

Introduction:

In this activity, participants make their own interpretations of emojis and discuss their interpretations in groups. They then reflect on differing interpretations of emojis and how this impacts communication.

Objectives:

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

1. Articulate their interpretations of emojis.
2. Recognize that culture shapes interpretation of emojis.
3. Identify how different interpretations of emojis impact communication.

Time:

1 hour.

Group Size:

Entire Group.

Materials:

Emoji Aware Participant Instructions and slides (in [Downloads](#)) paper and pencil (optional); a mobile device; projector.

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).

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.

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.

Activity Instructions:

1. Ask participants to first review the emojis presented on the slides and/or handout (in Downloads). Participants will also need to jot down notes, so you can provide paper and pens, or instruct participants to type out their answers on their mobile devices.
2. Ask participants to then answer the following questions about each emoji individually:
 - Do you use this emoji? Why or why not?
 - Without consulting any outside sources, how do you interpret this emoji?
 - In what context would you use it? (audience, situation, etc.)
3. Once participants have answered the questions about each emoji, have them discuss their answers in small groups of 3-5. Instruct participants to begin by sharing their answers to the three questions for each emoji with their group. Then answer the following:
 - Why do you think you interpret emojis in the ways that you do?
4. In the large group, have each small group report out the insights that came from their small group discussion. You might consider visually representing the insights on a white board or an online whiteboard. Continue the debrief after each group reports their insights with the following questions:
 - What impacts how you use emojis (e.g., who you are talking to, etc.)?
 - What are the benefits of using emojis?
 - In light of differing interpretations, what issues might arise in the usage of emojis?
5. Instruct participants to then choose a story from their life (it can be any theme - funny, sad, inspirational, etc. – as long as there are emotions involved) and write a brief paragraph sharing the story and using as many emojis as possible.
6. Instruct participants to exchange their stories with a partner (if virtual, they can email or text their partner).
7. Each partner should then write a brief response to their partner's story using emojis as well.
8. Once they have finished responding to their partner, the partners should get together and discuss the following questions with each other:
 - How did it feel to write your story?
 - Why did you choose the emojis you did to tell your story?
 - How did it feel to read your partner's response? How did you interpret their use of emojis?
 - How did you feel reading your partner's story? How did you interpret their use of emojis?
9. In a large group, report out the insights from your partner discussion. Then, engage in a large group discussion answering the following questions:
 - "How do emojis compare to [in person] nonverbal communication?"
 - What are some of the difficulties in showing how you feel?
 - Are there emotions that the emojis do not appropriately express? [Which ones?]" (Adler et al., 2012)
 - What did you learn about yourself through exploring emojis?
 - What did you learn about others?
 - How might you apply what you learned through this activity?

Adler, R. B., Rodman, G. R., & DuPré, A. (2012). In *Understanding human communication*, Activity: Emoti-pros and cons. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.