Culture Mates

Materials:

2-4 Descriptions of Each Culture, A through G

Time:

20-30 minutes

Objective:

This activity is a highly interactive, cross-cultural simulation in which participants begin to understand how bonds develop with individuals within the same culture and heighten awareness of the feelings experienced by members of cultural minority groups.

Instructions:

Prior to class, create descriptive note cards of Cultures A through G. You need 2-4 of each culture.

1. Count and shuffle the number of culture descriptions that match the number of participants who will take part in the exercise
2. Introduce the exercise
3. Hand out one culture description card, face down, to each participant. Participants are not allowed to see each others cards.
4. Give participants time to read their descriptions and then ask them to get up and search for the other member(s) of their culture. Indicate that they must identify their “mates” by walking around the room and practice their culture’s traditional greeting behavior until they find one or more person(s) who display exactly the same behavior. When they find their “mate”, participants should stand together.
5. Allow 5 or so minutes for the meet and greet to take place, depending on how large your group is.
6. Stop the exercise. One by one, ask each group to demonstrate to the others the particular greeting tradition for the assigned culture. If some participants did not find their “mate” they should be able to do so now.

Note: If there are an odd number of students in the class you can have only one person in Culture D. This is the only culture that speaks. Then in your debriefing make sure you address how it felt to be the only person in that culture.

Debriefing:
From feelings of frustration or triumph, processing questions should reflect on how participants felt during their quest to find their culture mates. Your group may lead you in a general direction or more intimate centered discussion.

1. How did you feel when you were able to locate the other member(s) of your group?
2. How did you feel if you were unable to locate your mate(s) or did not have a mate?
3. If you did not have a cultural description, how did you feel as those around you greeted each other? What did you observe in terms of body language and facial expressions?
4. How did you feel if you realized a person who approached you (or whom you approached) was not a member of your group?
5. Did you find it difficult not to smile, or make eye contact, etc? Why or why not?
6. How do people sometimes relate to strangers who have different customs and traditions?
7. If you were a member of a cultural group that prohibited physical contact, how did you feel if someone tried to touch you? What happens in real life to many people whose culture prohibits being touched by strangers?
8. Do any elements of these fictional descriptions fit real cultures? Which elements? Which cultures?
9. Have you ever been in a situation in which you felt uncomfortable because you were not sure what the cultural norms were? What did you do? Was there anyone you could ask?
10. Have you ever been in a situation where someone had contact with your cultural group but did not know the norms for expected behavior? For example, at a wedding or a funeral? What did the person do? How did the others respond?
11. Discuss the transition to college and finding people who are similar to you. Where can you meet people with similar interests?

A key point to focus in on is that even a behavior as simple as a greeting is culturally determined. Lack of familiarity with cultural norms and traditions of others can lead to a lack of communication and failure to establish credibility with others.

If appropriate you want to describe actual cultural differences in greeting traditions, or other cultural behaviors that are manifested in daily human interactions. The point to make with the students is that they will encounter cultural differences and should be open to learning the differences and similarities in order to be more respectful of their new living and learning environment.
Culture A

In your culture, no one ever *speaks or smiles* when greeting another member of the group. Members approach one another *silently and solemnly*, bow and then *turn their backs* to one another.

Culture B

When greeting other members of your culture, no one ever speaks or smiles. Members approach one another *without speaking or smiling and never look the other person in the eyes*. Looking at another person directly in the eyes is considered highly insulting and you must avoid this behavior at all costs. Members of the culture always *extend their left hand* to shake hands with the other person.

Culture C

In your culture, *no one speaks when greeting*. However, *eye contact is very important*, and as members approach one another they *always* look the other person directly in the eyes and then shake hands with their *left hands*. If another person should avoid looking you in the eyes, speak to you, or try to shake your right hand, you should indicate, nonverbally, that his or her behavior is totally unacceptable.

Culture D

Members of your culture may greet one another any way they wish. However, they must always say the words “Hi Ho Hello” when they approach someone from the group.

Culture E

In your culture, *no one speaks, smiles, or looks the other person in the eye* when greeting. When members approach one another, they hold out their *right hands* to the other person and wait until the person either takes their hand or moves away.
Culture F

In your culture, members *do not speak* when greeting, but they *always smile and laugh* when they see one another and are generally very friendly, even to members of other cultures. It is important to remember, however, that your cultural norms *strictly forbid any physical contact* with another person. If someone from another culture tries to touch you, you must let them know (nonverbally) that you are offended and feel uncomfortable with their behavior.

Culture G

In your culture, members *are very happy people and laugh as much as possible*. They are extremely uncomfortable being around people who are not as happy as they are. To find out if someone else is a member of your group, you will have to *approach the other person and laugh out loud*. If the other person does not laugh in return, you will know that he or she does not belong to your culture. *If the person does laugh in return, you should immediately make physical contact with the other person*, for example, by hugging (if you are comfortable), shaking hands, or touching the person on the shoulder.