



Square pegs and round holes

- Developed by:** Clay McLeod
- Subjects:** Social studies, language arts
- Grades:** This lesson can be used for students in Grades 1–7, although it is best suited for intermediate students.

Brief overview

This lesson is a simple cross-cultural-contact simulation. Through experiencing and debriefing the potential that cross-cultural contact has for conflict and misunderstanding, students develop their perspective consciousness and recognize the need for tolerance, acceptance, communication, and compromise when interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It is inspired by and loosely based on (although quite simplified in comparison to) the “Bafa Bafa” cross-cultural-interaction simulation activity described in Pike and Selby, *In the Global Classroom 1* (Toronto: Pippin Publishing, 1999, pp. 189–195).

Themes

- respect for, and understanding of, human rights
- valuing diversity.

Global education objectives

- development of perspective consciousness.

Learning outcomes

It is expected that students will:

- understand the historically and geographically contingent nature of cultural practices and the potential that cross-cultural contact has for conflict and misunderstanding
- understand the potential that cross-cultural contact has for the celebration of diversity and learning about others
- demonstrate the ability to accept cultural practices that are different from their own
- explain ways people preserve and transmit culture
- describe ways social and economic organizations satisfy needs and wants in a variety of cultures
- assess the relationship between cultures and their environments
- compare individual rights and social responsibilities in various cultures
- describe ways cultures have sought to preserve identity and adapt to change
- identify connections between current cultures and ancient cultures (Grade 7).

Time required

- 1.5 hours or two 45-minute classes.

Required materials

- handout describing the “Square culture” (one for each student designated a member of the Square culture)
- handout describing the “Circle culture” (one for each student designated a member of the circle culture)
- worksheet entitled “Squares and Circles: Cross-cultural contact” (one for each student)
- objects that, through the students’ dramatic interpretations, can represent food.

Procedure

1. Explain that the students will be participating in a cross-cultural simulation, and that some students will belong to “Square culture,” while others will belong to “Circle culture.” The Squares have invited the circles for a meal, and each group will follow the cultural practices of their own group during the meal.
2. The Squares and Circles go to different locations to read the respective descriptions of their own cultures (but not the description of the other culture).
3. The Circles come to the location where the Squares are ready to host the imaginary (dramatically interpreted) meal.
4. The Squares and Circles to interact for a period of time.
5. Facilitate a discussion in which members of each cultural group
 - attempt to describe the cultural practices of the other group
 - express their feelings about the contact experience.

You may wish to pose the following questions to the students (since a number of the questions appear on the worksheet, you may wish to leave some unasked in the whole-group discussion in order to encourage individual reflection)

- What are the rules and practices of the other culture?
 - How did you feel during the meal?
 - What do you think about members of the other culture?
 - Why do you feel that way?
 - What could they have done differently to make contact go more smoothly?
 - What could you have done differently to make contact go more smoothly?
 - Would you have to break any of the rules of your culture to make contact go more smoothly?
6. The students complete the front of the worksheet “Squares and Circles: Cross-Cultural Contact.”

7. Pose the situation described on the back of the worksheet “Squares and Circles: Cross-Cultural Contact” to the students:
You’ve just received word that war has broken out between the Circle culture and the Square culture. You have been asked by the President of Roundland and the Prime Minister of Quadriland to make a plan for a peace treaty between these two countries.
8. Students work in mixed-culture groups of four to plan a peace treaty. You may wish to have students take responsibility for the following roles within their groups.
Group work roles
 - The **facilitator’s** role is to manage the group discussion and encourage other group members with positive feedback.
 - The **recorder’s** role is to write the group’s plan for a peace treaty.
 - The **problem solver’s** role is to mediate disagreements between group members.
 - The **checker’s** role is to make sure that all group members understand the concepts discussed and the group’s final product.
9. Once the groups have completed their rough plans for peace treaties, individual students can complete the back of the worksheet “Squares and Circles: Cross-Cultural Contact.”

Assessment and evaluation strategies

Criteria for group work during peace-treaty process:

- Group members should work together, be patient, use manners, listen to others, share their thoughts respectfully, share materials, speak kindly, and help others.

Criteria for responses on “Squares and Circles: Cross-Cultural Contact:”

- Responses should be accurate, complete, and appropriate.
- Responses should show the ability to make inferences about information that was not explicitly provided.

Criteria for participation in simulation:

- Students participate enthusiastically.
- Students make contributions to discussions in role (i.e. as if they are the person that they are role-playing).

Lesson resources

- “Doing CL (co-operative learning): Group Roles”
- www.archive.wceruw.org/cl1/CL/doingcl/grproles.htm
- “Circle Culture” and “Square Culture” descriptions
- “Squares and Circles: Cross-Cultural Contact” worksheet

Circle culture

You are a member of the Circle culture. In Circle culture, it is stylish to roll up your pant legs but out-of-style and rude to roll up your sleeves. Circles are fun-loving and boisterous. You like to laugh and make jokes, and you think it's polite to be loud and enthusiastic when meeting new people. When meeting new people, you like to shake hands enthusiastically (the right hand of course), and you like to clap people on the shoulder to show how much you like them. Talking about these or any other aspects of Circle culture to anyone is considered rude.

You have been invited to the homeland of the Square culture for a special meal.

Your hosts, the Squares, will be putting lots of effort into making a meal for you. In Circle culture, it is important to show your manners by eating with enthusiasm and eating everything that is served to you as fast as you can. Circles don't stop to talk while eating, because that would show that they don't like the food they have been served enough to focus on it, and that would hurt a Circle host's feelings. After you have finished eating, it is polite to thank your hosts enthusiastically and relax so that you can have a conversation and get to know your hosts. When visiting another culture, Circles are expected to follow the rules of Circle culture.

Square culture

You are a member of the Square culture. In Square culture, it is stylish to roll up your sleeves but out-of-style and rude to roll up your pant legs. Squares are quiet and shy and don't trust people who are loud and obnoxious, because such people are aggressive tricksters. When meeting new people, it is important to be quiet in order to show respect. When meeting new people, you like to gently shake the other person's left hand (right hands are dirty because they are used to put garbage in to the garbage can), but under no circumstances are you to make any other physical contact, since doing so might offend or scare the other person (it would shock you if someone were to hit you or slap you upon meeting you). Talking about these or any other aspects of Square culture to anyone is considered rude.

You have invited people from the Circle culture to your homeland for a special meal. Your guests, the Circles, will be travelling a great distance to visit you for the meal. In Square culture, it is important to show your appreciation of guests and generosity by serving more food than they can possibly eat, a little at a time, until your guest can eat no more. Squares consider it impolite for someone to thank them for a meal, since all Squares are happy to share meals with others, and to thank a Square for that would be making fun of that Square. Make sure that you show the Circles that you are interested in them by talking to them politely while they are eating; ask them lots of questions during the meal. After the meal is finished, it is polite ask your guests to leave, since you have nothing left to offer them. When visiting another culture, Squares are expected to follow the rules of Square culture.

Name: _____

Squares and Circles: Cross-cultural contact

What group were you a member of, and what rules did your culture follow?

What was the other group, and what rules do you think they followed?

How did you feel during the time you spent with them?

What could they have done to make contact with your group go better?

What could **you** have done to make contact with the other group go better? Would you have to break any of the rules of your culture?

