

Lesson plan

Me and the world

Communication and friendship

1. **Theme:** Me and the world: Communication and friendship
2. **Grade:** 6th
3. **Lesson type:** Combined lesson
4. **Duration:** 45 min.
5. **Basic terms:** world, country, culture, communication, intercultural, traditional, religious communication, cultural greetings, friendship
6. **Pedagogical methods:** storytelling, presentation, discussion, dialog, group work, reflection, individual work, role-play
7. **Means:** board (interactive or otherwise), markers, laptop/computer, multimedia (screen/projector), ppt presentation, flipchart (optional), cards with role-play statements

8. Goals:

○ Educational:

The students

- ✓ Recall common greetings and gestures from different cultures
- ✓ Explain the meaning of different gestures
- ✓ Describe different communication styles and compare them
- ✓ Act-out a scenario, focusing on constructive communication and friendship
- ✓ Identify potential misunderstandings that can occur in intercultural or friendship interactions
- ✓ Assess which communication strategies are most effective for maintaining friendships across cultures
- ✓ Create a “Friendship Guide” with tips for clear, kind, and culturally aware communication

○ Formational:

The students

- ✓ Are aware of cultural differences in greetings, gestures, and communication styles
- ✓ Demonstrate empathy toward friends and peers from different cultures
- ✓ Listen carefully and respond thoughtfully to others’ perspectives.
- ✓ Appreciate the importance of respecting diverse ways of expressing friendship and politeness.
- ✓ Balance assertiveness with empathy when expressing personal feelings and boundaries.

- ✓ Exhibit consistent respectful, empathetic, and culturally aware communication in daily interactions.

9. Cross-curricular connections: Social studies

10. Intra-subject connections: with the lesson plans on the themes: Me and the others, Me and society, I support others, Me and my environment, and the other modules from the Me and the world theme

11. Expected results:

- ✓ Students identify and explain common greetings and gestures in different cultures and recognize how they may differ from their own
- ✓ Students describe and discuss how gestures and communication styles affect friendships and demonstrate empathy toward peers from diverse backgrounds
- ✓ Students show interest and participate in activities that explore intercultural communication
- ✓ Students can compare and analyze communication behaviors in different cultures and in friendships, identifying potential misunderstandings and ways to resolve them
- ✓ Students reflect on and prioritize behaviors that maintain strong, healthy friendships
- ✓ Students demonstrate self-regulation and adaptability in friendships while maintaining personal values

12. Preparation

- For the teacher: Reading the theoretical base, downloading the presentation, providing cards (sheets) with role-play statements

13. Structure of the lesson:

Me and the world: Communication and friendship

1. Intercultural Communication and friendship
 - Meaning, essence, characteristics
2. Communication and friendship in different countries
 - Greetings and their meaning in different cultures
 - Gestures and their meaning in different cultures
 - Religious communication
 - Guidelines for constructive communication and friendship
3. Activity – role-play
4. Reflection and discussion

- The students are prompted to answer several questions on the subject, reflecting on their thoughts and feelings and engaging in a discussion.

14. Structure, content and timeline

1. Introduction (5 min.)

- Teacher activity:

- Actualization of prior knowledge on the subject: How do you greet people that you don't know (people you are just meeting)?; How do you greet your friends? What gestures do you typically use?; Have you heard of different meanings of some of the popular gestures? (3 min.)

- Introduction of new information and terms: (2 min.)

Communication is the way people share thoughts, feelings, and ideas with each other. We communicate not only by speaking, but also by listening, writing, using body language (gestures), and even through facial expressions. The essence of communication is connection. It helps us understand others and helps others understand us. Good communication has important characteristics: it is clear, respectful, and involves both talking and listening. When we communicate well, we can solve problems, express our emotions, and build stronger relationships.

Friendship is a special kind of relationship between people who care about and trust one another. The essence of friendship is support, kindness, and spending time together. A true friend makes you feel safe and valued, and you do the same for them. The main characteristics of friendship include honesty, loyalty, respect, and fun – you enjoy being together and can rely on each other in good times and bad. Friendship grows when there is good communication, because talking, active listening, and understanding each other strengthen the bond between friends.

- Student activity:

- Participation in the dialog, asking questions, active listening

- Methods and tools:

- Methods: dialog, storytelling
- Tools: board, marker or an interactive whiteboard (for outlining the theme and the terms; optional, for writing down student's ideas, thoughts)

2. Stating the theme of the lesson: Me and the world: Communication and friendship (30 min.)

- Teacher activity:

- Short presentation, focused on greetings and gestures in different cultures; friendship; religious communication (10 min.)
- Theoretical overview, performed with the presentation:

People around the world communicate in many ways, and these differences often reflect their cultures and traditions. For example, in some cultures people greet with a handshake, while in others they bow, smile, or even use silence to show respect. Let's examine how people from different cultures greet each other and what gestures they use.

The handshake is a common way of greeting people in many countries, like the USA, Canada, the U.K., China, Australia, the Middle East, Germany, Zambia, Rwanda, and Botswana. Most people shake with their right hand, since in places like the Middle East, India, and Pakistan, the left hand is seen as unclean. The style can be different: in China, the handshake is light, in Germany, it is firm, and in Morocco, people touch the backs of their right hands if one is dirty. In Botswana, the handshake has several steps with clasping and thumb interlocking. In Malaysia, people often touch their chest after shaking hands, or if they don't shake hands for religious reasons, they smile, nod, and place a hand on their chest instead.

A well-known practice is that of the bowing, a common greeting in places like Japan, Thailand, India, Cambodia, Laos, and Nepal. In Nepal, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand, people press their palms together at chest level or higher and add a small bow, called *wai* in Thailand, *nop* in Laos, *sampeah* in Cambodia, and often with the word *namaste* in Nepal. In Japan, people bow without praying hands; a deeper bow shows more respect, with men bowing with hands at their sides and women with hands on their thighs. Today, many younger Japanese simply nod their heads instead.

Nose bumping is preferred in Oman, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and other Gulf countries. It is known as the "Khashm-makh" greeting and is used among men – they bump their noses together and sometimes follow with a handshake with the right hand. Due to religious norms, women greet only other women this way, and usually in private.

Air kisses on the cheek are a common greeting in France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Latin America, Québec, Russia, and Ukraine. The number of kisses varies: one per cheek in France and much of Latin America, two in Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Québec, and three in Russia and Ukraine. Importantly, it is not a real kiss – people kiss the air beside the cheek.

Greetings vary by factors like meeting formality as well. In Arab countries, close male friends hug or kiss cheeks, with careful male-female interactions. Hungary favors cheek kisses among friends and firm handshakes for introductions. China prefers subtle nods, smiles, or formal handshakes, while Russia uses strong handshakes for men, softer ones for women, and sometimes triple cheek kisses. Albania and Armenia show European diversity with handshakes and cheek kisses depending on familiarity and context.

Gestures are used not only for greetings, but for expressing a wide range of thoughts and feelings. There are several very popular gestures that people use around the world, but the interesting fact is that their meaning differs in the different cultures.

The thumbs-up gesture (thousands of years old) signals approval and satisfaction in American and European cultures, but in many Asian and Islamic countries, it's considered a major insult. The OK gesture is also among the most popular ones, especially in America, most of the English-speaking world, and most of Europe. It means that everything is going well and according to plan. The gesture turns offensive in Latin America and France, means "lazy person" in New Zealand, and simply represents "zero" in Australia. The V sign is another fairly common one. Originally, it meant victory; later, peace. However, palm direction matters significantly outside the USA – a V sign with the palm facing inward is considered insulting in Australia, the UK, and South Africa. The Head shake – while nodding means "yes" and head shaking means "no" in most English-speaking countries, these gestures are reversed in Bulgaria and Greece,

which can confuse unaware visitors. The Index finger gesture is used to point at something or someone in the Balkan cultures, but in many other countries, it is considered very rude. The Corona hand gesture is positive in Hinduism, Buddhism, and rock culture, but is seen as a devil sign in parts of Europe.

As we can see, communication can look very different depending on someone's culture. Some cultures, like those in the USA or parts of Latin America, are comfortable sharing many personal details in conversations, while others, like Finland or Japan, may prefer to keep personal matters private. These differences can sometimes cause misunderstandings – what seems polite or friendly in one culture might feel unusual, even rude, in another. Language barriers and the way people perceive situations can also lead to mixed messages, which is why it's important to listen carefully and be open-minded when communicating with people from different cultures (and from our own culture).

Even though people from different cultures communicate in many different ways, there are also important similarities, especially in religious communication. No matter the religion, people often use prayer and preaching, worship and witnessing, reading and listening to sacred texts, singing and sharing, prophetic discourse, ritual practices, or making the sign of the cross to connect with their faith. Some cultures pray with folded hands, others by raising their arms, and some do not use gestures like crossing at all; but the main idea is the same: communicating with God and bringing people together as a community. These shared practices show that while the form may look different, the purpose of spiritual communication is similar across many cultures and religions. Religious communication serves several universal purposes across different faith traditions. At its core, it connects believers with the divine or sacred through prayer, meditation, chanting, and ritual speech, providing a direct channel for worship, gratitude, and spiritual guidance. Religious communication also builds and strengthens community bonds through common liturgies, stories, and teachings that are passed down through generations. Whether through Christian prayer, Islamic dhikr, Buddhist mantras, or Jewish davening, these practices create sacred space and time, fostering spiritual growth and deeper meaning.

Activity: "Communicating with friends" (20 min.)

- ✓ The teacher divides the class in pairs
 - ✓ The teacher hands each pair a card with a written statement describing a situation among friends ("your friend wants to borrow something, but you don't want to give it")
 - ✓ Each pair studies their situation and rehearses a role-play dialogue
 - ✓ Each pair performs a dialog based on the card statement; the focus is on constructive communication and resolving a potential conflict between friends in a harmonic way
 - ✓ Together, the students create tips for communicating with friends, each proposing at least one idea ("you should be respectful", "you should help your friends", "you should be polite and empathetic"); the teacher writes the ideas on the board, or on a flipchart (they could be saved on a poster and hanged in the room)
- Student activity:

- Participation in the dialog, taking notice of the presentation, asking questions, active listening, participation in the activity, acting out a scenario
- Methods and tools:
 - Methods: dialog, presentation, storytelling, group work, role-play, discussion, individual work
 - Tools: interactive board or a screen, laptop/computer, board, marker, flipchart (optional, for writing down students' ideas), cards with role-play statements
- 3. Reflection and discussion (10 min.)
- Teacher activity:
 - Posing questions for a discussion:
 - ✓ What makes a good friend, and how do they communicate with you?
 - ✓ How can we show we care about friends through words or actions?
 - ✓ Have you ever disagreed with a friend? How did you communicate your opinion?
 - ✓ Why is it important to share your feelings honestly, even if your friend might not agree?
 - ✓ How do you balance listening to your friends with expressing your own thoughts?
 - ✓ Can you think of a time when listening carefully helped avoid a misunderstanding with a friend?
 - ✓ What is the difference between being honest with a friend and being rude?
 - Engaging the students with prompts:
 - ✓ "I had a friend who noticed I was quiet one day and asked if I was okay. That small question made me feel cared for"
 - ✓ "When a friend was upset about a test, I listened without interrupting and repeated what I understood. They said it helped them feel better"
 - ✓ "I once told a friend I couldn't help with homework because I was busy, but I added, 'Maybe we can try another day?' They understood, and we stayed friends"
 - ✓ "Once I made a joke that my friend thought was mean. I explained what I really meant, and we laughed about it later"
 - Answering questions and clarifying information
- Student activity:
 - Engaging in the discussion
 - Reflection on their ideas and emotions on the subject, thinking critically about different friendship situations and outcomes

- Methods and tools:
 - Methods: reflection, discussion, active listening
 - Tools: possible use for a board/flipchart and a marker – to write down interesting ideas and suggestions.

15. Variations:

- Specific traditional gestures from different cultures could be presented through an iconographic, or from a source (examples available here: <https://www.worktheworld.com/infographics/around-world-42-hand-gestures>).
- The students could act out the different gestures and try to perform a dialogue using only gestures.
- The activity can be adapted: the pairs could perform their situation and then exchange the cards and perform the other pair's scenario.
- A game of associations can be transformed into an educational activity: the students are divided into groups; each group receives a card with listed book titles (ones that are being studied in Literature class); one person from the group tries to explain the title with gestures; a discussion about the importance of nonverbal communication is organized.
- The “Around the world” activity: the teacher sets up several stations around the classroom, each representing a different country/culture with posters showing the local greeting style (handshakes, bows, cheek kisses, etc.); the students rotate in pairs through each station, practicing the greeting while learning a few key phrases in that language like “hello” and “nice to meet you.”
- The “Gesture detective” activity: The teacher sets up a scenario for a classroom mystery: An international student exchange program had a big misunderstanding at their welcome party because of confusing gestures and greetings; the teacher divides the students into small teams; each team receives a case file with “evidence” (images of different gestures and their meanings in different cultures, “witness statements” describing what was the mix-up, a world map showing where different exchange students came from, cultural greeting reference cards); the teams must figure out what went wrong by matching gestures to their cultural meanings and identifying which interactions caused confusion (e.g. The student from Bulgaria kept shaking her head when asked if she liked the food, but she was actually saying yes).

16. Interesting facts (from Chiolli, Ch., 2025 – <https://www.afar.com/magazine/beyond-the-handshake-how-people-greet-each-other-around-the-world>; Toll, E., 2025 – <https://www.diversityresources.com/greeting-customs-around-the-world/>)

- ✓ In Tibet there is a “Tongue sticking” custom. It stems from 9th-century Tibetan king Lang Darma, who murdered his brother, suppressed Buddhism, and was known for his

black tongue before being assassinated. Monks began showing their tongues to prove they weren't his reincarnation and came in peace. Today, tongue-showing is uncommon and best avoided unless someone greets you this way first.

- ✓ The hongi greeting, where foreheads and noses press together, is more personal than air kisses. This Māori “sharing of breath” ceremony welcomes visitors into New Zealand's indigenous culture during *pōwhiri* ceremonies, but requires a special invitation and isn't offered to everyone.
- ✓ In Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique, handshakes are followed by rhythmic clapping – one clap answered by two in Malawi and rural Zimbabwe, or three claps in northern Mozambique. Men clap with aligned fingers and palms, while women clap with angled hands.
- ✓ In Greenland and Tuvalu, personal greetings involve breathing or sniffing. Greenland's kunik involves placing nose and upper lip against someone's cheek or forehead while sniffing, reserved for very close relationships. In Tuvalu, people press cheeks together and take a deep breath when greeting relatives or close friends.
- ✓ Throughout Asia and Africa, greeting elders first is a crucial social rule. Use respectful titles and gestures: in the Philippines, the *mano po* involves pressing an elder's hand to your forehead; in India, people touch elders' feet; and in Liberia and among Nigeria's Yoruba people, young people bend or kneel when greeting seated elders.
- ✓ A friendly wave may appear dismissive in East Asian or European cultures, where it can mean “no” or “come here” as in India.
- ✓ Hand counting also varies – Germans and Austrians read an index finger as “two”, while Japanese use the thumb to indicate “five”.