

# CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION THROUGH ROLE PLAY #3

(Time Middle)

## Anticipating and Resolving Conflict: Understanding the Cultural Values Behind Behaviors

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### Lesson Sketch

**Skills:** Students *read* articles on the cultures and greeting rituals of countries around the world; *select* two countries with radically different cultures and greeting rituals; *learn* how to introduce themselves in informal and professional settings in their countries of choice; *collaborate* with classmates to write a skit in which the behavioral differences between citizens of the two countries are highlighted, and in which these differences are then resolved; *write* an explanation of how and why the characters in the skit are clashing with each other, and how they learn to interact more effectively; *perform* the skit and the explanation for their classmates; *take notes* throughout this process on their responses to various introduction rituals; and *write* personal essays about the differences and similarities between the etiquette they just learned and what their own cultural backgrounds have taught them.

**Grades:** 12

**Time:** Three 90-minute classes plus homework essay assignment

**Featured Resources:** AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com articles on Maps, Country Snapshot, Cultural Overview, The People, Greetings and Courtesies, The Business Experience, and Language.

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### Inspirations

*"Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less." ~Marie Curie*

*"The reality today is that we are all interdependent and have to co-exist on this small planet. Therefore, the only sensible and intelligent way of resolving differences and clashes of interests, whether between individuals or nations, is through dialogue." ~The Dalai Lama*

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### Lesson Overview

Students perform greeting rituals from radically different cultures, and explore in performance and in writing how members of different cultures might at first misunderstand each other, then understand each other better; consider the cultural values that are expressed in greeting rituals; and write about how their family cultures of origin impact their experience of encountering unfamiliar cultures. Working collaboratively within small groups, students expand cultural understanding while improving reading comprehension, geographic knowledge, and geopolitical awareness. When students write about the similarities and differences between the greeting rituals of the world and the greetings they use at home and at school, they turn the lens of cultural awareness toward themselves and their own cultural tendencies, completing the conceptual circle of the exercise. By working with the connections between verbal expression, body language, and relational

expectations in various cultures, and by developing greater awareness of their own cultural tendencies, students become more sophisticated global citizens, better able to engage in dialogue with those different from themselves.

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## Lesson Steps

With small groups, students make a list of countries they are curious about. Students briefly skim articles on those countries to narrow down the list and choose two very different cultures to focus on. Students complete a prewriting exercise in which they make some guesses and some predictions about the countries they're about to study. Students read a series of articles about the countries of interest in order to develop a sense of cultural context, and note how the countries' reality is in line with and/or contradictory to their predictions. Students read specifically about how to introduce themselves in their countries of choice, and about the cultural values that are expressed in introduction rituals. Students write skits in which members of radically different cultures encounter each other with confusion, awkwardness, and offence based on misunderstanding the motivations for behaviors, then in which their characters from different cultures come to understand each other better. Students write narrator voiceovers for their skits that let the audience know what the motivations for behaviors are, even as the characters wonder what on earth the other person is doing. Students in the audience take directed notes throughout the skit performances, and following a series of prewrite exercises on family cultures of origin and how these might effect students' experiences with unfamiliar cultures, students write personal essays about the differences and similarities between the etiquettes they've just learned and what they've been taught to do at home and at school.

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## Standards Met

1. **Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Reading**
  - a. Key Ideas and Details 1, 2
  - b. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
  - c. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10
2. **Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Writing**
  - a. Text Types and Purposes 1, 2, 3
  - b. Production and Distribution of Writing 4, 5, 6
  - c. Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7, 8, 9
  - d. Range of Writing 10
3. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Reading**
  - a. Key Ideas and Details 1, 2
  - b. Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7
  - c. Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10
4. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Writing**
  - a. Text Types and Purposes 1, 2, 3
  - b. Production and Distribution of Writing 4, 5, 6
  - c. Research to Build and Present Knowledge 7, 8, 9
  - d. Range of Writing 10
5. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Speaking and Listening**

- a. Comprehension and Collaboration 1, 2
- b. Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas 4, 5, 6
6. **Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchors for Language**
  - a. Conventions of Standard English 1, 2
  - b. Knowledge of Language 3
  - c. Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4, 6
7. **National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards for the English Language Arts:**
  - a. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
8. **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies:**
  - a. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9

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## Supplies

- Computer access sufficient for students to work in groups of four
- Access to AtoZWorldCulture.com or AtoZtheWorld.com
- Access to online language references like BBC Languages, Omniglot.com, and Forvo.com
- Dictionaries
- Notebooks, pens, etc.
- Flashcards for presentation notes

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## Instructional Plan

### Student Objectives

#### Students will:

- Improve reading comprehension skills, abstract thinking skills, and speaking/writing skills.
- Increase global awareness by working with texts on world cultures and world history.
- Begin to develop a sense of shared cultural tendencies that define regions around the world.
- Begin to develop a sense of which languages are spoken in what regions, and have brief encounters with languages other than English.
- Increase cultural awareness and self-awareness by encountering their own cultural tendencies, and considering how these tendencies condition responses to unfamiliar cultures.
- Improve skills in understanding and presenting complex sequences.
- Collaborate with classmates, encountering and bridging cultural differences within their own groups.
- Practice taking notes and prewriting, then incorporating these incremental steps into a fully realized essay.
- Write personal essays about their experiences, considering how their own cultural values conditioned their expectations regarding greeting etiquettes.
- Become more sophisticated global citizens able to engage in dialogue with those different from themselves.

## Teacher Introduction

- Introduce students to the idea that “polite” behavior is different from place to place, because what’s considered “polite” is culturally determined.
- Let students know that small class activities will culminate in a performance and a larger writing assignment—those who participate in small preparatory steps along the way will find the performance and the final writing assignment much easier.
- Establish expectations for prewriting and preparatory steps toward the final writing assignment: prewriting is to be taken seriously as a time to generate ideas, but it is not the time to agonize over perfect word choice or perfect spelling. Prewriting is a time to generate, not revise—revision will come later.
- Guide students in forming groups of 3—mixed-gender groups are ideal for this exercise.
- Direct groups to move to shared work stations.
- When students choose what countries they will investigate, encourage groups to cover countries in different regions, vs. covering countries all in the same region. This is helpful because a stronger contrast in greeting behaviors will be experienced by students working on Tanzania, Cambodia, Brazil, and France than by students working on Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and France.

## Student Directions

### Which country would you like to visit? Select a country

- Go to [AtoZWorldCulture.com](http://AtoZWorldCulture.com) or [AtoZtheWorld.com](http://AtoZtheWorld.com).
- Peruse list of countries.
- Identify four countries, each in a different region of the world, that you are curious about. For example: South Africa, Yemen, Cambodia, and Australia. Skim materials for these countries.
- Choose the two countries that seem most culturally different from each other to mentally visit for this exercise.

### Learn about your chosen country: Comparing expectations to reality

- Go to Maps—understand more precisely where countries are.
- Place your bets: Pre-writing #1
  - Jot down answers to the following questions for each country: Based on the country's location, what are your expectations regarding the culture? In what language/s do you guess that people greet each other? Do you guess that most residents have their roots in this country, or do you expect a large recent immigrant population? Do you expect that most residents are of the same ethnic background and religion, or do you expect a high degree of ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity in this place? What do you suppose is important to residents of this country? Do you imagine an intricate ritual of greeting, or a loose, laid-back greeting style? What role do hierarchy and social status play in the culture's greeting rituals? Do you expect that greeting etiquette will be different depending upon social status, gender, age, or degree of relationship? Do you expect to find large differences between what's expected in informal, formal, and business settings, or do you expect greeting etiquette in this country to be fairly uniform for most situations? Do you expect those of different cultural backgrounds within the country to greet each other differently? Any specific gestures or words you expect to see in their greetings?
- Read the articles Country Snapshot, Cultural Overview, and The People for each country.
- Place your bets: Pre-writing #1A
  - So far, how do your guesses before reading compare to the lives of these countries' citizens? What is as you expected, and what surprises you?

- Read the article Greetings and Courtesies, and the article The Business Experience.
- Place your bets: Pre-writing #1B
  - What surprises you so far about the ways in which people greet each other in each country? What is in line with the expectations you wrote about earlier? How would you describe the differences in how people greet each other in informal, formal, and business settings?
- Compare and Contrast Two Cultures: Prewriting #1C
  - Jot down your initial thoughts regarding the similarities and differences you see between the two cultures. How are expectations for polite behavior in social and professional circumstances alike and different?

## S e s s i o n   T w o

### Teacher Introduction:

- Reconvene groups and remind students that these reading and prewriting exercises are building toward a performance and a writing assignment—both of which will be easier to complete if a good-faith effort is made on the preparatory steps.
- Try to keep student groups moving on pace with each other—when the first groups get to the vocabulary practice steps, the volume level in the room will rise, which could be distracting to those trying to read and write. Similarly, script writing is bound to be an animated activity.
- When students arrive at the step of learning the vocabulary of their chosen countries, assist as necessary with finding the supplemental Web materials and audio files for word pronunciation that are listed in the Supplies section.

### Student Directions

#### Understanding cultural values

- Return to the article Greetings and Courtesies. Observe the etiquette variations in your countries.
  - With your group, take notes on each country: Does the nature of polite behavior vary depending on social class? Age? Gender? Degree of relationship between speakers (family members vs. people meeting for the first time)? Religion? Language? Region? Business setting vs. social setting? Some combination of these factors? Other factors?
- Working together with your group, revisit the Greetings and Courtesies article and the article The Business Experience for each country, looking for value words that connect to greeting behaviors.
  - Look for words like: egalitarian, authoritarian, patriarchal, matriarchal, respectful, polite, outgoing, welcoming, hospitable, private, reserved, open, laid-back, cautious, organized, detail-oriented, flexible, relaxed, relationship-oriented, etc.
  - With your group, take some notes about what you think is important to people's relationships in these two countries, based on what they prioritize in their greeting etiquette (you'll use these notes later to make a presentation to your classmates). Do people more highly value maintaining differences in social status, or putting everyone on the same footing? Recognizing differences in age? Recognizing differences in professional status? Recognizing family relationships? Expressing concern for and interest in all the members of each other's families? What do people look for in personal relationships vs. business relationships?

#### Learning greeting vocabulary

- Return to the article Greetings and Courtesies for each country. What sense can you make of the words in language/s other than English presented in the Greetings article so far? With your group, take a guess aloud as to how these greetings sound when spoken.

- Go to Language. In the Essential Terms glossary, use the phonetic guide to refine your pronunciation of some key greeting words. Practice greeting words aloud with your group. For further assistance, visit BBC Languages online, Omniglot.com, or Forvo.com to download sound files of common words and expressions. For example, Google "Omniglot useful Icelandic phrases" or "Forvo Icelandic pronunciation" to reach these audio files.

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### Write the script & Rehearse

- Mission: Present a scenario in which people from different cultures confuse and/or accidentally offend each other with their well-intended but very different greeting styles.
- Here's a famous real-life example:
  - In 1981, Australian cricket player Dennis Lillee created a minor international scandal when he met the Queen of England and greeted her by saying, "G'day, how ya goin'?" Australia is famous for its egalitarianism, so for Australians, respect is often expressed by treating others as equals. In Britain's more hierarchical society, respect is often expressed by behaviors that preserve hierarchal distinctions. So the Australian cultural value of egalitarianism directed Lillee to disregard any surface status distinctions between himself and the queen, and to speak to her as an equal, while the British value of preserving status distinctions caused the queen and her admirers to expect a very different greeting from Lillee. Therefore, Lillee's behavior was decried in Britain, but many Australians defended his greeting as an authentic expression of the Australian way.
- To find your own Dennis-Lillee-vs.-the-Queen moment, consider your two countries' specific greeting variables that you wrote about in your notes. For example, in Belgium, greetings vary based on region, language, gender, and situation. (Therefore, two French-speaking women who are old friends chatting in the bakery line address each other differently than would a Flemish-speaking man and woman meeting for the first time at a professional conference.)
- Look for a variable that is the same in both countries, but for which the expected behavior is very different. For example, the variable of gender. An American woman banking executive probably expects to be treated as her male colleagues are treated. Yet in Saudi Arabia and some other parts of the Middle East, she might extend her hand when meeting a strictly observant Muslim male colleague, only to find that he won't shake her hand—because to him touching a woman in public is inappropriate. Both parties are sincerely trying to be courteous, yet both parties are doing something the other party thinks is inappropriate and/or rude. Now we have two people in an awkward moment of cultural conflict—she's standing there holding her hand out for a handshake, and he won't take her hand. What do these two people do next?
- Choose your own scenario to demonstrate for the class.
- Using the Greetings and Courtesies article as your guide, prepare to demonstrate how the people in your scenario encounter each other.
- Your team will divide into two actors, one translator, and one narrator.
- Let's envision the completed performance, then back up and take the steps to get there one at a time. Here's what you're aiming for:
  - The narrator will describe the scenario—"An American woman meeting a Saudi Arabian man at a conference"—and then the two actors will demonstrate their moment of greeting, which will end in awkwardness or confusion or offence. If the two parties meeting each other do not speak the same language, one member of your group will act as translator. When the two actors (and translator) have demonstrated the scenario once, the narrator will read an explanation of the cultural values expressed in the respective greeting rituals (see your group's notes on the value words in the Greetings and Courtesies article and The Business Experience), and then the actors will repeat their demonstration of the failed greeting. Then, the actors will demonstrate how the greeting could go more smoothly for their two characters.
- Breaking it down into steps:
  - Identify your greeting scenario.
  - Identify which team members will be actors, and which a translator, and which a narrator, for your scenario.



- Working together as a group, using flashcards or another note-taking method that will work for your presentation, write out the appropriate greeting lines for the actors in their parts of the awkward moments, referring to the Greetings and Courtesies article, to other language references (BBC Languages, Omniglot.com) and to your own notes about language pronunciation as needed.
- Working together as a group, referring to the Greetings and Courtesies article and The Business Experience, write two to three sentences for the narrator to speak in explanation of each country's role in the scenario. For example, if one person is from Nepal: The narrator might mention that the namaste greeting, which involves placing the hands together before the chest and bowing slightly with a smile, shows the regional preference for a greeting that establishes personal connection without physical contact. This deeply reverent greeting shows a strong cultural value of respect, especially for elders— younger people are expected to address the eldest at a gathering first.
- Working together as a group, prepare a do-over greeting for your two characters in which things go more smoothly for them. How, hypothetically, could these two characters adjust their greeting behavior so that they accommodate the other person's culture without sacrificing their own values? Be as creative as need be. Have your actors practice the do-over greeting, and write a few sentences for the narrator regarding how this do-over solves the problems witnessed in the first greeting.
- Rehearse your scenario, complete with the narrator's explanation of the values shown in the scenario, until you are comfortable with the words and gestures you have learned, and the group can perform the demonstration smoothly.

## Session Three

### Teacher Introduction

- Lead a sensitive discussion regarding cultural comfort and discomfort, and possible responses to unfamiliar behaviors.
- Set some ground rules for expressing those responses appropriately.
- Direct students to note their responses to learning about unfamiliar cultural practices using the list of cues below.
- Oversee student performances.

### Student Directions

#### Context of Cultural Comfort and Discomfort

When we encounter things that are unfamiliar to us, such as behaviors that diverge from our own cultural training, we may experience various emotions and sensations. Some people feel queasy when encountering unfamiliar behavior; others may feel intensely curious, even euphoric. As you witness your classmates' performances of various greeting rituals, note your physical and emotional responses.

#### Physical responses could include:

elevated pulse

sweating

queasiness

feeling shaky or disoriented

feeling euphoric

#### Emotional responses could include feeling:

curious  
excited  
uncomfortable  
embarrassed  
offended  
amused  
bored  
relaxed  
comfortable  
inspired  
frightened  
alarmed  
surprised  
startled  
joyful

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### Perform & Observe

Each group performs its greeting ritual in turn. The event sequence is:

- Narrator introduces scenario (Australian cricket player meets the queen of England)
- Actors perform the awkward greeting, with translator assistance if required
- Audience takes reflective notes: Of the physical and emotional responses noted in the list above, which do you experience when you observe this greeting ritual? Or what other physical or emotional responses do you experience when you observe this greeting ritual?
- Narrator explains the cultural values expressed in the parties' respective greeting styles
- Actors perform the awkward greeting a second time
- Audience takes reflective notes: What do you experience physically and emotionally the second time you witness the greeting? Is this different from the first time? Do you think your experience is impacted by understanding the values expressed by the greeting? How and why?
- Actors perform the do-over greeting, and the narrator explains how this greeting expresses the cultural values of both parties more skillfully.
- When all groups have performed their greetings, all take a moment to reflect in writing.
- Pleasant & Unpleasant Responses to Unfamiliar Cultures: Prewrite #2
  - Note which customs seem especially appealing to you. Why do you think these customs draw you the most?
  - Note which customs, if any, are associated with a negative emotional response for you, those that you feel uncomfortable or offended when watching. Why do you think that these negative emotional responses arise for you?

### Teacher Introduction

- Remind students of expectations for prewriting.



## Student Directions

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### Blast from the Past: Prewrite #3

See if you can remember what you were taught as a child about how to meet new people, and how to greet those you already knew. What did you learn? Did you learn it through direct instruction, or just by watching other people? Who taught you, and/or to whom did you look for example? Parents? Older siblings? Grandparents? Aunts and uncles? Family friends? Others? What is the first thing you remember about instructions for meeting and greeting people? How did the instructions you received, whether directly, or indirectly, change over time? What different circumstances or relationships were you instructed (directly or indirectly) to account for in how you interact with people when you meet/greet them? Age? Status? Gender? Family member vs. non-relative? Other criteria? What, if anything, did you learn about the protocol for informal vs. formal vs. work settings? Did you learn different behaviors, directly and/or indirectly, in your home culture and in your school culture? What are the differences between what you learned at home and what you learned at school? What were you told at home about the reasons for the greeting behaviors that were considered polite? What were you told at school about the reasons for the greeting behaviors that were considered polite? Were you given any reasons for the polite behaviors? If you weren't told what the cultural values behind the behaviors were, could it be that this itself revealed a cultural value, such as children should obey adults without question? At home and at school, did what adults told you about appropriate behavior seem to match their behavior?

Write down as much as you remember. Don't worry about writing great prose right now—just get your thoughts down on paper.

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### Connecting Past and Present: Prewrite #4

Keeping in mind what you just wrote about greetings in your culture growing up at home and at school, and revisiting your notes from the performances as necessary, think on paper about the questions below. Again, no need to write perfect prose right now—just get your thoughts on paper.

- What surprised you most in learning about the countries whose greetings you performed? How did you feel when acting out the greetings of another culture? How did you feel physically? What about emotionally?
- For which countries was your experience of watching the second performance of a greeting very different than watching the first performance? Why?
- For which countries was your experience of watching the do-over performance of a greeting very different than watching the first or second performance? Why?
- With which cultures, if any, are you now more comfortable than you were before this exercise? Why?
- With which cultures, if any, are you now less comfortable than you were before this exercise? Why?
- Which of the countries you saw greetings performed for do you think you would be most comfortable traveling to? Moving to? Working in? In which culture do you think you would be least at home? Why? How do your cultures of origin, at home and at school, relate to which cultures are more and less comfortable for you to encounter?
- What do you do when you run into a friend you haven't seen in a while? What about when you greet your grandparents? What variables affect how you greet people? Age? Family member vs. non-family-member? Old friend or new acquaintance? Gender? Status? Ethnicity? Language? Religion?
- What do you think it will be like for you in the future to encounter people from very different cultures in your workplace?
- What cultural values are expressed in your own customary greeting style for different kinds of people?
- Overall, how do you think your own cultural background influenced your encounter with other cultures' ways of meeting and greeting?

## Teacher Introduction

- To prepare students for small-group discussion, establish or remind students of ground rules for fair, respectful discussion of sensitive issues.
- Interpersonal strategies to address include:
  - the use of I statements ("I feel freaked out when people are speaking languages I can't understand");
  - the avoidance of you statements ("You just don't like people from the Middle East");
  - the avoidance of labeling and/or name-calling ("You're a hypocrite" or "Those people are weirdos");
  - and possibly some conversation about the value of active listening (listening attentively instead of thinking about what to say next while the other person is talking, and demonstrating understanding of the other party's point—"I hear what you're saying . . ."—before launching into why you feel differently—. . . but for me it's more like . . .").

## Student Directions

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### Putting It All Together: Comparing Notes with Your Group

Reunite with your performance group to compare notes from prewrites so far. Identify and discuss some similarities and differences in the cultures of your families of origin, and how these colored your responses to the cultural rituals you've encountered in this exercise.

## End of Session Three and Homework

## Teacher Introduction

- Remind students that the final writing assignment is to be completed with the help of all their notes and prewrites from the previous classes. If students get stuck, encourage them to consult their notes and prewrites.

## Student Directions

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### Putting It All Together: Personal Essay

**Situation:** Imagine that a local newspaper has sponsored a writing contest in which students are asked to submit essays regarding their cultural experiences at school.

**Assignment:** Write a personal essay in five-paragraph form. Remember that the readers of this essay will not have participated in your classroom exercise, so you'll have to provide the context so that readers can understand the experiences you're describing.

**Essay prompt:** How has your cultural background so far in life colored your responses to unfamiliar cultures and customs in social and/or workplace situations? How do you predict that your responses to unfamiliar cultures might change as you get older?

**Tools:** Use your notes from class and your prewrite pages to get the essay started.

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## Essay Ingredients

Paragraph 1: Begin the essay in a moment of scene, of physical interaction—since an unfolding scene is much more interesting than an abstract concept, a scene makes an excellent hook, and draws the reader in to the essay.

Continue your introductory paragraph with some context about where this moment of scene occurred.

Arrive at a thesis in which you explain something about how your own cultural background conditioned your responses to learning about new cultures.

Paragraphs 2–4: Give evidence for your thesis. In a personal essay, evidence could mean describing a childhood memory, or sharing with the reader something your grandmother always says, or describing your physical response to encountering a new custom.

Paragraph 5: Conclude your essay by predicting, based on your cultural background and your experiences with this exercise, how your responses to new cultures might change over time.

### Example first paragraph:

Hook: Scene: "When I bowed to my friend Bob, I started giggling, and I felt like I was about to start laughing hysterically."

Introduction: Context: "My father always used to tell me to stand up straight when I met a person. He said it was disrespectful to slouch. He used to harangue all of us kids, me and all my five brothers and sisters, every day about our posture. At the dinner table: 'Sit up straight!' When we were doing our homework: 'Sit up straight!' And when we visited our grandparents, he would poke me in the ribs and whisper, 'Stand up straight!' So when I had to bow very deeply, to bend low to show the Nepalese namaste greeting for a class exercise about greetings around the world, I felt ridiculous. In my family, an upright physical posture equals respect, so it was hard for me to understand how in another culture a deep bow could show respect. I could understand bowing as a sign of respect in theory, but physically, it just felt wrong to me. However, it was easier for me to understand bowing as a sign of respect once I knew that the namaste bow is to not just the person, but to God as expressed in that person. In my family, we are taught to kneel at church, so kneeling or bowing to God is easier for me to understand than bowing to a person. "

Thesis: Claim: "Once I learned what namaste means, the idea of bowing to another person felt more familiar to me, because I could connect it to something my family does at church."