

International Customs Day – January 26

Dates coming soon

TAGS: Customs, borders, January 26

John Lennon imagined a world with no countries. However, today we do have countries and borders to delineate them. We also have Customs – and on January 26 we celebrate their work. This year, 2015, WCO (World Customs Organisation) has chosen the slogan: “Coordinated Border Management: an inclusive approach for connecting stakeholders.” What does this mean?

This year the WCO wants their employees to work together with special emphasis on the co-ordination of practices that may differ between the two bordering countries. People travel from one country to another for different reasons and the number of travellers keeps increasing every year. Importing and exporting of goods are other border crossings on the rise. Businesses want this exchange of people and goods to help them expand and earn more money.

Did you know that the WCO are also involved in emergency relief to countries in need – perhaps a natural disaster, disease or war has occurred and assistance is needed?

WCO is not only involved in relief to stricken areas but also in the stopping of the trafficking of people and drugs, so sometimes their job is moving equipment quickly and smoothly while at other times they must be careful to check that illegal items are not crossing borders.

Activities:

- 1) Have your pupils ever crossed a border to another country? What happened? (Remember that in some areas the border control seems almost invisible as in EU countries)
- 2) Ask your pupils about why we need passports and/or identity cards. Ask them what sort of information is contained in a passport or on an identity card. How long does a passport or identity card last in your country? Should that change?
- 4) Make an identity card or passport with your pupils containing the information the pupils have collected in point 3 or what they think is important. Remember to include a ‘photograph’.
- 3) What questions might a Customs Officer ask you and why? For example, where are you going (you may need a visa for this particular country)?; where have you been recently (perhaps a disease has broken out and you might need future medical attention, or you have been in rural areas and might be unknowingly carrying a disease into an agricultural area) ?; who are you travelling with (are you legally allowed to enter the country alone if you are a minor)?; are you carrying food (some countries do not allow importation of certain food products for reasons of health care, protection of local flora and fauna, illegal transportation of some food items) ?; are you carrying any gifts (have you exceeded the permitted amount of items according to price?) ?..... etc.
- 4) What would people leaving or entering your country try to smuggle out and in (apart from narcotics and weapons! Let’s get our pupils thinking a bit deeper!)? For example in Sardinia, Italy, it is illegal for people to take pork off the island unless it has been purchased beyond the Customs check zone. Other countries,

such as New Zealand and the USA, prohibit any fresh food or plants being brought into the country. Why do these laws exist (generally to protect the country especially if it is agricultural rather than industrial)?