**Brief Encounters – Chispas and Pandyas**

**Exploring cross-cultural differences through simulation**

Description by Andrea MacGregor

Level: This is appropriate for middle school through adult

Time Required: 60-75 minutes

**Overview**:

* Everyone has a culture. It shapes how we see ourselves, others, and the world.
* Behavior is affected in large part by cultural beliefs and values.
* Culture is like an iceberg. Some aspects are visible; others are beneath the surface. Invisible aspects influence and cause the visible ones.

**Objectives**:

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

**Materials**:

* Cultural-norms sheets (below) for the Pandya and Chispa cultures (half of the players will receive Pandya sheets and the other half Chispa sheets)
* Recorded music

**Introduction**

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 participants to explore the interaction of two cultures, one outgoing and casual, the other more reserved and formal with different social norms.

**Instructions**

1. Make space so that participants can move around the room. Explain that they will adopt the cultures of two unfamiliar groups, interact with each other, and then examine their reactions.
2. If the group is large enough, appoint 1 or 2 people to act as observers. Divide the remaining participants into two groups, roughly the same size and equal numbers of males and females, if possible.
3. Ask the observers to watch closely as two different cultural groups, the Pandyas and the Chispas, interact. They may move among the participants, but they may not touch or speak to them. Their observations will help the group view the lesson with a wider perspective during 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 the Pandyas 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. The simulation: Announce that the two groups from imaginary countries have been invited to a party sponsored by an international exchange organization. The party organizers hope the two groups will get acquainted and learn about each other. They are welcome to mingle, dance, and talk. Let them know that after the event they will be expected to present culture reports about the others to the people back home.
8. Start the music and let the two cultures interact. The observers should walk among the groups, looking for behaviors that can be described and discussed during debriefing.
9. After 10 to 12 minutes, call time and end the party. Ask the group members to meet once more in opposite corners of the room and to make notes for their culture reports.
10. Give each group about 10 minutes to create a brief report. The Chispas report will describe Pandya behavior and the values that the Chispas people could expect to encounter if they visited the Pandya nation. The Pandyas will create a similar description of the Chispas culture.
11. Ask a representative from the Chispas to present the group’s report to the whole group. Then, after providing the Chispas with a copy of the Pandya cultural norms, ask a representative from the Pandyas to read that group’s norms sheet. Ask the Chispas to note how their report compared with the Pandyas’ cultural-norms sheet.
12. Repeat with a Pandya representative sharing the group’s report on the Chispas (and provide the Pandyas with the Chispas’ norm sheet).

**Debriefing**

Use questions such as the following to guide discussion of how our own 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 well did your group members observe the norms of their assigned culture? During the party, what did you do if a member of your culture did not observe a particular norm?
3. What are the real-world advantages of 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 non-judgmental terms.
* People acquire cultural norms fairly quickly.
* 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, what appears friendly to Chispas seems pushy to Pandyas.

1. What are some real-world situations that were illustrated during the game?
2. Pandya women were instructed to speak for the Pandya men. In what real-world situations does one group speak for another?
3. How would the game be different for players if the Pandya men dominated the women?
4. What lessons from this activity would you want to keep in mind if you were going to spend time in an unfamiliar culture?
5. Invite participants 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 different 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. It’s possible that going to a new school or having dinner at the home of a friend from another culture also could be a cross-cultural experience. Brainstorm ideas about what students can do to encourage clear communication in such situations.

Adapted from: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/bridges/lesson12/printable.html>

**Cultural Norms:**

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| **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. |

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| **You Are a Chispa**  **Chispa Cultural Norms**   * Chispas are informal and friendly. * Among Chispas, there are no gender roles. Men and women behave the same way. * Chispas are outgoing. They love to make contact with people from other cultures. * Chispa contacts are brief and casual. * Chispas are democratic and call everyone by his or her first name. * Chispas value cross-gender contacts more than same-gender contacts. |