PDF 1 - Everyday Cultural Differences.



CULTURAL DIFFERENCES & INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Everyday Cultural Differences

Greetings, punctuality, communication styles, food, personal space and social expectations.

A. Warm-Up – Same World, Different Habits?

Discuss:

1. Is arriving ten minutes late always considered rude?
2. Do people in every culture greet strangers in the same way?
3. Is it polite to refuse food when visiting someone's home?
4. Should people always say exactly what they mean?
5. Can a simple misunderstanding become a serious problem?

B. Cultural Comparisons

Read the situations and discuss how expectations might differ between cultures.

1. Greetings

In some places, people greet each other with a handshake. Elsewhere, hugs, cheek kisses, bows or verbal greetings may be more common.

- What greetings are common where you live?
- How might you greet someone you have just met?
- Can a greeting ever feel too formal or too informal?

2. Time and Punctuality

Some people consider arriving exactly on time essential. Others have a more flexible approach to social appointments.

- Is being late acceptable in certain situations?
- Would you react differently to a late friend and a late business partner?
- How should people handle different expectations?

3. Directness and Communication

Some communication styles are relatively direct, while others rely more heavily on context, tone and indirect language.

- Is direct communication always more honest?
- Can being too direct damage relationships?
- How do people politely disagree in your culture?

4. Food and Hospitality

In some households, guests are encouraged to eat more, while in others, refusing additional food is perfectly acceptable.

- What happens when guests visit your home?
- Is refusing food considered impolite?
- What should visitors do if they have dietary restrictions?

5. Small Talk and Personal Space

Topics such as family, work, money and personal relationships may be treated differently in different societies.

- Which topics are suitable for small talk?
- How much personal space do people generally expect?
- What questions might be considered too personal?

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C. Mini Stories – Cultural Misunderstandings

Read each story and discuss what might have happened.

Story 1: The Silent Meeting

Emma attends a business meeting in another country. She presents an idea and asks everyone for their opinions. Nobody responds immediately. She assumes they dislike her proposal and moves on.
Later, a colleague explains that the participants prefer to consider ideas carefully before responding.

Questions:

1. What did Emma misunderstand?
2. Why might silence have different meanings?
3. What could she have done differently?

Story 2: The Unwanted Gift

Daniel visits a colleague's family for dinner. His hosts offer him more food several times. He politely refuses because he is full. His hosts seem disappointed.

Questions:

1. What might have caused the misunderstanding?
2. Should Daniel have accepted more food?
3. How could both sides have handled the situation?

Story 3: The Very Direct Email

Aisha receives an email from an international colleague:
"Your report is incomplete. Please correct it and send it again."
She finds the message unnecessarily rude. The colleague, however, believes the email is simply clear and efficient.

Questions:

1. Is the email rude, direct or simply practical?
2. How could the message be rewritten?
3. Should people adapt their communication style when working internationally?

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D. Role-Play – A Visitor in Your Country

Work in pairs.

Student A: You are visiting a country for the first time. You want to understand local customs and avoid making mistakes.

Student B: You live in that country. Explain some everyday customs, but remember that not everyone behaves in exactly the same way.

Discuss:

- Greetings
- Visiting someone's home
- Restaurant behaviour
- Punctuality
- Appropriate conversation topics

Swap roles and choose another country.

E. Final Discussion – Cultural Awareness

1. Should visitors always adapt to local customs?
2. Is it possible to be culturally sensitive without knowing every custom?
3. Can humour cause misunderstandings between cultures?
4. What is the difference between cultural awareness and stereotyping?
5. What would you like foreigners to understand about your culture?

Challenge: Explain three everyday customs from your own culture to someone who has never visited your country.

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