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Teaching About East Asia  
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Title: East Asian TIP: Using the game Barnga to teach about Chinese language & the Sociology of language

Purpose: By using the game Barnga to simulate language barrier, students will learn the development of language in China, both historically and today, along with analyzing the sociological phenomena behind language.

Rationale: Students will first hand experience the difficulties of not being able to understand one another. This will prepare them for a discussion on how civilizations use language, using China as an example. This lesson uses the game Barnga created by Sivasailam Thiagarajan. In this game, students break into groups and play a card game. The trick is that each group has different rules and must play silently. After each round of play, the winner and loser of each group moves to another group and silently begin playing, not realizing (due to silence) that the new groups have different rules. Students must learn how to communicate with one another without talking, and realize firsthand the difficulties of being in a culture different than their own.

Grade level & Standards/benchmarks this would satisfy:

- New Albany Standard/Benchmark:
  - Grade/Class: Sociology (elective for grades 10-12)
  - Standard: UNIT 2 - Culture, Socialization, and Social Structure
  - Benchmark: Elements of Culture: Provide examples of the different elements of culture (language, symbols, mores, folkways, values, beliefs)

Goals/objectives (specific to this lesson):

- Students will participate in a simulation teaching them about the difficulties that arise when misunderstandings occur between groups of people.
- Students will discuss the use of language in a modern society.
- Students will differentiate between written, oral, and body language.

Essential questions:

- What happens when there is a communications barrier? How can understandings be made?
- What assumptions are made about people who do not “follow the rules” of a certain society, in this case because they don’t speak the language?
- Even when there are communication barriers, what other ways can people create connections?
- Modern China is a vast culture with, what some call, the longest written language still in continual use. However, they are also a vast geographical region with multiple very different language families. How has China adapted their language, both written and spoken, to meet the demands of a modern society?

Materials/Resources:

- 4-6 decks of playing cards (Ace-8 are used).
  - It may help to have different color/designs of decks and somehow indicate on a master rules sheet which color/design goes with which set of rules, as to help you mediate any arguments during the playing of the game.
- Modified Barnga rules (see attached)
- Reading about the development of Modern Chinese Language (see Day 1)
- Follow up questions (see Essential Questions section of this lesson)

Activities (by day if multiple days are used)

Day 1:

- Optional: you can either conduct the entire class silently, or begin the class talking and enforce silence once the game has begun.
- As students enter the room, somehow indicate to them that there will be no talking in class today.
- Divide the class into 4-6 groups depending on the size of your class.
- Distribute the rules of the game to the groups. If they haven't been given the silent rule yet, tell them to read the directions silently and they may whisper questions to their group members only. Be sure that each group gets their unique set of rules.
  - Optional: you may deduct points from students who violate the no talking rule.
- Once the students have had sufficient time to read and understand the rules, collect all the rule sheets and distribute the cards. Have the students begin playing their game.
- Once the first round is finished, winners and losers rotate. Circulate and act as a silent mediator.
- Continue playing for at least 4 rotations.
- If you have time at the end of class, have the students silently write a reflection about how they felt during the playing of the game. If not, you can do this as homework.
- For homework, either distribute the reading about the development of Chinese language, or direct the students to the appropriate web links. At your discretion, have them highlight, outline, answer reading guide, etc., the reading for use in the next class.

Day 2:

- Debrief from the previous day's experience. As students to explain what the problem was that caused such confusion. Have a few students share their reflections about how they felt.
- Discuss with students how language is used in a society. Ask students to define the difference between written, spoken, and body language. Have them give examples of how all of those forms of language were used during the game.
- Have students refer to the reading about language in China. Have students give examples of how language, both written and spoken, has developed in China.
- Have students begin to make connections to the game. Examples:
  - People from different regions have different languages/dialects that prevent them from being able to understand one another, just like students were unable to understand the new rules when their groups changed after rotation.

- In China there is a semi-common written language that is used across the country so that people from different regions can understand each other. In the game, everyone understood the meaning behind the cards: high vs. low, different suits, etc.
- Assign the Essential Questions to the students as a completion to the lesson.

Assessments:

- Reaction to the game writing assignment
- Essential Questions

Websites:

- FAQ about Chinese languages: <http://www.glossika.com/en/dict/faq.php>
- Basic info about Chinese language:  
[http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Chinese\\_writing\\_system](http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Chinese_writing_system)
- Barnga: <http://www.interculturalpress.com/store/pc/viewPrd.asp?idproduct=30>
- Modified Barnga rules:  
[http://socrates.acadiau.ca/courses/educ/reid/games/Game\\_descriptions/Barnga1.htm](http://socrates.acadiau.ca/courses/educ/reid/games/Game_descriptions/Barnga1.htm)

## ***Language & Sociology – Some Talking Points***

- Language is an invention of society, both verbal and written.
- Language is used to transmit information, ideas, and knowledge to other people.
- Language reveals things about a society. Examples:
  - America has many words relating to intervals of time: nanosecond, millisecond, moment, minute, era, recurrent, light-year, afternoon, eternal, regularly, etc.
  - Some societies do not have a word for sin, while others have many.
  - The Inuit language has over 20 words to describe snow.
- Language can hold clues to what people find important.
- How we speak is important. Is there a difference in the language you use when speaking with a friend versus when speaking with an adult?

Source: Shepard, Jon M. and Robert W. Greene. Sociology and You. Columbus, OH: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, 2003.

## ***Language in China's Society***

- In 1911, a revolt against the Qing Empire of China began. Many of the targets of this revolt were the old ways of Imperial China, and many of the leaders were young intellectuals looking to bring China into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.
- Revolutionary leaders like Hu Shi believed that the Classical Language of China was “A dead language” and, because it had been tied to the educated elite for so long, it was holding down the progress of the rest of society. He proposed one standard vernacular be used by all Chinese to help unify them into a stronger nation, similar to how a unified vernacular developed in European nations during the Middle Ages.
- The Vernacular Chinese is based on the Mandarin language of northern China.
- By 1921, the Ministry of Education determined that lower grade school books would be written in the vernacular language.
- Today, Simplified Chinese is based on the Vernacular Chinese, and used as the written language by most people in the Peoples Republic of China. Classical Chinese is still used, but only in more formal settings and by some outside of PR China.
- Because Vernacular Chinese is based on Mandarin, other major language groups, especially Cantonese, include other symbols into the Vernacular written language to better express words that appear in their language, but not in Mandarin.

Sources:

- Ebrey, Patricia, Anne Walthall, and James Palais. East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2009.
- [http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Vernacular\\_Chinese](http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Vernacular_Chinese)

## ▲ *Culture Cards!* ▲

Cards: This game uses cards Ace-9

Teams: Teams should consist of 4-6 players.

Starting the game: The dealer will deal an equal amount of cards to each person, with any extra being left in the middle.

Game Play:

- Each player, starting with the person to the RIGHT of the dealer, will lay down one card.
- Whatever card the first player lays down, everyone else must follow suit. If you do not have a card to play to follow suit, you may lay any card.
- Once each player has laid down a card, whoever has the **highest** card wins.
- There is NO TRUMP in this game. The highest card for the player who followed suit is the winner.
- The winner collects the cards from the hand and places them face down in front of them. The winner will lead the first card for the next hand of play.
- Once all the cards are played, whoever won the most hands is the winner of the game. However won the least is the loser.
- In the event of a tie, one round of rock-paper-scissors will determine the overall winner.

Winners & Losers: Once the game is over, the winner & loser from each table will move to a different table. Winners move to the table on the right, losers move to the table on the left.

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Starting the game: The dealer will deal an equal amount of cards to each person, with any extra being left in the middle.

Game Play:

- Each player, starting with the person to the RIGHT of the dealer, will lay down one card.
- Whatever card the first player lays down, everyone else must follow suit. If you do not have a card to play to follow suit, you may lay any card.
- In this game, SPADES are trump. You must follow the suit that was lead by the first person, however if you do not have that suit and you do have a spade, your card will trump the others and becomes the highest card.
- Once each player has laid down a card, whoever has the **highest** card that follows suit, or who has the highest spade card, wins.
- The winner collects the cards from the hand and places them face down in front of them. The winner will lead the first card for the next hand of play.
- Once all the cards are played, whoever won the most hands is the winner of the game. However won the least is the loser.
- In the event of a tie, one round of rock-paper-scissors will determine the overall winner.

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Starting the game: The dealer will deal an equal amount of cards to each person, with any extra being left in the middle.

Game Play:

- Each player, starting with the person to the RIGHT of the dealer, will lay down one card.
- Whatever card the first player lays down, everyone else must follow suit. If you do not have a card to play to follow suit, you may lay any card.
- In this game, CLUBS are trump. You must follow the suit that was lead by the first person, however if you do not have that suit and you do have a club, your card will trump the others and becomes the highest card.
- Once each player has laid down a card, whoever has the **highest** card that follows suit, or who has the highest club card, wins.
- The winner collects the cards from the hand and places them face down in front of them. The winner will lead the first card for the next hand of play.
- Once all the cards are played, whoever won the most hands is the winner of the game. However won the least is the loser.
- In the event of a tie, one round of rock-paper-scissors will determine the overall winner.

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Game Play:

- Each player, starting with the person to the RIGHT of the dealer, will lay down one card.
- Whatever card the first player lays down, everyone else must follow suit. If you do not have a card to play to follow suit, you may lay any card.
- In this game, HARTS are trump. You must follow the suit that was lead by the first person, however if you do not have that suit and you do have a hart, your card will trump the others and becomes the highest card.
- Once each player has laid down a card, whoever has the **highest** card that follows suit, or who has the highest hart card, wins.
- The winner collects the cards from the hand and places them face down in front of them. The winner will lead the first card for the next hand of play.
- Once all the cards are played, whoever won the most hands is the winner of the game. However won the least is the loser.
- In the event of a tie, one round of rock-paper-scissors will determine the overall winner.

Winners & Losers: Once the game is over, the winner & loser from each table will move to a different table. Winners move to the table on the right, losers move to the table on the left.

## ◆ *Culture Cards!* ◆

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Teams: Teams should consist of 4-6 players.

Starting the game: The dealer will deal an equal amount of cards to each person, with any extra being left in the middle.

Game Play:

- Each player, starting with the person to the RIGHT of the dealer, will lay down one card.
- Whatever card the first player lays down, everyone else must follow suit. If you do not have a card to play to follow suit, you may lay any card.
- In this game, DIAMONDS are trump. You must follow the suit that was lead by the first person, however if you do not have that suit and you do have a diamond, your card will trump the others and becomes the highest card.
- Once each player has laid down a card, whoever has the **highest** card that follows suit, or who has the highest diamond card, wins.
- The winner collects the cards from the hand and places them face down in front of them. The winner will lead the first card for the next hand of play.
- Once all the cards are played, whoever won the most hands is the winner of the game. However won the least is the loser.
- In the event of a tie, one round of rock-paper-scissors will determine the overall winner.

Winners & Losers: Once the game is over, the winner & loser from each table will move to a different table. Winners move to the table on the right, losers move to the table on the left.

## **Chinese Language Reading Guide**

Use this website to answer the following questions:

[http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Chinese\\_writing\\_system](http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Chinese_writing_system)

1. The written form of Chinese dates back how long?
2. What is relationship between written and spoken Chinese?
3. Describe what Vernacular Chinese is and how it is used today? What is it based on?
4. Vernacular Chinese is based on language from northern China. Cantonese is a southern Chinese language. Explain the relationship between written Cantonese and Vernacular Chinese.
5. The Chinese written language is based on an ancient Chinese language using pictograms. Explain how pictures became words in Chinese,
6. What is the difference between Traditional and Simplified Chinese?

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Use this website to answer the following questions:

<http://www.glossika.com/en/dict/faq.php>

FAQ #1: How many languages does China have?

FAQ #4: Define the following: Language & Dialect.

FAQ #5: Roughly, how many dialects does China have?

FAQ #19: Can two people from China who speak different languages or different dialects understand each other? (You may need to define the term Mutually Intelligible).

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Follow Up (Your Opinion)

So how do people from all across China communicate with each other?

## ***The Sociology of Language***

Now that we have completed this lesson about language as it pertains to a culture or a society, answer the following questions:

1. What happens when there is a communications barrier? How can understandings be made?
2. What assumptions are made about people who do not “follow the rules” of a certain society, in this case because they don’t speak the language?
3. Even when there are communication barriers, what other ways can people create connections?
4. Modern China is a vast culture with, what some call, the longest written language still in continual use. However, they are also a vast geographical region with multiple very different language families. How has China adapted their language, both written and spoken, to meet the demands of a modern society?