



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!'

Money!

- 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.'



NO!



- 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!**