

CATEGORY: VENEZUELA: NOW

CONCEPTS: LANGUAGE, life style, folklore

ACTIVITY: THE ART OF VENEZUELAN GESTURES. It is no secret that Latin Americans in general employ more gestures in their everyday language than we do. To a Latin American, a North American speaking often seems stark or "gesture poor." To a North American, the gestures of Latin (and other "gesturing cultures") are often viewed as excessive arm and hand waving. This contributes to the stereotype of the "excitable" Latin. Recent interest in "semiotics" (the study of signs) has led to the study and classification of all sorts of non-verbal signs, i.e., gestures, visual advertising language, traffic signs, etc. Students will enjoy entering this world of signs which are all around us, even when we are unaware of their existence.

OBJECTIVES: Students will learn a series of important Venezuelan gestures and become aware of the value of gestures in communication.

MATERIALS: none.

PROCEDURE: Have a class discussion of the words "communication" and "gesture." The students can give their own definitions of these words, then look up several dictionary definitions, and expand on their definitions.

Explain that gestures are an important part of "non-verbal communication" in Venezuela as well as throughout the Hispanic and Portuguese world.

Teach them the following gestures which are common but not limited to Venezuela:

1. Indication or pointing towards something. Venezuelans extend their lips as in an exaggerated kiss, accompanied by a slight nod towards the object or person. Example: "That's the man I told you about" (pursed lips, nod in direction of man indicating non-spoken "over there").



LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES

Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades*. Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985. 1989.

2. To indicate food. When referring to hunger or food, a person brings the open hand towards the mouth and fans up and down. Example: "It's 12:30!" (Hand fans mouth indicating "time to eat!").



3. To indicate money. There are several gestures, but the most common in the Hispanic world is extending the hand slightly and rubbing together the thumb and index plus middle fingers. Example: "I'd really like to buy that dress but . . ." (rubbing fingers to mean "It's very expensive.")



4. To formalize an agreement. Venezuelans shake hands as we do to seal a pact, but they also at times place the hands of the contracting parties palm-down on top of each other. Example: "Is it a deal?" (Both place hands together to indicate "Yes, it's binding").



5. Negation. There are also many gestures for "no," but one of the most interesting is the hand moving back and forth behind the ear with the index finger extended.



6. Surprise. Eyes wide open, tongue slightly out and resting on lower lip. Probably considered vulgar here but quite normal in Venezuela.



7. Against bad omens or the evil eye. Hand is placed in fist with index and little finger extending like horns. (In Spain this is an obscene gesture - be careful!)



Also, as in many other parts of the world, the fist knocks three times on a table, door, chair or anything of wood.

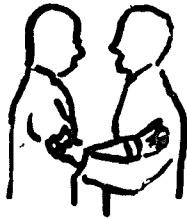
8. To indicate a rejection or inhibition. Both hands are held palm forward, chest high. Facial expression indicating doubt or bewilderment. Example: "You want me to kill that spider?" (Gesture indicating "No way!")



9. To indicate the abrupt end of something or big trouble. When one is fired from a job, gets dumped by a girl or boyfriend, makes a "fatal" mistake in school, etc., the index finger traces in front of the neck like a knife followed by a snapping of the fingers. Example: "The boss found out about Ann's mistake" (slash-snap, meaning "She's in big trouble and may get fired").



10. Greetings. Instead of shaking hands, many Venezuelans greet people, even those they don't know very well, by exchanging a series of pats on the shoulder.



Now students can discuss some of the gestures that are common in the United States. Remember and remind them that many gestures are unconscious forms of communication. They may discover some gestures that they didn't even know they are used to making.

VOCABULARY: communication, gesture, nonverbal communication.