menu, the search results for "eric" are displayed. The main result is "Eric's Intercultural Experiences" by Elisabeth Poelzleitner, dated June 28, 2016 5:39 pm. The description reads: "Eric's Intercultural Experiences A reading-writing project to prepare students for an exchange trip abroad." Below the text is a book cover for "eric" by Shaun Tan. To the right of the main result is a sidebar titled "Pages" with a search bar and a "Search" button. The sidebar lists several pages under different categories: Assessment (Course Materials for "Error Analysis and Assessment", Official Documents and Weblinks, Useful Assessment Scales), Brain (Seminar materials for "Wie kommt die Sprache ins Gehirn?"), Grammar (Adverbs, Conditionals, Good books for teaching grammar, Grammar books written by), and Writing (Eric's Transcultural Experiences).



# THE FINAL STORIES SHOW THAT...



- Learners have shown curiosity about their hosts' cultures.
- They have noticed many small cultural details.
- They have discussed cultural differences with their host families and exchange partners and clarified misunderstandings.
- They have actively questioned their stereotypes and deverified some of them.
- They have noticed cultural aspects of their own country.

...and last, but not least

- They have produced final products that they are proud of and have published their stories online.

**FIP**

# CONCLUSIONS

- Reading Eric combined with discussion and writing tasks seemed to help to mediate learners' intercultural competence, especially concerning attitudes, knowledge and skills of interpreting and relating.
- This project seems to show the importance of preparing learners for class-trips abroad in every stage of the experience
- This project also seems to show the important role that teachers have in ensuring that learners are given the support and space they need to profit from the intercultural experience.



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**Have a look at the students' stories**



**Do you have any questions?**