

CULTURE, CUSTOMS AND DAILY LIFE

GRADE LEVEL: Middle School

SUBJECT: Social Studies

TIME REQUIRED: One class period

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

1. Define the concepts of cross-cultural communication (or miscommunication), context and empathy.
2. Describe cross-cultural miscommunication.
3. Analyze specific non-verbal behavior of Koreans and North Americans (U.S.)
4. Demonstrate an understanding of role-taking in a cross-cultural context.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

See handouts accompanying this lesson

MATERIALS:

Handouts accompanying this lesson

PROCEDURES:

1. Organize the students into groups of four. Using the list of gestures and body language on handout, have students randomly select a custom from a box or envelope and role-play the situations of their group for the class. Prior to beginning the role-play, inform students that they will be responsible for communicating their reactions to the situation, whether role-playing or watching.
2. In role-taking, or role-playing, it is important for the students to place themselves in another's shoes. In order to accomplish this task, ask students to read the gestures and body language handout and respond to the items that make them feel awkward or uncomfortable. Describe a situation that could be difficult to understand from a Korean perspective (e.g. the U.S. custom of gesturing come here as it is the manner in which Korean people summon dogs) and have the class discuss why this could easily miscommunicate a negative feeling on the part of a Korean person. Similarly, illustrate a Korean custom that could create miscommunication on the part of American people (e.g. the Korean custom of boys holding hands) and discuss how this could feel to American people.
3. After providing some examples, have students, in pairs, groups, or individually, use the handout to create similar scenarios describing the situation from both the Korean and American perspectives.
4. Using handout titled "Situations," have students illustrate an understanding of Korean customs by listing ways in which they could respond to the given situation.
5. List the terms cross-cultural miscommunication, cultural context and role-taking

(or perspective) on the board. Discuss how these terms apply to the lesson.

EVALUATION:

For evaluation, have the students write a letter to a friend in Korea describing some of the cultural gestures that they have learned in this lesson.

MAKING CONNECTIONS:

Find current News articles describing issues faced by Korean-Americans today. Are any examples of cultural misunderstandings illuminated in the news events?

Background for Teachers

Most cross cultural miscommunication is not due to a lack of goodwill or to an insensitivity on the part of the individuals involved. Rather, miscommunication is often due to a misreading of another's behavior.

When students become aware of their own cultural conditioning they are ready to begin to understand other cultures. The concern is one of "cultural contexts. It is difficult for the "outsider" to understand the same cultural contexts that guide the "insider" effortlessly and unconsciously. What is needed is a kind of dual vision or "empathy."

Source: (1982) Ferish, Seymore; Learning About Peoples and Cultures. McDougal, Littell and Company, Evanston, IL.

Gestures and body language are powerful communicators; different cultures use gestures and body language in very different ways. There are "acquired" gestures, which are used to accompany day to day communication. Identical acquired gestures can mean different things in North America, South Korea, and other cultures. Since these acquired gestures are used unconsciously, students need to become more conscious of what is being signaled by the gestures they use and how those signals may be misinterpreted.

Source: (1991). Axtell, Roger; Gestures: The Do's and Taboos of Body Language Around the World. John Wiley and Sons, New York.

GESTURES AND BODY LANGUAGE FROM SOUTH KOREA

- Two men may be seen walking holding hands, and it is merely a sign of friendship, nothing more. But in almost all other situations, avoid touching, gripping, or patting a Korean person on the arm, shoulder, or back unless you are good friends.
- In public situations, however, personal space is very limited and Western visitors may be disconcerted by the closeness of others in markets, on buses, or while walking on the sidewalks.
- Men generally have priority in Korea: They go through doors first and walk ahead of women.
- When saying goodbye, the traditional gesture is the bow, but the younger generation has adopted the Western custom of waving goodbye by moving the arm from side-to-side.
- The Western version of gesturing "come here"—arm and hand up, palm toward the face—is used only for calling dogs. The correct way to beckon a person in Korea is to extend the arm, palm down, and make a scratching motion.
- In Korea it is impolite to walk behind someone. So, if you are standing talking to someone a Korean may walk between you rather than walk behind you.
- When walking in public, the convention in Korea is to keep to the left side of the walkway.
- Avoid putting your feet up or slouching in a chair when seated.
- Koreans will cover their mouths when laughing. This results in giggling rather than wide open-mouth laughing.
- Shoes are removed before entering a Korean home.
- Loud talking or laughing is usually avoided, unless the occasion is business entertainment. Then, after dinner, there may be solo or group singing and much laughter.
- Older people are highly respected in Korea, so it is appropriate to rise when an elderly person enters the room.
- When dining the elderly are served first and the children last.
- Avoid eating food while walking along a public street.

- During dinner, a small communal cup may be passed along; drink from it and pass it on. It is also polite to fill your neighbors small soy sauce dish and vice versa.
- Lines in public are not necessarily respected, so do not be upset by a little pushing and shoving.
- Blowing the nose in public is considered rude. Also, dispose of tissues rather than putting them in your pocket or purse.
- Do not open a gift in public; rather, wait until later in private.
- Posture is important in Korea and other Asian countries. Stand or sit erect. Try to keep your hands in sight of the person you are talking to.
- If you are wearing sunglasses, remove them during any conversation with another person.
- Good eye contact is important during conversations but not an absolute requirement.
- When you enter a conference room or dining room, wait to be directed to the seat designated for you.
- If honored by a Korean person, making slight protestations is accepted. Koreans appreciate humility.

SITUATIONS

If you were in Korea, how would you respond to show you understand the Korean culture? How would you respond as an American? (Look at the "Confucian Values" lesson as well.)

1. You are friendly with several Koreans and you ask them if they want to get something to eat. You all go to a nearby restaurant.
2. You are at a local grocery store. You have chosen your purchases and are standing in line to pay the cashier. All of the sudden, two Koreans push ahead of you in line.
3. Two friends have come to visit you. They remove their shoes at the entrance, bow to your parents and hand them a wrapped gift.
4. You see two Korean male students walking down the street holding hands.
5. You are lost on the streets of Seoul and need to get directions to the bus stop which will get you home.
6. You are in a restaurant and want to order but the waiter has not come to your table.
7. Your father has reached his sixtieth birthday.
8. As a representative of your company, you are introduced to the head of Hyundai Motors.
9. A Korean friend wants to get married.
10. You are invited to a Korean student's home for dinner. His grandparents will be at the meal.