

Silent Speech: The Importance of Nonverbal Communication

Enduring Understandings:

- Emotions can be conveyed by gesture and body language without the use of words.
- Some gestures are universal and some are culturally based.
- When we cannot comprehend or express a complex emotion, we tend to fall back to expressing simpler emotions, which may not adequately convey our true thoughts and feelings.

Essential Questions:

- How do people communicate without using spoken language?
- How does one's body language intentionally or unintentionally communicate emotion?
- What are the advantages of having a large emotional vocabulary?



Notes to the Teacher:

The film *The Way Home* shows the power of nonverbal communication, demonstrating that in each culture there are gestures, facial expressions, and body language that people use to express ideas and feelings. Many of these nonverbal signals are universal and many are specific to individual communities. In this lesson, students will explore nonverbal communication and its importance for understanding within a culture and for encounters between cultures.

In the first activity, a warm-up, students will brainstorm the gestures that are used on a daily basis in their community. They will become aware that some gestures are universal and some are specific to a particular culture. Most importantly they will discover that the same gesture can have a very different meaning in other cultures. A hand signal that means hello in one group may have a very negative meaning in another. It is important to learn the gestures and postures that are acceptable in the culture in which you are living and to be sensitive to the differences that may exist in others.

In the second activity, students use body language to express specific emotions. They become aware that certain elements of body language often indicate specific ideas. For example, having the head down with shoulders slumped and face frowning most often indicates sadness; holding the head high with a smile on the face and hands held over the head signifies joy. Among the emotions you may wish to call on students to demonstrate in Activity 2 are fear, anger, sorrow, depression, disgust, acceptance, anticipation, surprise, boredom, shame,

shamelessness, kindness, wonder, amusement, courage, pity, pride, tension, respect, alertness, disrespect, tiredness, hope, gratitude, love, unhappiness, and pain.

What is important in this lesson is the use of an expanded emotional vocabulary. Many people, especially young people, have a very limited range when it comes to naming and expressing feeling. They know “mad,” “sad,” “happy,” “afraid,” and a few others. But when it comes to nuances, say the difference between shame and embarrassment, they are at a loss.

When people do not understand – or cannot label – what they are feeling, they are also unable to express it. They often grasp for the easiest emotion they can think of, and therefore express themselves inappropriately. (For example, insecurity leads to arrogant bragging.) This is especially true of negative feelings, which are often repressed and expressed as anger.

In the film, when Sang-Woo finds himself abandoned by his mother and thrown into a whole new culture, he is probably sad, afraid, confused, and lonely, but he expresses all of this as one emotion—anger. To his grandmother and the other characters, and perhaps to the audience, his behavior looks like the bad manners or temper tantrums of a spoiled child. If he had the words to talk about the feelings, then he would be able to express his real needs, rather than just rebel against the community’s attempts to befriend him. It is essential to convey this to your students if they are to understand the film.

In **ACTIVITY 3**, students learn about the effect that expressing certain emotions can have on other people. They observe the reaction of others to expressions of anger. They will discuss appropriate ways of expressing feelings and how using the appropriate ways affects interpersonal relationships.

In the film, the boy’s expression of anger never seems to upset the grandmother. She just accepts his feelings. For example, she does not tease him or ignore his fear of being alone, but sits with him when he has to go to the toilet. This patience is much like one who is trying to tame a bird or wild animal. She lets him act out, keeps reaching out to him and finally wins him over through her example of acceptance and generosity.

DURATION OF LESSON:

One or two periods

ASSESSMENT:

Student performance

Class discussion

Charting

BEHAVIORAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Indicators addressed by this lesson:

STANDARD 1. Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity, and behavior.

LEVEL III (GRADES 6-8)

1. Understands that each culture has distinctive patterns of behavior that are usually practiced by most of the people who grow up in it

STANDARD 2. Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function.

LEVEL III (GRADES 6-8)

7. Understands that there are similarities and differences within groups as well as among groups.

WORKING WITH OTHERS

STANDARD 4. Displays effective interpersonal communication skills.

LEVEL IV (GRADES K-12)

5. Uses nonverbal communication such as eye contact, body position, and gestures effectively
9. Attends to both verbal and nonverbal messages

Procedure:**ACTIVITY 1:** “High Five,” or “Get Out of My Face”

1. Arrange students in small groups.
2. Raise your arm with the palm out and ask, “What does this mean?” Students will probably respond that it is an invitation to join you in a “high five” sign, a sign of approval or agreement. Explain to them that, in some cultures, if you raised your palm, it might be taken to mean “Go away, get out of my face.”
3. Ask each student in the group to draw or describe three gestures and tell what they mean. (Caution students that they should not draw gestures that are considered inappropriate in their own culture.)
4. Ask the members of the group to share their gestures with each other, discussing whether the gesture means the same to all of them.
5. Ask each group to choose five gestures drawn by the members to share with the whole group.
6. Have the first group perform the five gestures, one at a time, to see if the whole group can interpret the meanings. Ask student to note if they see any gestures that have different meanings if performed in other cultures.
7. Ask each group in turn to perform any additional gestures beyond the ones they have already seen. (There will probably not be much left for the last group.)

8. Discuss with the students why it is important to understand the nonverbal communication in a new culture:

- It is a way of making yourself understood when you cannot speak the language.
- It is a way of “fitting in” when your body language and gestures match those of your peers.
- It keeps you from using inappropriate gestures that can lead to misunderstandings.

ACTIVITY 2: Express Yourself

- 1.** Ask your students to walk about the classroom space, being careful not to bump into others. Tell them that when you give a signal (which could be with a percussion instrument, a whistle or a clap), they should freeze in place and wait for directions.
- 2.** After a minute or two, give a signal. Say, “Show me what ‘Sad’ looks like.” Let the students use body language, facial expression and gesture to indicate ‘Sad.’”
- 3.** Give the signal again and have students resume moving about the room.
- 4.** Continue for three or four demonstrations of different emotions, or until you determine that the students understand the exercise.
- 5.** Repeat the exercise, but this time, walk to various children and point out what they are doing right. (For example, “Joe has his shoulders hunched to show he is afraid.”)

6. Ask half the group to sit and watch, while the other half continues the exercise. After each demonstration, ask the children to point out what the students are doing to indicate the particular emotion called for.

7. Have the groups change roles so that each group has a turn to watch and to demonstrate.

8. Have the children sit again. Ask them if there were elements that were universal, and elements that were culturally specific. Talk about some of the emotions that were more difficult to express. (Shame, loneliness, confusion, etc.)

9. Ask them for examples of times when people might be feeling these emotions. Ask them to recall some of the ways these emotions were expressed during the movement activity.

10. Have the children talk about how emotions are or are not expressed in their family and community. Are they free to express feelings or are they encouraged to control them? Do they talk about feelings? Are they listened to when they do? Is there any person or place where they are freer to express feelings? Are their gender expectations when it comes to talking about or expressing feelings? Are some feeling more acceptable for boys or girls? (Some students may say it is all right for men to become angry, but girls are taught to hold their temper.)



ACTIVITY 3: My Feelings/Your Feelings

1. Place students in pairs and assign one person in each pair as A and one as B.
2. Ask each person A to use mime, movement, gesture, and facial expression to show anger.
3. Ask person B to respond in whatever way A's anger makes him or her feel.
4. On your signal, have them all freeze, keeping the pose.
5. Lead all the A students to one side of the room, while the B students continue to hold their pose.
6. Discuss with the A students what emotions they see portrayed by the B students. (Fear, anger, sadness, indifference.) Discuss how else they might express their feelings to get a different reaction from the partner.
7. Have each person A re-enter the scene and take up his or her last pose. Lead the B students aside and discuss the A's behavior, their own reaction to it, and how else they could react to change the situation. (Ignore, placate, stand up for themselves, etc.)
8. Have all the B students re-enter the scene. Then each pair will decide how they can change the scene in order to express their feelings in a way that will help solve the conflict.
9. Ask each pair to demonstrate their new approach for the rest of the class.

ACTIVITY 4: Charting

Do one of the following activities:

1. Have students make a chart showing the chain of events caused by the expression of emotions. Here are some sample entries:

The Event	The Emotion	The Body Language	The Reaction From Other	The Outcome
My friend is late	Anger and frustration	Closed fist, frown, hunched shoulders	Defensive, making excuses	Anger is escalated
My friend is late	Anger and frustration	Closed fist, frown, hunched shoulders	Apologetic, taking responsibility	Anger is dissipated

2. Have students make a chart of the way different people express the same emotion. See if there are similarities. Discuss whether you think the behavior is natural or learned. Here are some sample entries:

The Emotion	Me	My Grandmother	My Dad	My friend
Anger	Yelling, fighting	Goes to her room, refuses to talk	Yells, throws things	Cries
Uncertainty	Freeze, tense body language	Talks very fast, and repeats herself	Acts sure of himself, talks loud	Bites nails, asks lots of questions

3. Explain to the students that they will soon see a film where body language and gesture are keys to understanding the story and the characters. Ask them to watch the film very closely and apply what they have learned today.