**Brief Encounters**
Adapted by Hostelling International from Coverdell Worldwise Schools’ Building
Bridges: A Peace Corps Classroom Guide to Cross-Cultural Understanding.
www.peacecorps.gov/wws/bridges/index.html

**Introduction**  
Brief Encounters asks girls to explore the interaction of two cultures—one outgoing and casual, the other more reserved and formal—with different social norms.

**Objectives**  
Girls will gain skills in observing and describing behaviors and develop an understanding of how our cultural values influence the way we view other groups. Girls will understand that they can learn about someone and their culture before making quick judgments that may feed misperceptions and/or stereotypes.

**Materials**
- Cultural norm sheets for the Pandya and Chispa cultures
- Recorded music

**Process**
1. Ask girls to imagine that they are all foreign exchange students who arrived in the United States yesterday and will all be attending school together.

   Explain to the class that half of the girls are from a country called Pandya and the other half are from a country called Chispa.

2. Tell girls that Chispas and Pandyas have different cultural norms. Demonstrate what a cultural norm is by offering your hand in a handshake to several girls. Because a handshake is a typical greeting in the U.S. girls will know how to react. Next, try bowing to a student as a form of greeting. How does he/she react? It is not “normal” in our culture to bow, but in many places in the world, it is. Every culture has its own cultural norms.

3. Explain to girls that they will have a pretend “welcome party” and they will interact with each other using the cultural norms for their country as listed on the handouts.

4. Send the Pandya and Chispa groups to opposite corners of the room. After cutting the sheets in half, distribute copies of the Pandya cultural norms sheet to one group and the Chispa cultural norms sheet to the other group. Ask the members of each culture to read these sheets and to discuss their norms among themselves.

5. The simulation: Announce that the two student groups from imaginary countries have been invited to a party sponsored by an international student-exchange organization. The party organizers hope the two groups will get acquainted and learn about each other. The girls should mingle, dance, and talk.
6. Start the music and let the two cultures interact.

7. After 5 minutes call time and end the party.

8. Give Chispas a chance to state their thoughts about the Pandyas. Then, let the Pandyas tell the Chispas what they thought of them. Generally, the groups will not like each other.

Debriefing
Use questions such as the following to guide discussion of how our own cultural biases influence the way we view other groups.

1. How did you feel about the behavior of the members of your own group? Of the other group? Did your group’s culture report use positive, negative, or neutral terms to describe the other group?

2. Read the cultural norms sheets of both groups. Ask girls if they had known a little about one another before the party, how do they think the party would have been different?

3. What lessons from this activity would girls want to keep in mind if they were going to spend time in an unfamiliar culture? What should they remember as they meet world travelers at the hostel?

4. What are the real-world advantages of understanding and following cultural norms?

5. Ask girls whether they agree or disagree with each of the following statements:
   - People have difficulty describing the behaviors of other groups in nonjudgmental terms.
   - People acquire cultural norms fairly quickly.
   - A particular behavior can be perceived differently depending on your cultural norms. For example, what appears friendly to Chispas seems pushy to Pandyas.

6. Ask girls to list as many examples of cross-cultural experiences as they can. Remind them that not all cross-cultural experiences take place in other countries or between people who speak different languages or come from different ethnic backgrounds. Attending worship services, for example, with a friend who holds different religious beliefs is a cross-cultural experience. It’s possible that going to a new school could be a cross-cultural experience. Brainstorm ideas about what girls can do to encourage clear communication in such situations.
Brief Encounters

You are a Pandya.

Pandya Cultural Norms:

- Pandyas prefer to interact with members of their own culture.
- Pandyas do not initiate conversation. They speak only when spoken to.
- Pandyas have very formal speech patterns. For example, they always use “sir” and “ma’am”.
- Pandyas do not like eye contact.
- Pandyas pat themselves on the back when they feel uncomfortable.

Brief Encounters

You are a Chispa.

Chispa Cultural Norms:

- Chispas are outgoing. They love to make contact with people from other cultures.
- Chispas speak loudly.
- Chispas’ sense of personal space is small. They stand very close to others while in conversation.
- Chispas greet each other by touching elbows.