

**Activity Suggestions: Grades 10-12****Brief Encounters**<sup>18</sup>

**Class time needed:** 40 minutes

**Materials**

- Cultural-norms sheets for the Pandya and Chispa cultures (half of the players will receive Pandya sheets and the other half Chispa sheets)
- Recorded music
- A whistle and a timer to help you pace the game

**Objectives**

- Students will gain skills in observing and describing behaviors.
- Students will develop an understanding of how our cultural values influence the way we view other groups.

**Introduction**

Science fiction fans will recognize a familiar theme as they participate in this simulation. Many science fiction authors have explored how humans will behave when we meet an alien race for the first time. “Brief Encounters” brings the question closer to home and asks students to explore the interaction of two cultures—**one outgoing and casual, the other more reserved and formal**—with very different social norms.

**Procedure**

1. Remove all furniture from the center of the classroom. Students will need space to move around.
2. Divide the participants into three groups. Two groups should be about the same size and should have roughly equal numbers of males and females, if possible. A smaller group of two to three students will act as observers.
3. Tell the observers that they will be watching closely as two different cultural groups interact. They may move among the participants, but they may not touch or speak to them. Their observations will help the class view the activity with a wider perspective during the debriefing.
4. Send the Pandya and Chispa groups to opposite corners of the room. Distribute copies of the Pandya cultural-norms sheets to one group and the Chispa cultural-norms sheets to the other group. Ask the members of each culture to read these sheets and to discuss their norms among themselves.
5. Visit the Pandyas and clarify their values. Emphasize the importance of staying in “character.” Emphasize that the male students should be chaperoned at all times. Remind them of their reluctance to initiate contacts with people of other cultures.
6. Visit the Chispas and clarify their values. Emphasize the importance of making several brief contacts rather than a few lengthy ones. Define a contact as eliciting a verbal or a nonverbal response from a member of the other culture. Remind them of their friendly, outgoing nature and their eagerness to meet people from other cultures.
7. If students ask about the scoring system that appears on the norms sheets, tell them you will discuss this aspect of the game during the debriefing. Actually, you will not keep score. The point systems are printed on the norm sheets to establish a reward system for “good” behavior as defined by each of the two cultures.

8. Announce that the two student groups have been invited to a party sponsored by an international student exchange organization. The party organizers hope the two groups will get acquainted and learn about each other. When students return to their home schools, they will present culture reports to their classmates. The students are welcome to mingle, dance, and talk.
9. Start the music and let the two cultures interact. The teacher and student observers should walk among the groups, looking for behaviors that can be described and discussed during debriefing.
10. After 10 to 12 minutes, blow the whistle to end the party. Ask the students to meet once more in opposite corners of the room and to make notes for their culture reports.
11. Give each group about 10 minutes to create a brief report. The Chispas' report will describe the Pandya behavior and values that their classmates might expect to encounter if they visited the Pandya nation. The Pandyas will create a similar description of the Chispas.
12. Ask a representative from the Chispas to present the group's report to the class. Then ask a representative from the Pandyas to read that group's norms sheet. Ask the Chispas to note how their reports compared to the Pandyas' norms sheet.
13. Repeat with a Pandya representative sharing the group's report on the Chispas.

### Debriefing

Use questions such as the following to guide discussion of how our cultural "biases" influence the way we view other groups. Be sure to ask the observers for their views on the participants' attempts to communicate across cultures and to maintain cultural norms.

1. How did you feel about the behavior of the members of your own group? Of the other group? Did your group's culture report use positive, negative, or neutral terms to describe the other group?
2. How did your group organize to observe the norms of your culture? During the party, what did you do if a member of your culture did not observe a particular norm?
3. Did your group attempt to keep score during the game? What are the real-world rewards for following cultural norms?
4. Ask students to discuss whether they agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
  - People have difficulty describing the behaviors of other groups in nonjudgmental terms.
  - People acquire cultural norms fairly quickly.
  - People seldom question the cultural norms that are handed to them.
  - Most of the group's norms are maintained through peer pressure.
  - Americans tend to feel uncomfortable without eye contact, even though in many parts of the world, eye contact is considered to be rude and impolite.
  - The same behavior can be perceived differently depending on your group's norms. For example, the same behavior appears friendly to Chispas and pushy to Pandyas.
5. What are some real-world situations that were illustrated during the game?
6. Pandya women were instructed to speak for the Pandya men. In what real-world situations does one group speak for another?



7. How would the game be different for players if the Pandya men dominated the women?
8. What would have happened if the two groups had been required to complete a science experiment or organize a field trip together? If the “party” had lasted for the entire class period?
9. What lessons from this activity would you want to keep in mind if you were going to spend time in an unfamiliar culture?

### Extending the Ideas

- Ask students to list as many examples of cross-cultural experiences as they can. Remind them that not all cross-cultural experiences take place in other countries or between people who speak foreign languages or come from different racial backgrounds. Attending worship services, for example, with a friend who holds different religious beliefs is a cross-cultural experience. Brainstorm ideas about what students can do to encourage clear communication in such situations.
- If you are corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer, ask him or her to describe the typical conversational style of people in the host country. What adjustments did the Volunteer make to avoid misunderstandings in the host country?
- This lesson could lead to a service-learning project. If you have a multicultural class or have international exchange students in your school, help your students develop a project to foster better understanding and communication. Some ideas for action follow.
  - Conduct a survey to determine what communication difficulties, if any, exist among the students and between students and teachers.
  - Research the customs and culture of the groups that are represented in your class or school.
  - Plan a cultural awareness week.
  - Invite Returned Peace Corps Volunteers or parents of international students to speak to your students and share information about the language(s), culture, and customs of their countries.
  - Develop a feature article or regular column in the student newspaper that introduces various peoples and cultures.

Use the Service-Learning Rubric, found in the introduction to this teacher’s guide, to plan a project that will have a strong impact.



## You Are a *Pandya*

### *Pandya Cultural Norms*

- *Pandyas* prefer to interact with members of their own culture.
- *Pandyas* do not initiate conversation. They speak only when spoken to.
- *Pandyas* have very formal speech patterns. For example, they always use “sir” and “ma’am.”
- Among *Pandyas*, women have more status than men. Men are chaperoned by *Pandya* women.
- *Pandya* men avoid eye contact with women from other cultures.
- *Pandya* men do not talk directly to women from other cultures. They respond through their chaperones.
- *Pandya* men can talk to men from other cultures. They can maintain eye contact with men from other cultures.

### Scoring

- *Pandyas* lose 1 point for initiating conversations with anyone from another culture.
- *Pandya* men lose 2 points for talking directly to women from another culture.
- *Pandya* women gain 1 point each time they respond to a woman from another culture on behalf of a *Pandya* man.



## You Are a *Chispa*

### *Chispa Cultural Norms*

- *Chispas* are informal and friendly.
- Among *Chispas*, there is no gender discrimination. Men and women behave the same way.
- *Chispas* are outgoing. They love to make contact with people from other cultures.
- *Chispas* contacts are brief and casual.
- *Chispas* are democratic and call everyone by first name.
- *Chispas* value cross-gender contacts more than same-gender contacts.

### *Scoring*

- *Chispas* get 1 point for making a same-gender contact.
- *Chispas* get 2 points for making a cross-gender contact.
- *Chispas* lose 5 points if they fail to make a cross-gender contact within one minute.



## Becoming Part of the Community

**Class time needed:** 40 minutes

### **Materials**

Copies of “She’s a Thai,” “Drip Diplomacy,” and “Features of Culture” for each student

### **Objectives**

- Students will identify the features of culture experienced by Peace Corps Volunteers in two different countries.
- Students will identify the skills and attitudes required for successful cross-cultural experiences.

### **Introduction**

Volunteers come to the Peace Corps from all the U.S. states and territories. Some are just out of college; some are just starting retirement. They represent a cross-section of ethnic and economic backgrounds. But when Volunteers return from their host countries, they share a new perspective on the world and its peoples. They appreciate the diversity of human life, and at the same time they treasure our common bonds.

There are many stories from Volunteers that describe a moment in which they realize that they have come to feel at home in their host countries. The following two stories illustrate that moment for two Volunteers.

### **Procedure**

1. Review or introduce the “Features of Culture” printed at the beginning of this section. Emphasize the idea that these universals serve as a way of looking at the things that cultures have in common. For example, all cultures have ways of acquiring food. American families who shop at supermarkets and Ugandan families who grow almost everything they eat have that need in common.
2. Ask students to read “She’s a Thai” and “Drip Diplomacy.” As they read, they should look for details that correspond with the “Features of Culture” printed at the beginning of this section, and for evidence of the ways each Volunteer learned to fit into the host communities. Be sure students know that the stories do not correspond to all of the features of culture.
3. When students have finished reading, divide the class into several small groups. Have each group match details from the stories with as many features of culture as possible. Students should discuss and negotiate their ideas until all group members agree on the best representation. Each group’s conclusions should be listed on a large sheet of paper and posted on a classroom wall. Then, as a full class, discuss the differences and similarities among the small-group observations.
4. Ask each group to identify two to three attitudes or actions that they believe helped the Volunteer have a successful experience in the host country.



**Debriefing**

Use the following questions to focus discussion of Sharon London's and Keith Talbot's experiences.

1. How does it feel to be in a place that is completely new to you?
2. What are some of the cultural differences that Sharon London and Keith Talbot faced in their host countries? (*Possible answers: new languages, different standards of courtesy and beauty, different foods*)
3. Which features of culture are most apparent in these readings?
4. What did the Volunteers do to learn to feel at home in their host communities? (Students will need to infer responses. Possible answers: The Volunteers carefully observed the behaviors and practices of their hosts; they made efforts to learn Spanish and Thai; they each approached their assignments with curiosity and a sense of humor.)
5. What lessons do these readings offer about dealing with unfamiliar situations or people?
6. What if these stories were written about the Volunteers from Thai or Dominican perspectives?
7. What are some questions you can ask yourself the next time you are puzzled by another person's way of doing things?

**Extending the Ideas**

- If your class is matched with a Peace Corps Volunteer through the World Wise Schools program, have students find examples of cultural universals in letters from the Volunteer.
- Have each student research the customs and norms of a country they would like to visit. Have students use the "Features of Culture" list to outline a report on the country they choose. The Peace Corps web site <<http://www.peacecorps.gov>> will be helpful in this activity.

## She's a Thai <sup>19</sup>

This week I received a very special compliment: “*Sharon ben kone Thi laow.*” (“Sharon is a Thai person.”) What satisfaction—I am considered one of the gang. Yahoo! Seven months in this country, with three months of intensive training, have granted me the auspicious title of “Thai person.”

What is it, however, that makes me “Thai” rather than “American”? Perhaps this question will explain why I can no longer easily pinpoint my identity, and why I often feel like the person I was eight months ago has been lost somewhere along the way in my travels to this place high in the mountains of northern Thailand.

First, let's look at my physical appearance. Sure, my hair is dark for a *farang* (a westerner), but it is brown and curly, not straight and black. It definitely cannot be my body. Not only am I taller than most Thai men and women, but I probably weigh more as well. At least nobody calls me fat, which Thais have no qualms about saying. (My threats to cry nonstop may be the reason *ooahp*, or shapely, has been used to describe me instead.) Also, I have far more body hair than any of my Thai friends and co-workers. Thai women rarely have arm, leg, or armpit hair. My eyes are round, my skin is white, and I have body hair. There is no mistaking me for a Thai.

Maybe, then, it's my food consumption. My spicy food intake is definitely increasing. I can eat sticky rice with no problem and actually even prefer it to steamed rice. There is more to my “Thai-ness” than food, however. Possibly it's my con-

versational abilities. I can hold a simple conversation in Thai (and a tiny bit in the northern dialect, too). For example:

*Sharon:* Hello.

*Thai:* Hello.

*Sharon:* Have you eaten yet?

*Thai:* Yes. Have you eaten?

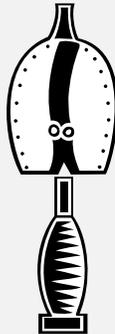
*Sharon:* No. What did you eat with rice today?

*Thai:* Spicy pepper dip. And what will you eat with rice today?

*Sharon:* I don't know yet. Probably stir-fried vegetables.

*Thai* (not knowing I don't eat meat): Will you eat beef or pork? Would you like some?

*Sharon:* No thanks, just vegetables.



Occasionally, conversations go further:

*Thai:* Do you have boyfriend? Are you married?

*Sharon:* Nope, not yet.

*Thai:* Do you want a Thai one? I know a nice guy.

*Sharon:* Sure, only if he'll do all my laundry and cooking. And could you find me a couple? One won't be enough.

Yes, I would definitely say I am very Thai in my conversational patterns. I raise my voice in conversation more than I ever have in my past 24 years of life. I ask Thai people personal questions with no qualms, like how old they are, how much money they make, where they are going, and what they are eating. People in America may think I am prying upon my return.

*Sharon London served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Thailand from 1994 to 1996.*



## Drip Diplomacy<sup>20</sup>

Strange and subtle sometimes are the habits of courtesy. Water is a precious commodity out here in the *campo* (countryside). So there is a whole culture built around its acquisition and usage. If you go to any store or wait for a *guagua* (bus), the custom, usually, is to push or shove your way to the front. When it comes to water, at least in my community, the rules are different. I spent the morning collecting water for myself at the communal tap. The same *Doñas* who elbowed me aside in the *colmado* (corner store) last night made sure I got my water when it was my turn—first come, first served.

Water is one of the first things you offer a visiting Volunteer, water to drink and to wash off the dusty road. A good host is not stingy with his water even if he has to go through great effort to get it. A good guest notices how difficult it is to get the water and limits her usage accordingly. Even better, the guest helps replace the water used.

Volunteers from water-poor communities are often quick to notice the lavish habits of Volunteers from water-rich communities. “I can’t believe she used three full gallons to take a bath. You’d think she were washing an elephant.” On the other hand, Volunteers from water-rich communities are struck by the unreasonable stinginess of the water-poor. “He hoarded water like it was gold at Fort Knox, rationing it out drop by drop.”

I consider myself a decent host in this area. I keep about 15 gallons in my house almost all the time. Since the average Volunteer uses about three to four gallons a day, that’s a pretty good quantity.

I never tire of marveling at the combinations of strength and grace displayed by the women and girls who carry five gallons on their heads, with a gallon in each hand. My favorite is when they casually turn to chat with a neighbor, blithely ignoring the burden with which they are laden. I once watched a woman gracefully bend down and pluck a *peso* without spilling a precious drop!

I carry the water on my shoulder. I’ve assumed that the wide berth the folks give me is not due to unpleasant body odor, but because of the constant splashes that leap forth from my bucket. But I’m improving. Now, people rarely ask me if I’ve recently gone swimming after I’ve actually been carrying water. And the water source is one of the best places to catch the latest gossip. I have concluded that *chesmes* (rumors) are flying due to the occasional, “*No me digas!*” (“Don’t tell me!”) and “*Adquerosa!*” (“Gross!”) that escapes from their mouths while they are huddled over the tap.



I suppose that’s what I like best about the water collection process. It’s one of the places where I fit into the community best. My Spanish is what it is, and I do remain the *gringo*. Yet, I understand the rules at the tap and even some of the subtleties. The community sees I am on even ground with them and ask no privileges. It is a calm and orderly place. Maybe I will fondly remember the communal tap when I am reaching for the hot water faucet in the shower. And then again. . .

*Keith Talbot served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Dominican Republic from 1993 to 1995.*

