**IB Learner Profile: Open-mindedness**

**Cultural Norms**

**When Nodding Means No**

Cultural norms are the ways members of a particular culture behave. Different cultures use different gestures in different ways. For example, Americans shake hands as a form of greeting, while Japanese people bow instead. While direct eye contact is generally accepted as showing attentiveness among Americans, in many cultures it is considered rude or disrespectful. As the world becomes smaller, it is increasingly important to understand these subtle differences between cultures.



Discuss

This picture is from the New York Times. It was taken when

President Bush and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia met

in Crawford, Texas in April, 2005.

* What is your reaction to this picture?
* How do you think a person from a culture where it is normal for men to hold hands to show equality of status and respect would interpret the picture?

**As you read about the following cultural norms in the world, think about why it might be important to be aware of how they differ from your own culture.**

1. In many countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Morocco, personal space is small. People stand very close to each other when they are talking. Conversely, in many countries, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Japan, New Zealand, personal space is large. People stand at an arm's length distance from each other.

2. When riding in a taxi in Australia, it is polite to sit in the front seat. This is an example of how Australians value equality among all people.

3. In Austria, you should remove your shoes when entering someone's home.

4. In Belgium, it is rude to chew gum or blow your nose in public.

5. Being punctual is not a priority in Brazil. Being 15 minutes late is normal.

6. Bulgarians shake their heads to say "yes" and nod to say "no".

7. In Chile, if someone interrupts you as you are speaking, it is a sign that they are interested and engaged in what you are saying.

8. Chinese people spit for good luck.

9. In Denmark, many people are quiet and shy before you get to know them.

10. In Egypt, exposing the soles of your feet is very offensive. Keep both your feet on the ground when sitting.

11. In France, punctuality is important.

12. When Germans ask "How are you?" they expect a real answer to the question, unlike Americans who use this phrase as a greeting/a rhetorical question.

13. In Greece, raising an open palm at face level is an insult.

14. In India, an appropriate greeting is called a "narnaste". It involves bowing slightly or nodding while holding your palms together below your chin.

15. In Italy, it is rude to slurp your spaghetti. But in Japan, it is polite to slurp noodles.

16. In Japan, if someone you're talking to crosses his/her arms and closes his/her eyes, it means that he/she is considering your words carefully.

17. In Mexico, if you hear someone saying "psst-psst" they are trying to get your attention; this is not considered rude.

18. In Pakistan, when someone offers you anything, it is polite to refuse it before accepting. A Pakistani may offer you something that he cannot afford to give, so be sure to decline several times. If the offer is genuine, the item may be thrust into your hands.

19. In South Africa, talking with your hands in your pockets is considered rude.

20. Never touch a Thai person on the head. It is the highest and most sacred part of the body. If you touch a person's head by accident, apologize immediately.

Source: Behave Yourself. The Essential Guide to International Etiquette, by Michael Powell

**Discussion: Guiding questions**

1. What might happen in Argentina if you back away from someone while they are speaking with you? How might the person feel?

2. What might happen if you immediately accept a Pakistani person's invitation to have you visit their home for dinner?

3. Why might it be important to understand that for Chinese people, spitting is for good luck?

4. What are the benefits of knowing about the cultural norms of other cultures?