

Overview:

This lesson plan will challenge participants to be open to unfamiliar experiences and reflect on how they might react to cultural difference. They will participate in a scene acted out by a simulated culture, the Albatrossians, and then discuss their feelings and reactions after the performance.

Background and Information:

The Albatross activity was originally published in *Beyond Experience* by Theodore Gochenour (see citation below), but it can also be found online (see instructions on the following page). The Albatross involves a scene with an even number of actors who are dressed in togas or other unusual garments. The scene they act out is a "Welcoming Ceremony," and the audience members (the participants in this activity) are their guests.

Note: The original activity relies on a binary view of gender (man and woman) that is often considered outdated and does not reflect current understandings of gender as a spectrum or non-binary. Therefore, facilitators may choose to omit gender from the activity and instead have the actors portraying the Albatrossians choose participants at random to play the two different roles. Alternative directions that omit gender are available on the following page.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Experience unfamiliar cultural norms.
2. Reflect on their reactions and feelings to unfamiliar and perhaps disconcerting cultural norms.
3. Reflect on how we can infer a lot of useful information from what we observe and learn what is expected of us, but also that things don't always mean what they seem.

Time:

1 hour and 30 minutes

Group Size:

Large group

Materials:

Dishes or bowls for handwashing, liquid to drink, food to eat, tongs or toothpicks, sheets or other pieces of cloth for the Albatrossians, candles, incense, or other extras as desired and directions for the participants about cultural norms.

Note: If you make food a part of this simulation, be prepared for people to refuse to eat if they have dietary restrictions. Have a protocol or solution in mind for dealing with gluten-free, allergies, dairy-free, etc.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness:

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Openness:

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

Other Skills:

Friendship, Teamwork, Mentorship, Diversity & Inclusion

Links to Activity Instructions (with Gender):

- [Diversity Activities Resource Guide created at the University of Houston](#) (instructions on pp. 50-52)
- [Euroekonóm.sk description and instructions for facilitators](#)

Alternative Activity Instructions (without Gender):

Part 1: The Simulation

1. Before leading the activity, facilitators should know some basic facts about the Albatrossian culture: They are patient, friendly, and shy. They will only touch guests while proceeding ceremonies (e.g. Welcoming & Farewell). Albatrossians also speak a different language: there is a certain sound for disagreement and another one for agreement. There is also a sound to attract people's attention.
2. Facilitators should briefly explain that participants will be observing and participating in a ceremony by a simulated culture, the Albatrossians. Emphasize that participants are not allowed to speak during the ceremony.
3. At the beginning of the ceremony, the Albatrossians are seated: one is sitting on a chair, and the other is kneeling on the floor next to the chair.
4. Participants are asked to enter the circle, but half of the participants will first be asked to take off their shoes.
5. The one Albatrossian leads half of the guests to the chairs while the other Albatrossian leads the rest of the guests to the spaces next to the chairs and gestures for them to kneel down next to a chair.



6. Then, the two hosts welcome their guests. One Albatrossian welcomes the guests sitting in chairs by touching their shoulder and waist and rubbing knees. The other Albatrossian welcomes kneeling guests by running both hands down their lower legs and feet in a ceremonious way.

Note: You may choose to alter how the Albatrossians welcome their guests if you feel that your participants will be uncomfortable with this form of touching.

7. After this procedure, there is a short period of silence. Then, the originally kneeling Albatrossian takes the bowl of water and asks the guests sitting in chairs to dip the fingers on their right hand into it.
8. The kneeling Albatrossian will then signal that it's time for feeding. The kneeling Albatrossian offers food to each of the guests in chairs, beginning with the other Albatrossian. Food is placed in the guests' mouths with tongs or toothpicks.
9. Upon being fed, the chair Albatrossian hums, moans, and burps while pounding his chest with his fist. The guests in chairs are encouraged to repeat this process.
10. The originally kneeling Albatrossian then feeds the other kneeling participants, who take the food in their hands. The originally kneeling Albatrossian then returns to her original position.
11. There is a small pause, and then the Albatrossian in the chair touches the kneeling Albatrossian's head to the earth.
12. The Albatrossian in the chair signals that the drinks should be served. The kneeling Albatrossian takes a small pitcher and pours of small amount of liquid (could be water, lemonade, etc.) into a small cup for the guests in chairs. Then, they serve the kneeling guests and return to their place.
13. After another pause, both Albatrossians rise and walk around the guests communicating with various noises. As they are walking, they select the kneeling guest with the largest feet and lead them over to the Albatrossian chair where they are induced to kneel next to it.
14. Next, the chair Albatrossian repeats the greeting ceremony with the guests in chairs, and then the kneeling Albatrossian does the same with the kneeling guests. They then return to their original places.
15. After a final small pause, the Albatrossian in the chair touches the heads of the kneeling Albatrossian and the chosen guest. They then rise, and the chair Albatrossian leads them both out of the circle of guests.

Part 2: Discussion

Following the simulation, the facilitator should lead a discussion with participants using the following questions:

- What do you think you have just seen/experienced?
- What were the parts of the encounter with the Albatrossians?
- What are the differences between the roles of the Albatrossian in the chair and Albatrossian kneeling?
- What are the differences between the clothing of chair Albatrossian and the kneeling Albatrossian? Why?

- How can you describe the Albatrossian language?
- What are some of the similarities between your culture and the Albatrossian culture?
- What are some differences between your culture and the Albatrossian culture?
- What is, in your opinion, the role of the kneeling Albatrossian in the society? Why?
- What is, in your opinion, the role of the chair Albatrossian in the society? Why?
- On what basis was a guest chosen to join the Albatrossians?
- What were your personal feelings and reactions to the activity?

Related Tools:

Tools to use in conjunction with this lesson:

- [Intercultural Communication \(Graduate Syllabus\)](#)
 - This lesson could be incorporated into an intercultural communication course.

Similar tools:

- [Whispers](#)