

Overview:

This lesson plan will challenge participants to examine emojis through a cultural lens. They will first discuss the relationship between emojis and culture. Then, they will consider what emojis teach us about different cultures and why representation matters.

Background and Information:

A 22-year-old graphic design student from the Ivory Coast has made headlines for his new app Zouzoukwa, which includes emojis that depict the culture of the Ivory Coast and surrounding countries. O'Plerou Grebet created this app because he noticed hardly any African representation in the standard set of emojis. Emojis have become an integral component of digital communication, but they do not always reflect the culture of the individuals who use them.

Lindsey Macdonald and Annette Benson, CILMAR, created this activity based on the Zouzoukwa emojis.

Objectives:

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

1. Identify the cultural significance of emojis.
2. Recognize the importance of representation in digital forms of communication.
3. Articulate what they learn from specific cultures based on emojis that are representative of that culture.

Time:

1 hour

Group Size:

Small group

Materials:

Internet access, one tablet or computer per group of participants, paper, and pens/pencils

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- 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).

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication:

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Curiosity:

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.
- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks:

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Other Skills:

Diversity & Inclusion

Activity instructions:

1. Ask participants to prepare for the activity by reading the *NPR* article "[The Emoji Designer Who's Bringing African Culture to Smartphone Keyboards.](#)"
2. Lead participants in a short discussion using the following questions:
 - How have emojis changed how we communicate with each other?
 - What is the cultural significance of emojis?
 - What sorts of cultures do you typically see represented in the set of standard emojis?
 - What sorts of cultures seem to not be represented in the set of standard emojis?
 - Why do you think some cultures have more of a representation than others?
 - Why did O'Plerou Grebet create the emoji app Zouzoukwa? What inspired him?
 - In the *NPR* article, Grebet says that his emojis primarily represent the Ivory Coast and surrounding countries, but he would like to add emojis that depict the culture in other countries throughout Africa. Why do you think it's important to specify which country and region of Africa he is representing?
3. Divide participants into groups of three or four. Make sure each group is provided with a tablet or computer with access to the Internet. Then, direct participants to Grebet's Zouzoukwa [Instagram page](#). Throughout the page, Grebet has many posts that depict his emojis. Ask participants to look through these posts and record their thoughts on the following questions. Each group should be prepared to share their thoughts/findings with the rest of the group.
 - What is being depicted in the emojis?
 - What are the similarities and differences from the standard set of emojis?
 - What did your group learn about African culture (specifically the Ivory Coast and surrounding countries) from looking at the emojis?

4. Ask participants to individually brainstorm emojis for a culture with which they identify. They can either actually draw those emojis or simply describe what they would depict. They should be prepared to discuss their emojis based on the following questions:
 - Why did you pick these emojis to represent your chosen culture?
 - What would someone from a different culture learn about your culture by looking at your emojis?