

Avoiding Conflict: Week 2

Month: Sept.

Week #: 5

Day: d. Thur. Time: 30 min.

# The Body Language Bus

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**Objectives/Aims**

The students will: recognize and correctly interpret the emotional connotations behind physical gestures, postures, facial expressions, voice tone/inflection and how to respond appropriately

**Materials**

12 small chairs, 1 large chair

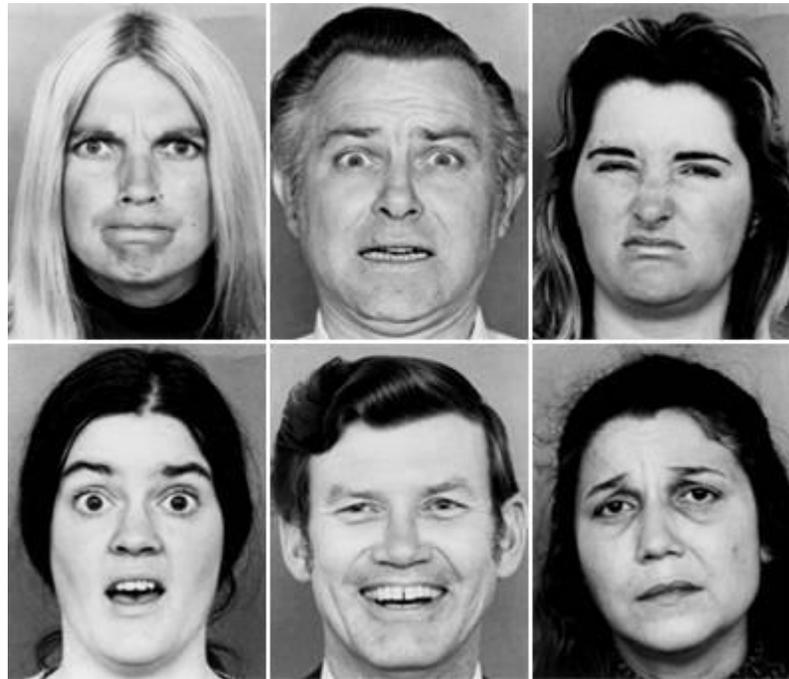
**Illustration**

These faces show six human emotions that can be recognized the world over. Can you determine what the six basic emotions are?

**Background**

Given that 7% of communication happens through spoken words, 38% happens through voice tone and 55% happens through generalized body language, [1] it is very important that students learn how to ‘read’ nonverbal communication to both avoid conflicts and to interact positively with others.

While some emotions are probably genetic in origin and common to all people (e.g. anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise) others are



specific to one’s culture. [2] The emotions portrayed in this lesson were chosen because they are found in our culture and are congruent with this curriculum. In addition, I chose Parrot’s [3] detailed break down of emotions because the simpler & general descriptions can be used with younger students and the more detailed delineations used with older ones. (Parrot’s chart can be found in the ‘Computer Generated’ layout of this database.)

Note: The idea for this activity came from Iman L. Khan.

**Group Activity**

**Body Language Bus**

Simulated bus setup: Arrange six pairs of chairs (passenger seats) parallel to the wall with a one large one at the front to denote the bus driver. The passenger seats should be angled such that the audience can see the passengers next to the wall.

1. Say, “Today we’re going to take an exciting ride on the ‘Body Language Bus’. Will it be a scary, happy or lovely experience? Hop on board to find out! First, I need six students that are already on the bus, seated next to the wall.” (Choose six students who are fairly empathetic about the emotional states of others.) “I also need six students who will be waiting at a bus stop to board the bus.” (Choose six students who can accurately portray the emotions of love [can pretend to be holding a baby], joy, surprise, anger, sadness and fear. Have them sit or stand off to the side at the ‘front’ of the bus. Whisper secretly into each of their ears what emotion they will portray and even, maybe, a situation that would cause such an emotional response to help them personally

relate to the emotion.) “Finally I need a bus driver.” (Show this person how to pantomime the driving of a bus, especially the opening and closing of the door with a manual door lever.)

2. Say, “Now we’re to begin our bus trip. I wonder if it will be an emotional roller coaster? People at the bus stop, when I say your name I want you to wait until the bus driver opens the door to enter the bus. When you enter the bus we want to see that emotion I gave you on your face, hear it in your words and in your voice tone, and see it in how you hold and move your body. Remember to face the audience and be dramatic! Once you enter the bus, go sit next to one of the passengers sitting near the wall. You are welcome to interact with that person. (At this point, you may want to demonstrate how to do this.) Also, all the actors need to listen for me to say, “Freeze frame!”, which means you need to freeze in place both in body and in voice. Good actors listen to their director.

3. Say to the audience, “While each person is entering the bus carefully observe his or her physical gestures, posture, facial expressions and voice tone/inflection. Then try to figure out what the emotion is that they are portraying or showing. Each time I say, “Freeze frame!” the audience is going to try to figure out what the emotion is and how to best treat a person who is demonstrating this emotion. Then I’ll say, “Action!” and the passenger that is already seated next to the wall will choose one or several of the audience’s ideas on how to best treat the emotional person who just sat next to them.”

**Group Discussion Questions** (ask after each ‘emotion’ enters the bus and you say “Freeze frame!”)

1. What physical gestures, posture, facial expressions and voice tone/inflection did you see or hear?
2. What emotion do you think he or she was portraying?
3. What can cause a person to feel this way?
4. How do you think would be the best way to react to someone that is showing this feeling?

Note: Draw out the idea that emotions such as love, joy and surprise are often easy to respond to because they are usually positive emotions. On the other hand, anger, sadness and fear are often much stronger emotions with negative connotations and thereby much harder to deal with.

In addition, in this activity the word ‘love’ is used to indicate brotherly, not romantic love.

**Conclusion**

Say, “Raise your hand if you think it would be exciting to ride on the ‘Body Language Bus.’ Learning to read ‘body language’ which includes physical gestures, posture, facial expressions and voice tone/inflection are just as important as listening to, and understanding other people’s words. Understanding body language can not only help you avoid conflicts, but help you to better meet the needs of other people.

**References**

[1] Mehrabian, Albert and Ferris, Susan R. "Inference of Attitudes from Nonverbal Communication in Two Channels," *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, Vol 31, No. 3,, June 1967, pp.248-258

[2] *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, USA*. 2010 Feb. 9;107(6):2408-12. Epub 2010 Jan 25.

[3] Parrott, W. (2001), *Emotions in Social Psychology*, Psychology Press, Philadelphia

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