

Transcript for The Shapes Game Podcast.

My name is Maryanne Datesman. I'm one of the authors of the textbook *American Ways*, an introduction to American culture. I've had a varied kind of a career. I've taught ESL mostly in a university setting. I taught at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky, for a number of years, and while I was there I worked with a refugee program. We had the beginnings of a refugee influx into a small town back in the early 80's, and actually we started a language school, and then I came to Washington, and the last place that I taught was Georgetown University. So, I've had an interest in a variety of different things, and the cross-cultural communication aspect of this book has been really interesting because the three authors have come at this from very different perspectives: Ned Kearny from the perspective of American studies, Jodi [Crandall] from cross-cultural communication as well as ESL, and I from an ESL background.

Today I'd like to tell you about a way Jodi and I have enjoyed getting our classes started. Generally speaking, we've had classes that were multicultural; that is, we had a number of students from different countries, and so, this is a technique that Jodi learned from a cross-cultural trainer, Sandra Mumford, a number of years ago, but we don't really know its origin.

In this game, you make tags out of different colors in a variety of odd shapes, and all of the tags have to have some common feature among them, like a rounded corner, a triangle, a square corner, a serrated edge, and so forth. If this is hard for you to visualize, we do have this described in the *Teachers' Resource Manual for American Ways* and it actually has some sample shapes that you might get some ideas from.

Anyway, when you do this, just be sure to use, say, four different colors and have each shape—you can just do weird shapes, you don't need to do like a star, for example, but you might start out with something circular and have a point on it that looked like a star, so you have different features so that all of them would relate in some way that you could... that they could find some similarity. Then you also need some straight pins or paperclips so that students can wear the shapes like tags.

So here's how you set it up. First of all, you tell the students that starting right now, as you give out the tags, starting right now, they are not to talk, and during this whole time, they are not to talk. You have them choose a tag from a pile or an envelope, and take a pin, and put the tag on, and remind them not to talk. After everybody has a tag, tell them to walk around the room and look at each other's tags without talking. When they've walked around a bit, and looked at all the tags, ask them to form groups, without talking. Give students enough time to form the 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 groups, and not to talk. And I frequently say to them, "Find your group; look at your tag and find your group," and they have to be reminded not to talk, but gesturing is allowed. Then you ask them to look around their group and notice why they all belong to the group. Have them notice what they have in common, and remind them again not to talk about it. And then, after a little awhile, you ask them to walk around again, look at each other's tags and form new groups, then look around their new group, notice the tags, and not talk. And we do this several times—at

least three times, but you can do it four or more times and having the students find different types of groups according to the tags. And you'll find... usually we find that they'll start by grouping by color or by very obvious shape, or size, or something like this. But, as they go on, with succeeding groups, they will have more difficulty doing that; they'll get more inventive, and they'll point to a small feature on their tag, and point to a small feature on your tag and you know, try to say they are alike in some way. So, some students... you'll find that some are outside a group and don't seem to be able to find a group. Sometimes, then by the end, often the students will form just one great big group.

So, after they are finished, then you allow the talking and you discuss the activity with them and you ask them questions like "What did you notice?" "Did you feel left out, or did anybody feel ignored, or did people invite you to form their group?" "How did you feel when you were included in the group?" "How did you feel if somebody excluded you from the group?" "Did you notice any changes in the size of the groups over time?" "Why did you think that happened?"

And this game can lead to some very interesting discussions for the culture class. And you can talk about differences, the fact that we have a lot of individual differences, but that we also have a great deal in common. You can also talk about the fact that you shouldn't judge another feature of another culture—that it's important to treat everybody in the class with respect and try to understand how that particular feature of the culture would fit into the larger culture. So, it is often difficult to discuss values and beliefs and attitudes of different cultures, but it's very important that people have respect for each other and that then you have created a good learning environment where people can feel comfortable and are ready to share their ideas, and a lot of good conversation will come from that.