

## **Description of the Game of Shapes: (from *American Ways Teacher's Resource Manual*, ISBN 0-13-192418-4)**

One of our favorites is a game of "shapes" which we learned many years ago from a cross-cultural trainer, Sandra Mumford, but we do not really know its origin. In this game, tags are made out of different colors in a variety of odd shapes, with some common features among them (a rounded corner, a triangle, a square corner, a serrated edge, and so on.) You can use these as patterns to cut out shapes in different colors, or you can use your imagination and create your own. Just be sure that every shape has at least one feature in common with one other piece of a different color. You will also need an envelope and some straight pins or paper clips so that students can wear the shapes like tags.

Here are the rules of the game:

1. Tell students that beginning now, they are not to talk.
2. Have students choose one tag from the envelope and one of the pins or paper clips to put the tag on. Remind them not to talk.
3. After everyone is wearing a tag, tell the students to walk around the room and look at each others' tags, without talking.
4. When they have walked quite a bit and have looked at all the tags, ask them to form groups without talking.
5. Give students enough time to form groups. Some students may find that no one "matches" them or invites them to join the group. Others may find that several groups invite them in. Remind them to look at the tags and find their group, and not to talk.
6. Then ask them to look around their group and notice why they all belong to the group. Have them notice what they have in common, but remind them not to talk about it.
7. After some time, ask them to walk around again, look at each other's tags, and again to form new groups, and then to look around their group, noticing the tags, but not to talk.
8. After several rounds (at least 3, but 4 or more is better), when students have formed the more typical groups based on color, or shape, or size, you will notice that they have to look much more carefully to find things that they have in common. Some students will find that no one thinks their tag is like others, and they may find themselves standing alone, outside a group. Other times students will form one large group.
9. Now it's time to "debrief" or discuss the activity with them. You might ask these questions:
  - What did you notice?
  - Did anyone feel left out? Ignored?
  - Did anyone invite you to form a group? How did you feel?
  - Did anyone exclude you? How did that make you feel/

Did you notice any changes in the size of the groups over time?  
Why do you think that happened?

This game can lead to an interesting opening discussion for the culture class or component and suggest ways in which we may differ, but also have a lot in common. It can lead to discussions about the importance of belonging to a group and how we exclude or include people, as well as discussion about tolerance or acceptance, or even prejudice and discrimination.

This activity can also serve as a good place to begin setting ground rules for your class. This is important, especially in multicultural classes, where there is likely to be misunderstanding. You may want to remind students that in this class you will expect all of them to be respectful of each other as individuals and as members of different cultures. They may have questions; they may be surprised or even shocked at what they read or hear; but they should refrain from judging each other, other customs or cultural differences before they have tried to understand how a custom or practice fits in with the whole system of the culture.

It can often be difficult to discuss values, beliefs, attitudes, or cultures. Not only may the content be sensitive, but the words may not be readily available. For that reason, you may want to provide a lot of pair or small group activities in your classes. Try putting students in pairs, where they can share their ideas with only person, before having to talk with a larger group, or put them in small groups, where they may feel freer to speak up than they might feel in front of you and the whole class.

The culture class is a community of individuals working together to understand each other. It is a microcosm of the global community, and the efforts of you and your students represent one small but important step toward greater global understanding.