American Gestures

A lesson for Elementary Students
Gestures

• Every culture has its own unique set of gestures and facial expression.

• Gestures and facial expressions are part of what is called non-verbal communication.

• Nonverbal communication is when people do not need to talk to communicate their ideas.
Fad Gestures

- Sometimes young people have their own special gestures that only they and their friends understand.

- They may use the special gesture for a few weeks or a few years, but no one else would understand the gesture.
Common Gestures

• Common gestures are gestures that most people would understand. They stay the same for many years.

• Gestures can show happiness, encouragement, anger, sadness, boredom, hope, and many other emotions.

• Some gestures are the same in America and Japan.

• Some gestures mean something different in Japan than they do in America.
Encouragement

• This gesture can mean many things. It can mean ‘Good job,’ ‘Excellent,’ or it can mean ‘I agree’ or ‘Good idea.’

• Example:
  ‘Great job on your English speech!’
In Japan, the sign for money is similar to that for encouragement in America.

In America, the gesture for money is made by rubbing one’s fingers against one’s palm, as seen here.

Example:
‘I would like to go to the movie with you, but I do not have any money.’
This gesture is usually made by teachers or parents to children.

The gesture is made by wagging one’s index finger back and forth.

Example:
‘You are a very bad boy.’
Polite Tea Drinking

• Tea cups in the West are different from those in Japan.

• Women hold the tea cup with one hand, and keep their pinky finger loose.

Example:
‘There is nothing as good as a hot cup of tea on a cold day.’
Photo Peace Sign

• In Japan, people make the peace sign when they have their picture taken.

• In America, people usually do not make the peace sign when they have their picture taken.

• In both countries, people say ‘Cheese’!
The Friendly Punch

• Boys and men often lightly punch each other as a form of greeting or to show friendship.
• The fist-to-fist greeting is very popular with young men.
• Example

‘What’s up, yo? I haven’t seen you in awhile.’
Telephone Gesture

• In America and in Japan, people make a special gesture to indicate a telephone.

• In Japan, the gesture is a fist to ear, whereas in America, the gesture is the same, but with the thumb and pinky fingers extended.

• Example: ‘Just give me a call sometime!’
Confusion!

• Scratching one’s head or throwing up one’s arms are ways to show confusion.

• Example:
  ‘I wonder if we can convince Tanaka-sensei to let us take our test tomorrow instead of today.’

  ‘I don’t know, but it’s worth asking.’
I’ll cross my fingers.

• When people are worried about a future event, they often cross their fingers.

• Example 1:
  ‘I have my fingers crossed that I pass the math test.’

Example 2:
 ‘I hope I pass my entrance exam!!’
Quotations

• Quotations in the air can show two different things, depending on the context.

  • First, the quotations may be a sign that the person is quoting someone else.

  • Second, they can be a sign of sarcasm—or saying one thing, but meaning another.

• Example:
  ‘I am on a ‘chocolate diet.”

Meaning: I am not on a diet, but I am eating chocolate.
Come here!

• To say ‘Come here’ in Japan, people often stick their hand in front of them and make a pulling motion with their fingers facing down.

• In America, the gesture is the same, but the fingers are pointing up.

• Example:
‘Come here! I want to show you something.’

[Note: The Japanese gesture actually means ‘Shoo’ or ‘Go away’ in America.]
Final Note

• Communication between people of different cultures is sometimes difficult. However, by watching gestures and facial expressions and listening carefully, even the most difficult ideas can be understood.

• However, words and gestures rarely have completely fixed meanings. Gestures especially are very flexible and can mean a variety of different things.

• Having contact with people from other cultures can help you to learn different gestures, and how to use them in many situations.

• Learning the gestures of other cultures is fun!