



# PART I: DEFINING CULTURE



*The nsima looks like mashed potatoes and you take a piece of it and roll it in your hand, indent it with your thumb, and scoop the meat or soup. I am still learning and usually have more food on my face and arms than in my stomach. Today I helped kill a chicken for the first time. It is supposed to be an honor, so I tried, but it made me feel sad. Then we plucked the feathers and are going to cook it. Very different from America's way of eating chicken!*

- Emily Harker<sup>6</sup>

*We're all on the same planet together, breathing the same air. We're all living in the same community.*

- Dan Barutta<sup>7</sup>

These two statements, one from a Peace Corps Volunteer during her first year of service and the other from a Returned Volunteer 14 years after his experience, speak volumes about the challenges and benefits of global education. Peace Corps Volunteers and other cross-cultural sojourners often begin their journeys thinking about differences, then return home understanding our similarities. Along the way they learn about culture—the daily living patterns and the most deeply held beliefs that a group of people have in common.

According to Ina Corinne Brown in *Understanding Other Cultures*:

*... no custom, belief or behavior can be understood out of its social or cultural context. That is, any item of behavior, any tradition or pattern, can be evaluated correctly only in the light of its meaning to the people who practice it, its relation to other elements of the culture, and the part it plays in the adaptation of the people to their environment or to one another. No custom is "odd" to the people who practice it.*<sup>8</sup>



Even younger students can appreciate the “normalcy” of cultural practices different from their own when they examine these within a framework that links the many factors (e.g., geography, history, belief systems) influencing cultural norms rather than study the practices as isolated oddities.

Cultures are systems of behaviors and customs passed from one generation to the next. The rules, language, religion, family systems, recreation, and education that a group of people share provide predictability and safety in their daily lives. When people are bound together by common beliefs and practices, they understand each other and the world around them has meaning.

As Brown suggests, a culture is a complex and evolving pattern of life, rooted in tradition as well as place. Culture is indelibly a part of each person's identity, but individuals also influence culture. It defines how we see ourselves and how we perceive others. How can we, then, ever understand a culture other than our own? One way is to view differences through a neutral framework that organizes cultural traits around a set of common functions. Over the years anthropologists have developed lists of cultural universals, or functions, that are found in some form in every culture on earth. For example, all cultures have customs and habits related to food. Peace Corps Volunteer Emily Harker's host may slaughter her own chicken while a U.S. family buys a precooked bird from a local fast-food restaurant, but each action has the same function—to acquire food.



The first activity in this section is designed to help students understand the concept of culture. The second familiarizes students with a list of cultural features that can be used as a guide for exploring differences and similarities among groups. These activities have not been assigned specific grade levels because they offer important background for cultural studies at all levels. We recommend that people using this guide adapt these activities to meet the abilities of their students and incorporate them early in their teaching about culture.

The other lessons in this section will provide students with opportunities to reflect on the cultural patterns that shape their perceptions.

Activities are included to help students develop awareness of the many groups to which they belong and to build appreciation for the diverse cultures that share the planet.

# Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different<sup>9</sup>



**Class time needed:** 40 minutes

## Materials

An “Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different” worksheet for each student

## Objectives

- Students will be able to define culture.
- Students will recognize that some differences among people stem from culture and that some stem from personal traits and preferences.

## Introduction

This activity invites students to identify aspects of culture that influence our own behavior and sometimes make it difficult to understand the behavior of other people. Culture is a complex idea, and teachers should be prepared to offer students many examples of cultural features.

## Procedure

1. Write the following statements on the board.
  - No one is exactly like me.
  - I have many things in common with the members of my family and community.
  - Every person in the world needs some of the same things I need.
2. Ask students to share ideas that support these statements.
3. Point out that people in various groups often look at people in other groups as “different.”
4. Ask students to describe some of these differences. Why may people in one group behave differently from people in another?
5. Explain that many differences are related to culture—ways of living and beliefs that are handed down from one generation to the next. Working from the list on the board, explain that all people share basic needs (food, shelter, etc.), that each of us learns a set of behaviors and beliefs from the people we grow up with (the kinds of houses we build and foods we eat), and that each individual has unique talents and preferences (I’m good at math; I don’t like chocolate). When we talk about the behaviors and beliefs that a group of people have in common, we are talking about culture.
6. Ask students to complete the worksheet in order to help them identify aspects of their own cultures. Explain that each student should answer each question with one sentence or phrase. Then students should rank each item as to how important they feel it is to their culture.
7. After students have completed the worksheets, ask them to share their answers in small groups. Ask the groups to compare and contrast various aspects of their individual cultures.
8. In some schools, students may share many cultural traits. Some students may not identify with a particular ethnic or foreign culture. Ask students if they think there is one American culture. Discuss characteristics of your region (immigration patterns, geographic location, etc.) that might explain the similarities and differences among student responses to the worksheet.

**Debriefing**

Use the following questions to focus discussion on the role culture plays in forming our behaviors and beliefs.

1. How does it feel to know you are part of a cultural group that shares many ideas and beliefs?
2. What happened when you compared your worksheets? How many different cultures are represented in the class?
3. What did you learn from this activity?
  - Does culture explain why other people sometimes seem “different”?
  - What are some things that you do that you learned from your culture?
  - Are all of our behaviors related to culture? (Possible answer: Some behaviors are related to individual preferences and personality traits.)
4. What can you do to learn about and understand other cultures?
5. What if you were part of another culture? How might you be different from the way you are now?
6. How can we use what we learned in this lesson to improve our community?

**Extending the Ideas**

- Have students explore their community’s history to trace the influence of various cultures. Who were the original inhabitants of the area? Over the years, what other cultural groups have come to the area? What are some of the features of your community that represent these groups (e.g., architecture, place names, types of restaurants, religious organizations)?
- Ask students to imagine a community that allowed no resident to display or practice any element of cultural identity. Have students write short stories describing a typical day in such a community. When students have completed their stories, ask volunteers to read their compositions. Are the fictitious communities desirable or interesting places to be? Would it be possible or desirable to create such a community in reality?

## Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone Is Different

**Directions:** Write one sentence or phrase about each topic. Then rate each item from 1-10 (1 is most important) according to what value this topic has in your culture.

### Rank

\_\_\_\_\_ What language(s) do you speak?



\_\_\_\_\_ What is your religion?

\_\_\_\_\_ What music do you listen to?

\_\_\_\_\_ What dances do you know?



\_\_\_\_\_ What foods do you eat at home?

\_\_\_\_\_ What do you wear on special occasions?

\_\_\_\_\_ What holidays and ceremonies are important?



\_\_\_\_\_ What is most important to you?

\_\_\_\_\_ What things do you believe are right and wrong?

\_\_\_\_\_ How important is your extended family?



The name of my culture is \_\_\_\_\_.



## The Iceberg<sup>10</sup>

**Class time needed:** 30 minutes

### Materials

“Features of Culture” handout for each student

### Objectives

- Students will identify features that all cultures have in common.
- Students will understand that culture includes visible and invisible features.

### Introduction

Culture has been compared to an iceberg. Just as an iceberg has a visible section (one-ninth of it) above the waterline and a larger, invisible section below the waterline, culture has some aspects that you can observe and others that you can only imagine or intuit. Like an iceberg, that part of culture that is visible (observable behavior) is only a small part of a much bigger whole.

### Procedure

1. Draw a large iceberg floating in the sea on the board. Ask students: What do you know about icebergs? Emphasize the fact that most of the iceberg is hidden from view.
2. Ask students to look over the “Features of Culture” handout. Explain that this list presents some of the features all cultures have in common. Pictures of people involved in everyday activities in various parts of the world will help you illustrate this idea.
3. Ask students to identify those features from the list that they can see in the behavior of people and those that are invisible. As students share their ideas, record them above or below the waterline on your iceberg drawing.
4. Point out that there is a relationship between those items that appear above the waterline and those that appear below it. In most cases, the invisible aspects of culture influence or cause the visible one. Religious beliefs, for example, are “seen” in certain holiday customs, and notions of modesty influence styles of dress. Ask students to find other examples of this from the iceberg representation of culture.

### Debriefing

Use the following questions to help students understand how the “Features of Culture” can be used to enhance their understanding of other cultures.

1. Does it make sense to compare culture to an iceberg? Can you think of other things to which the visible and invisible features of culture can be compared?
2. A Peace Corps Volunteer serving as a teacher in Mongolia had this to say about some photographs she sent to a group of students in the United States.

*Mongolians are very serious and composed in their expressions. In the city, this is beginning to change slightly. You’ll see a number of my students smiling. But this is not traditional. When I first came here, my friends asked me why Americans smile so much. They felt that Americans smile even at people they don’t like and that this was quite insincere.*

- Lisa Buchwalder<sup>11</sup>

What does this tell you about the visible and invisible features of culture? Does it explain why people from different cultures sometimes misunderstand each other?

3. Can you match this description of American and Mongolian behaviors to any of the items on your list of cultural features?
4. How can a list such as “Features of Culture” help you understand differences among people? (Possible answer: Differences may seem less strange or unusual when we understand them as variations on fundamental characteristics that all cultures have in common.)

### Extending the Ideas

- If your class is corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer through World Wise Schools, share the “Features of Culture” list with your volunteer and ask him or her describe some of the visible and invisible features of the host country.
- Revisit the first activity in this section. Ask students to match items from the “Everyone Has a Culture—Everyone is Different” worksheet to items on the “Features of Culture” list.



## Features of Culture

1. facial expressions
2. religious beliefs
3. religious rituals
4. importance of time
5. paintings
6. values
7. literature
8. child-raising beliefs
9. ideas about leadership
10. gestures
11. holiday customs
12. ideas about fairness
13. ideas about friendship
14. ideas about modesty
15. foods
16. eating habits
17. understanding of the natural world
18. concept of self
19. the importance of work
20. concept of beauty
21. music
22. styles of dress
23. general world view
24. concept of personal space
25. rules of social etiquette
26. housing



## The Multicultural Person<sup>12</sup>

**Class time needed:** 20 minutes

### Materials

No materials needed

### Objectives

- Students will identify themselves as members of many different groups.
- Students will observe differences without making value judgments.

### Introduction

Each of us belongs to many groups that function in ways similar to larger cultures. This exercise can be used to teach elementary school children about the many groups to which they belong. It attempts to teach the notion of differences in a neutral framework without evaluating those differences as being either good or bad.

### Procedure

1. The teacher should prepare for this activity by developing three lists of neutral characteristics that would be likely to divide the group. The first list should include characteristics related to objects worn or carried by the students, e.g., those wearing black shoes/brown shoes/other-colored shoes; those wearing red/those not wearing red; those with backpacks/those without backpacks. The second list may include more personal characteristics, such as hair color, eye color, birth month, or food and activity preferences. The third set will contain more obvious cultural differences, such as gender, national background, and race. The lists should be appropriate for the students in the class and designed in such a way that students are not singled out in embarrassing ways.
2. Move desks and chairs off to one side of the room to clear a large area in the center of the floor.
3. Assemble the students into a large group in the center of the room. Ask students to name a few characteristics that they all have in common (e.g., all of the students live in the same community and are members of a particular class in school). Help students identify ways that these characteristics set them apart from other groups. For example, all of the students in the school may be expected to follow a particular set of rules. All of the fifth grade students may take part in an annual field trip.
4. Then give a series of instructions that will divide the group according to items on the first list, such as: "All those wearing red move to the right side of the room, and all those not wearing red move to the left side of the room."
5. Reassemble the large group and continue to issue instructions that will divide the group in a series of ways.
6. After the group has become familiar with the exercise, move toward the more personal differences related to the second list.
7. End the exercise by using characteristics from the third list.



## Debriefing

Use the following questions to focus discussion around racial/cultural difference being just one of the significant components that define us.

1. How did it feel to learn that each of you is a member of many different groups? Were you surprised by the number of groups to which you belong?
2. How did you feel about being put into a group based on characteristics you couldn't change (e.g., eye color and hair color)?
3. What happened when we started dividing the class into subgroups according to the color of their clothing or shoes? What comments did you or your classmates make?
4. What did you learn by doing this exercise?
5. What do you think about judging individuals according to the color of their shoes or by what kind of food they like?
6. How does this exercise relate to how you get along with people? What kind of judgments do you make about people? How are your judgments similar to or different from food or clothing preferences?
7. What if we had done this exercise by giving different treatment to certain groups? How would you feel? How might other people in the group feel?
8. How can we use what we learned during this exercise in real life?

## Extending the Ideas

- Point out to students that each of us typically can identify with a number of groups. Provide several examples, such as “people who speak Spanish,” or “people who like to eat fish.” Have students brainstorm additional examples of groups. Then, ask students to list on a sheet of paper 10 groups to which they belong. Have students arrange the items on their lists in a hierarchy from the group with largest number of people to the smallest (e.g., from people who live on the planet Earth to people who hate French fries). Then have each student collect the signatures of other students in the class who belong to the same groups. Afterward, discuss the similarities and differences among the student lists. Did students in the class belong to many of the same groups? Do some of these groups identify members as part of a particular culture or cultures?



- This lesson could lead to a service-learning project. Discuss the multicultural nature of your class, school, and/or community. Have your students learn more about the cultures present in your area and then teach other students about them. They may make posters, bulletin boards, videos, or multimedia presentations to accomplish this. Use the Service-Learning Rubric found in the introduction to this guide to help you plan and execute a project that will have strong impact.

## Cuisine and Etiquette in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia<sup>13</sup>



**Class time needed:** 40 minutes

### Materials

- Three readings on cuisine and etiquette in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia
- Large sheets of paper or overhead transparencies

### Objective

- Students will make inferences about cultural norms from customs related to eating in three African countries.

### Introduction

Food is one of the most enjoyable ways to experience another culture. The focus of this activity about mealtime etiquette is on how manners reflect cultural norms. The descriptions were written by teachers from Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. **Note: This lesson could be used to supplement content on African agriculture or climate.**

### Procedure

1. Explain the concept of “staple food,” usually a carbohydrate that is eaten daily and is a major source of calories. Ask the students to identify the staple foods of other cultures they have studied (potatoes for Ireland, rice for Japan, maize for Mexico, etc.). What is our staple food? Some students may say hamburgers, but wheat, corn, or potatoes are more accurate answers. Explain that in their readings in this lesson they will learn that rice is the staple food for most of West Africa, maize (corn) for much of Eastern and Southern Africa, and *matoke* (ma-tok-a), or cooking bananas, for Uganda.
2. Ask students to describe the table manners they are expected to observe in their homes or in the school cafeteria. Who eats together? What do you do before eating? Are there rules about your hands or the way you sit? What do you do at the end of a meal? Why do we have rules about how to eat? Have you ever been in situations where the rules you are used to don't seem to fit?
3. Introduce the countries of Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. If the students are unfamiliar with their locations, point them out on a map of Africa.
4. Divide the class into three groups for Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia.
5. Have each group read its handout (i.e., the Zambia groups reads “Cuisine and Etiquette in Zambia”) to identify the mealtime behaviors that are considered acceptable or unacceptable in Sierra Leone, Uganda, or Zambia.
6. On large sheets of paper or overhead transparencies, each group should draw up a list of rules for mealtime that they think are observed in their assigned country. The list should include: a) roles for men, women, and children; b) proper behavior before, during, and after the meal; and c) taboos, or what not to do when eating in this country.
7. Have each group display its lists and report on its findings. As a whole class, compare etiquette among the three countries.

8. Remind students that the cultural behaviors that we can observe often provide ideas about what the group values or thinks is most important. For example, by observing that it is common for Ugandan families to say a prayer before eating, we may assume that religion is an important part of daily life. Work with the whole class to develop some ideas about the values represented by the behaviors they listed. Some examples follow.

- In Sierra Leone, if you visit a friend, he or she will almost always invite you to stay and eat. *(Possible values: sharing, hospitality)*
- In Sierra Leone, when everyone finishes eating, they wash their hands and thank the cook. *(Possible values: cleanliness, respect for adults and for work)*
- In Uganda, the responsibility of preparing the family's meals belongs solely to women and girls in the home. *(Possible value: clearly defined roles for men and women)*
- In Zambia, if visitors happen to have a meal with the family, they are given the honor of washing first. *(Possible value: guests are treated with honor)*

### Debriefing

Use the following questions to focus discussion on the meaning of culture.

1. What are some mealtime rules observed in your household that are similar to those observed in the African households described in your reading?
2. What are some mealtime habits or rules in your home that a visitor from one of these three African countries may find unusual? What could you do to make your visitor feel comfortable?
3. Zambian children learn lessons about manners from their mothers during mealtime. How did you learn what behavior is appropriate at mealtime?
4. What if you brought a guest from Sierra Leone to a fast food restaurant in the United States? What might your friend think about the type of food, the manner of serving it, and the way people eat?
5. Why are rules of etiquette so important? Whose rules do you follow when you're sharing a meal at someone's house? Whose rules do you follow in a restaurant?

### Extending the Ideas

- Simulate an African meal using the recipes provided below. Responsibilities for preparation should be divided among class members as you see fit. Some classes may prefer to prepare one dish; others may want to sample several. The easiest dish to prepare is fried plantains. Groundnut stew is simple to prepare, and Americans usually enjoy it. During the meal, follow the rules outlined in the readings as closely as possible. Following the meal, debrief the class by asking them to react to eating African style.
- Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Chris Davis who served in Guatemala from 1987 to 1989 remembers his first meal in his host country as an awkward one:

*I am trying to force down what they give me, none of it recognizable to me. Some kind of fried vegetable and small pieces of meat. The mother smiles broadly at me, turns to [scold] one of her older kids, then smiles at me again. Since I am unaware that I have to be the one to stand first, we sit at the table for over three hours.*

Encourage class members to tell their own stories about feeling awkward in a strange situation or having a hard time understanding someone else's ways of doing things. What did they learn from these experiences?

- Invite a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, an international exchange student, a recent immigrant, or students' family members to talk about food and manners in other countries.



## Cuisine and Etiquette in Sierra Leone



In Sierra Leone, the staple food is rice. “If I haven’t had my rice, I haven’t eaten today,” is a popular saying. Sierra Leoneans eat rice at least twice a day. Only women and girls prepare the food. They usually cook in big pots on a three-stone stove (three big rocks that support the pots). Firewood or charcoal is the main fuel except for some city dwellers who use gas or electricity.

If you visit a Sierra Leonean friend, he or she will almost always invite you to stay and eat. Usually the men and boys eat separately from the women and girls. Everyone washes their hands before they eat, and then they gather around in a circle with a huge dish of food placed in the middle. Sharing is an important part of life in Sierra Leone, and each person eats from the part of the big dish that is right in front of him or her. It is very bad manners to reach across the dish! Only the right hand is used for eating; the left hand is considered unclean.

When you are eating, you usually don’t talk. Talking shows a lack of respect for the food. It is rude to lean on your left hand while you are eating. People usually drink water only after a meal is over.

The oldest males get the choicest food, the best pieces of meat or fish. Then the young males take the next best pieces, and then finally the women and girls get any meat or fish that is

left. Sometimes the women and girls wait until the men and boys have had all they want before they eat.

Rice is eaten with the hands by squeezing or rolling it into a ball, dipping it into the sauce, and then popping it into the mouth. If rice falls from your fingers or mouth, you don’t put it back in the dish. When everyone finishes eating, they wash their hands and thank the cook.

Many ingredients go into sauces or stews to go with rice. The most popular sauces are made of greens, especially cassava or potato leaves. Other common ingredients include palm oil, onions, tomatoes, yams, and red peppers. Sometimes groundnut (peanut) oil or coconut oil are used. Other sources of protein that go into the sauces include groundnuts and beans, as well as fish, chicken, goat meat, or pork. Seafood, such as oysters, lobster, and crab, may also be used. Most of the calories, however, come from rice, which is eaten in large quantities.

Fruits in Sierra Leone include oranges, bananas, papaws (papayas), lemons, avocados, guava, watermelon, mangoes, and pineapples. Fruit is usually eaten as a snack. Plantains are often sliced and fried as chips for a snack. Tea and coffee are drunk in some parts of the country for breakfast. Cokes and beer are popular with many people who can afford them.





## Cuisine and Etiquette in Uganda



In Uganda, the staple food is *matooke* (cooking bananas). Other food crops include cassava (manioc), sweet potatoes, white potatoes, yams, beans, peas, groundnuts (peanuts), cabbage, onions, pumpkins, and tomatoes. Some fruits, such as oranges, papaws (papayas), lemons, and pineapples, are also grown.

Most people, except for a few who live in the city centers, produce their own food. The responsibility of preparing the family's meals belongs solely to women and girls in the home. Men and boys of age 12 and above are not even expected to sit in the kitchen, which is separate from the main house. Cooking is done on an open fire using wood for fuel.

Most families eat two meals a day. The two meals are lunch and supper. Breakfast is just a cup of tea or a bowl of porridge.

When a meal is ready, all members of the household wash their hands and sit down on [floor] mats. Hands have to be washed before and after the meal because most Ugandans eat with their hands. At mealtime everybody is welcome; visitors and neighbors who drop in are expected to join the family at a meal.

Food is served by women. They cut it up into small pieces for each member of the family. Sauce, which is usually a stew with vegetables, beans, butter, salt, and curry powder, is served to each person on a plate. Sometimes fish or beef stew is served.

Normally a short prayer is said before the family starts eating. During the meal, children talk only when asked a question. It is bad manners to reach for salt or a spoon. It is better to ask someone sitting close to it to pass it. It

is also bad manners to leave the room while others are still eating.

Everyone respects the meal by staying seated until the meal is over. Leaning on the left hand or stretching ones legs while at a meal is a sign of disrespect and is not tolerated.

People usually drink water at the end of the meal. It is considered odd to drink water while eating.

When the meal is finished, everyone in turn gives a compliment to the mother by saying, "Thank you for preparing the meal, madam." No dessert is served after the meal. Fruits like papaw, pineapple, or sweet bananas are normally eaten as a snack between meals.





## Cuisine and Etiquette in Zambia



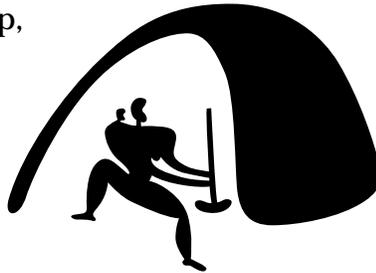
Zambia's staple food is maize (corn), and Zambians eat maize in several ways. When the corn is ripe but still green, it can be roasted and boiled. When it is dry and hard, it can be fried or boiled. It can also be pounded slightly to remove the top layer and boiled either by itself or mixed with beans or groundnuts (peanuts). At times the maize is ground to a size a little bigger than rice and is cooked as rice. Finally, we have the fine cornmeal which is called mealie-meal in Zambia. This is used for making *nsima*, the most popular meal. *Nsima* is steamed cornmeal.

Meat from cows, goats, sheep, and fish are used in sauces over *nsima*. There are also a lot of vegetables put in sauces, such as leaves from beans, okra, cow peas, pumpkins, and cassava. Other vegetables eaten almost daily include onions and tomatoes.

All the cooking is done by the wife. *Nsima* is usually prepared for lunch and dinner and not for breakfast. In a traditional setting, boys from the age of seven eat with the man.

The mother eats with the girls and the younger boys. This is because all of the children below the age of seven are under the guidance of their mother. Almost all learning takes place through daily activities in the home. The mother, who is in charge of the kids' learning, has to take care of their learning at meal time. This is changing, especially in towns and cities. The trend now is that members of the family all eat together.

Before eating, everybody washes hands in order of the status of the members of the family: father first, then mother and others follow according to their ages. One of the younger children, boy or girl, passes a water dish around for others to wash their hands. If a visitor happens to have a meal with the family, he is given the honor of washing first.



It is rude to talk very much or loudly while eating. After eating, the family members wash their hands again in the same order. The wife and the young ones clear the table. Belching after a meal used to be a compliment, but not nowadays.



## Recipes



Each recipe serves four.

### Groundnut Stew

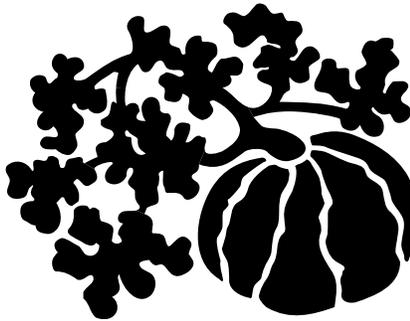
- 1 pound peanut butter
- 1 pound chicken or meat
- 1/4 pound onions
- 1/4 pound tomatoes diced
- 1 can tomato paste
- salt and pepper
- 1 cup milk
- cayenne pepper (optional)

Cut the chicken or meat into 1-inch pieces and season with salt. Brown the meat, then add the onion, tomatoes, tomato paste, milk, and red pepper. Simmer for half an hour. Then add the peanut butter. Simmer until the sauce is very thick. Serve with rice.

### Matoke

- 10 to 20 *matoke* (green cooking bananas—plantains may be used)
- 5 to 7 cups water, depending on the quantity of bananas

Peel the bananas and wash them in cold water. Put into a pot, add the water, and cover. Boil for 10 minutes, then reduce the heat and continue to cook. The mixture will turn yellow when well-cooked. Drain the water. Mash the bananas with a wooden spoon. Wrap the mashed food in foil and place on a steaming basket. Place the steamer inside a large pot and add water. Steam on low heat for 20 minutes. Serve while hot.



### Nsima

- 1 cup cold water
- 3 cups hot water
- 2 to 3 cups corn meal

Boil water in a saucepan. Make a paste using some of the meal with the cup of cold water. Add the paste to hot water. Stir with a wooden spoon until thickened like porridge. Cover the saucepan and simmer for some time (about 15 minutes). Lower the heat a little. Remove the lid and gradually add corn meal, stirring constantly and flattening any lumps that may form. Continue to add meal and stir until *nsima* thickens to the desired consistency (some people like it thin, and others prefer it thick). Cover and reduce heat to very low.

Leave for a few minutes to allow further cooking. Stir the *nsima* once again and serve in a slightly wet serving dish. Cover to keep it warm. Serve with meat, poultry, fish, or vegetables.

### Fried Plantains

- 4 plantains (or green bananas)
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- peanut oil
- black pepper

Cut the bananas into slices and cover with lemon juice. Cook the slices quickly in very hot peanut oil until crisp. The bananas may be sprinkled with pepper.



## Chatter<sup>14</sup>

**Class time needed:** 40 minutes

### Materials

- Photocopy of the “Chatter” etiquette sheets
- A whistle and a timer to help you pace the game

### Objectives

- Students will experience the challenge of using and interpreting unfamiliar communication patterns.
- Students will identify strategies for successful cross-cultural communication.

### Introduction

Language is one of the most obvious and one of the most complicated defining features of a culture. And language—vocabulary, syntax, intonation—is but one aspect of the complex communication patterns that groups use to share meaning and experience. Kristyn Leftridge<sup>15</sup> served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco from 1991 to 1992. In the example to the right from the Peace Corps’ collection of “Hello Data,” she describes the difficulty of a simple greeting.

“Chatter” is a simulation game that asks players to pay attention to the subtleties of communication and to discuss how these influence our perceptions of individuals and groups.

### Procedure

1. Cut the photocopied etiquette sheets into strips and distribute as wide a variety of individual strips as possible.
2. Move the classroom furniture to the sides of the room so that the players have plenty of room to move around.
3. Help the students organize themselves into groups of four to six members. Select another group of three to four students to act as observers.
4. Shuffle the etiquette sheets, and give one to each student. Ask the students to keep their sheets hidden from each other and to study them carefully.
5. Explain that they will be attending a party with guests from many different cultures. The etiquette sheets define the roles that students will play as they make small talk at the party. The observers will look for behaviors indicating frustration or special efforts participants make to understand the “rules” of communication.

*In Moroccan Arabic the standard basic greeting is “Salam oo-alley koom.” It translates literally to “Peace be unto you.” The appropriate response is “Oo-alley koom salam,” meaning “And unto you peace.” But knowing the words is not enough. Greetings in Morocco will go on for many minutes—sometimes up to half an hour—as the parties ask about each other’s health, faith in Allah, families, work, etc. Moroccans will shake hands when greeting, touching the heart immediately after the handshake to show that the greeting is sincere. Sometimes instead of touching the heart, they will kiss their own hand after the handshake as a sign of particular esteem or affection. In the case of family or close friends, women greeting women and men greeting men will kiss each other’s cheeks back and forth a few times. In the north, it’s right cheek—left cheek—left cheek. In other parts of the country, it could be right—left—right, or right—left only. How much you kiss cheeks also depends on how much you like the person, or how long it’s been since you’ve seen them. The longer it’s been, the more kisses are exchanged. Women and men who are not related NEVER kiss.<sup>16</sup>*

6. Ask the members of each small group to talk with each other using the conversational rules described on their etiquette sheets. Students should not divulge the contents of their sheets. The teacher and the student observers should watch the groups as they converse, looking for behaviors to discuss during the debriefing.

7. Blow a whistle after seven to 10 minutes and ask the students to form themselves into new groups.

8. These groups should start a new conversation, with the students continuing to follow the instructions on their etiquette sheets. Again, the teacher and observers should watch the groups as they converse, looking for changes that might occur between the two sessions.



9. Blow the whistle again after another seven to 10 minutes and ask the students to stop talking.

10. Tell them that there are 12 different etiquette sheets and that it is possible for more than one person in each group to have the same sheet. Ask the students to think back silently about their conversations and to guess what instructions each player had on his or her sheet. After a brief pause, ask the participants to take turns telling their guesses to the rest of the groups. However, no student should confirm or deny anyone's guesses at this time.

11. Tell the participants that some etiquette sheets said, "Be yourself." Ask the students to try to guess if any member of the group was acting as himself or herself.

12. Ask the students to tell one another what their etiquette sheet said. Were the students' guesses accurate?

### Debriefing

Use questions such as the following to guide discussion about the challenges of cross-cultural communication. Be sure to ask the student observers to share their observations of group and individual behavior to help give participants a broader view of the activity.

1. How did you feel about this exercise? Were you relieved or disappointed when it came to an end? Why?
2. What happened during the simulation? Did any of you feel embarrassed or frustrated during the conversations? What made you feel that way? Was it the way your etiquette sheet asked you to behave? Or the way someone else was instructed to behave? Why do you think you reacted the way you did?
3. Did you consider any of the behavior patterns in this exercise rude or offensive? If so, was it one of your behaviors or someone else's? Why did this behavior bother you?
4. What were the differences between your conversations in the first group and in the second group? Why do you think these differences occurred? Does this happen in real-life situations?
5. Did you correctly guess the etiquette-sheet behaviors at the conclusion of the activity?
6. Discuss the following statements. Ask students whether they agree or disagree with each statement. Ask them to use examples of their experiences from the game and from real life to support their opinions.
  - There is more to a conversation than just the words and sentences.
  - We tend to judge other people based on what we think is "normal."

- Behaviors that we consider to be bizarre or rude may be acceptable or polite in other cultures.
- Sometimes you may feel negative about another person because his or her conversational style seems strange.
- After time, people get used to unusual behaviors and begin paying more attention to the topic of the conversation.

7. What real-world situations are represented in this game? What do the etiquette sheets represent?
8. Can you think of any conversational behaviors you exhibit that others might find distracting or strange? (Hint: Do teenagers have ways of communicating that adults don't understand?)
9. What might have happened if the conversations had lasted for 45 minutes instead of 10?
10. What would have happened if you had been asked to solve a homework problem with the other members of your group?
11. What advice would you give a friend who is about to participate in this activity for the first time?
12. What if you were to visit a foreign country? Based on your experiences during this activity, what are some things you could do to make communication easier?

### Extending the Ideas

- Use World Wide Web resources to help students communicate with people from around the world. Use a search engine to locate information. Have students begin their searches with broad terms like “culture” or “language” and refine the search to meet their specific interests as they browse.
- The World Wise Schools program web site <<http://www.peacecorps.gov>> offers resources for teaching and learning about various countries and cultures. Use the suggestions found in “Volunteer Views” for use of the “Hello Data.”
  - Find other countries where a greeting is accompanied by gestures or has a specific traditional format. Give your ideas about what these greetings indicate about the culture of the people. Prepare an oral presentation for your classmates detailing your findings and including a demonstration of the greetings you have discovered.
  - List the ways in which people greet each other in the United States, adult to adult, adult to child, and teenager to teenager. Be sure to include any regional and/or ethnic variations. Explain any accompanying gestures or mannerisms. Prepare a role-play that shows how you would teach a visiting foreign student how to say hello to different groups of adults and young people in the United States.
- View one or more World Wise School *Destination* video tapes. As students watch the tape, they should note customs, objects, and ideas that are unique to the cultures depicted. After viewing the tape, ask students to react to what they have seen. For example, would students feel comfortable shopping in a crowded outdoor marketplace? What adjustments would American families have to make in order to live in a yurt as many families in Kyrgyzstan do? Then work with the whole class to categorize their notes according to “Features of Culture,” found in the introduction to this section. Have students discuss whether these universals help them view cultural differences more objectively.

## "Chatter" Etiquette Sheets

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It is impolite to shout, so talk softly. Whisper. Even if people cannot hear you, do not raise your voice.



-----

It is impolite to talk to more than one person at the same time. Always talk to a single person standing near you so that you can have a private conversation. Do not address your remarks to the group as a whole.



-----

It is important to get others' attention before you speak, so hold your hand above your head and snap your fingers before you make a statement or ask a question. That's the polite way to get everyone's attention.



-----

It is impolite to crowd people, so maintain your distance. Stand away so that there is at least an arm's length between you and the nearest person. If anyone gets too close to you, back off until you have achieved the required distance.



-----

It is friendly to share your thoughts and feelings without any inhibition, so make several self-disclosure statements. Describe your intimate feelings about different subjects. Ask personal questions of the other members of the group.



-----

It is impolite to stare at people, so avoid eye contact. Look at the floor or the speaker's shoes. Do not look at the speaker's face.



-----

It is polite and reassuring to reach out and touch someone. Touch people on the arm or the shoulder when you speak to them.



-----

It is important to show your enthusiasm, so jump in before other speakers have finished their sentences and add your ideas. Remember, it is rude to hold back your thoughts.



-----

It is impolite to speak impulsively. Whenever somebody asks you a question, silently count to seven before you give an answer.



-----

It is impolite to be aloof from others. Stand close to others until you nearly touch them. If someone backs off, keep moving closer.



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Be yourself! Behave as you would normally behave at an informal party.



## Where I Come From

**Class time needed:** 20 minutes for initial steps and then two to three additional classes for research and presentation

### Materials

Paper and pencils

### Objective

- Students will examine their own family traditions to identify how beliefs, values, and customs vary from culture to culture and how those traditions influence their perception of other groups.

**Note:** This activity asks students to share potentially sensitive aspects of their personal lives. Help students find “safe” ways to participate and set clear expectations for mutual respect in the class. Teachers should be sensitive to the needs of all students. Reassure students who live with single parents, grandparents, other relatives, or foster families that their experiences are valid and valuable contributions to this activity.

### Introduction

One aspect of cultural identity is the unique set of traditions held in common by a group of people. We can observe evidence of these traditions in day-to-day activities as well as in the ways groups celebrate special occasions. Introduce or review this concept with students and help them generate concrete examples of traditions commonly associated with special events in the United States (fireworks on Independence Day, feasts on Thanksgiving, valentines on February 14, etc.).



Then introduce the idea that families are unique cultural groups. While a specific family will share many traits common to larger groups (religious beliefs, clothing styles, language, etc.), each family develops its own set of traditions that sets it apart from other families. These traditional activities become so firmly a part of “the way we do things” that we sometimes feel puzzled or out of place when these activities are not present in other families.

### Procedure

1. Ask each student to write a list of special events that are observed by his or her family. Events can include annual holiday or religious observances as well as family milestones, such as birthdays and anniversaries. Some families have special traditions for observing annual events, such as the first day of the harvest season, or for celebrating special accomplishments, such as graduating to a new grade level.
2. For each item on the list, students should complete this sentence: On this day my family always \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Ask each student to share one or two sentences with the rest of the class. Be sure students understand that they need not share information that is considered private or sacred. Discourage students from making judgmental comments about others' lists.
4. Finally, ask the class to comment on the variety of events celebrated by the families represented in the room. Do some students celebrate special events in similar ways? What do their lists show about what the students and their families value? Which family traditions are truly unique and which are connected to community, ethnic, or religious traditions observed by larger cultural groups?

5. For homework, ask each student to choose one family tradition to explore more fully through interviews and library research. Students can compile this information into oral or written reports for the class. Work with students to formulate a set of interview questions that will encourage family members or acquaintances to discuss their traditions with students. Possible questions include:

- When did this tradition begin?
- Is this tradition associated with special food, clothing, decorations, music?
- Who participates in this event? Do individuals have specific roles or responsibilities?
- Has this tradition changed over the years? What led to these changes?
- Is this tradition associated with a particular season, climate or location? Would it be the same at another time or place?
- How do other family members feel about this tradition? Why do they think it is important?
- How would you feel if you were unable to participate in this event with your family?

### Debriefing

Discuss with students how family or community traditions contribute to each individual's idea of what is "normal" and important. Help students extend this idea into their thinking about and accepting the traditions, values, and beliefs of other families and larger cultural groups.

### Extending the Ideas

- If your class is corresponding with a Peace Corps Volunteer, have students explore how families in your Volunteer's host country celebrate special events.
- Volunteer Michelle Fisher<sup>17</sup> commented on the importance of family gardens to the people she knew in Vilnius, Lithuania:

*Most of the people here live in apartment buildings. Everyone has their own flat, or apartment, and typically they all have three rooms. Everyone has a garden, and they must have a garden because if they don't they're not going to eat in the winter. Most people have a pear tree, a plum tree, and an apple tree, strawberries—all kinds of vegetables and potatoes. Potatoes are the staple of the diet here. Kibelisks and cepilini are two traditional Lithuanian meals both made from potatoes. When it's time to harvest the apples, the people pick all the apples from the trees and all the apples from the ground and begin to make different things out them. Sometimes they make applesauce, apple cheese, apple cake, and they dry the apples. Just about a month ago every house I'd walk into had big strings of little cut apples strung throughout the house.*

*The gardens are usually 10 to 15 kilometers outside the town, and so in order to get to them the families must take a bus. The buses run once a day during the week, and so they have to spend the night. On the weekends they run two to three times a day. All the gardens are together, and they're all the same size. I'd say they're probably one-eighth to one-half acre.*

*A garden actually plays another role besides being a source of food. It keeps the family together because the children are needed to work there. So every weekend the children are taken there. Most people don't have cars, so they take the bus and stay over the weekend. Children stay with their parents and work. When they go to the garden, they usually go mushroom picking in the forests nearby. It's interesting because they usually break off—the sons tend to go with the father and the daughters all go with their mother. And so they have contests of who will get the most mushrooms. And it's a nice time because the parents are able to bond with their children. They work so much here that they don't have time to just sit and talk with their kids. When they're out in the forest, they tell the children what life was like, what life's going to be, what they need to get an education. And they just talk about family things. You know, they're able to bond.*

- Ask your students if any of their family traditions revolve around working together. Compare their responses to Michelle Fisher's comments about Lithuanian families.
- Explore the World Wise Schools online resources <<http://www.peacecorps.gov>> to learn more about the traditions of the people who live in Peace Corps host countries.

**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?

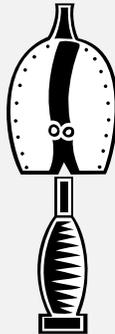
*Sharon:* No. What did you eat with rice today?

*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.*



## Endnotes

<sup>6</sup> Emily Harker served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Zambia from 1996 to 1998. This comment is taken from her correspondence with students at Eisenhower Middle School in Morristown, Pennsylvania.

<sup>7</sup> Dan Barutta served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Jamaica from 1981 to 1983. This comment is taken from an interview with him in March 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, Ina Corinne, *Understanding Other Cultures* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall/Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 140.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from *Promoting Harmony: A Compilation of Sample Lessons, Grades K-12* (Brooklyn: New York City Board of Education, 1992), by permission of the Board of Education of the City of New York.

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from *Culture Matters: The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook* (Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps, 1997), a book of activities designed to help Peace Corps Volunteers adapt to and understand the people of their host countries.

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Buchwalder served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mongolia from 1993 to 1995. This comment is taken from a letter she wrote to her World Wise Schools class in the U.S. dated November 9, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from *HOT TOPICS: Usable Research: Appreciating Differences: Teaching and Learning in a Culturally Diverse Classroom* by Evelyn Ploumis-Devick, Ph.D., with Joseph Follman (South Eastern Regional Vision for Education, 1993).

<sup>13</sup> The original version of this lesson appears in *Lessons From Africa: A Supplement to Middle School Courses in World Cultures, Global Studies, and World Geography*, Merry M. Merryfield, editor (Bloomington, Indiana: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> Adapted with permission from *Diversity Simulation Games* by Sivasailam Thiagarajan, (Amherst, Massachusetts: HRD Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Kristyn Leftridge served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco from 1990 to 1992.

<sup>16</sup> Additional "Hello Data" is available on the internet at the Peace Corps web site under "Volunteer Views" at <<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/dp/www1.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> Michelle Fisher served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Lithuania from 1993 to 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Adapted with permission from *Diversity Simulation Games* by Sivasailam Thiagarajan.

<sup>19</sup> Reprinted from *Peace Corps Times*, Number 2, 1995, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Reprinted from *Peace Corps Times*, Number 2, 1995, p. 36.