

# **“A VISIT WITH THE AMBERANA”**

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## A VISIT WITH THE AMBERANA AMBERANAN BRIEFING SHEET

You are the representatives of the Amberana people, a tribe that lives deep in the rain forests of Marañ. For years, your people have lived in isolation in the rainforests, avoiding the outside world. Recently some outsiders (or *Ee-bo*) have arranged a meeting with you and some “Americans” (an unknown tribe). You do not know what these *Americans* want, but you regard all *Ee-bo* as potentially dangerous. In fact your relations with outsiders are not good, as they are constantly encroaching onto your lands and burning down the trees of your habitat. Even the Marañ government has been unfriendly and demanding in their recent communications and you are concerned that tensions will only get worse.

The Amberanans are known for their use of the *ka-lee-ya*, a flowering plant that has healing properties. This plant is your pride and sacred symbol. Only the Amberana know where the *ka-lee-ya* grows and how it can be preserved. You consider this rare plant a sacred gift of mother earth and zealously guard its sanctity. It is only to be used to heal the Amberana, and possibly the friends of the Amberana.

Amberanan culture exhibits its own unique patterns and values. The Amberanans speak their own language, but some have a **limited command of English** (missionaries taught some English to members of the tribe about 10 years ago). The most overwhelming aspect of the Amberanan culture is **their reverence and connection to the land and its resources**. They are strongly against any kind of waste or harvesting unless it is controlled and necessary. The Amberana also exhibit some **unique nonverbal gestures**: two hands held up laterally in front of the face means “I do not agree” or “I do not want to hear this” [see *diagram 1*] while two hands moving up and down with four fingers extended means “I agree” or “I like what I hear” [see *diagram 2*]. Also, the Amberana **only sit on the floor**. Chairs are unknown and are considered an insult to mother earth. Sitting on the floor is done after initial trust with outsiders is established. Amberanan meetings begin with all parties standing. Furthermore, the Amberana have **no concept of money or ownership**. Nor do the Amberana have any **concept of hierarchy**. The tribe has no “leader,” in fact, it is somewhat insulting for an *Ee-bo* to suggest that one member of your tribe is higher than another. All have equal voice, and all decisions are made through communal consensus.

The Amberana have several favorite phrases (which they speak even when “outsiders” are present): ***Bah-doon*** – “[It is] good”; ***Bah-shan*** – “[It is] bad”; ***Ee-bo*** – “outsider”; These can be mixed to form longer phrases. For example, the phrase “*Ee-bo bah-shan*” roughly translates as “the outsider is bad,” or the phrase “*ka-lee-ya bah-doon*” means “The *ka-lee-ya* is good.”

Suddenly, a motor boat arrives bringing the *Americans* to your village. Your shaman chants in front of them to ward off any evil spirits they may be harboring. The Americans approach. It is time to talk with them and learn their intent . . .

## A VISIT WITH THE AMBERANA AMERICAN BRIEFING SHEET

You and another associate are representatives from an American university. You have come to the rain forests of Marañá to meet with the Amberana, an aboriginal people who have had little contact with the rest of the world. **Your purpose is to question the Amberana about a rare plant—the *ka-lee-ya* flower, which grows in their region—and harvest some samples for study back in the United States.** The *ka-lee-ya* is said to have significant pharmaceutical value (earlier samples tested years ago yielded promising results). The shrinking habitat of the *ka-lee-ya* has made your trip an urgent one, as ranchers are constantly encroaching onto jungle land and burning down sections of the rain forest.

Worse than this, the government of Marañá has pursued an unsympathetic policy towards the Amberana. Developers and ranchers have been encouraged by the governmental policy of ignoring deforestation. This policy has meant an end to the traditional way of life for many peoples who lived in the rain forest. The Amberana are one of the last groups to resist assimilation. The only sure way to stop development of their section of land is to buy it—but the university won't put out such funds unless it is convinced that the land is useful as a bio-diversity laboratory. Testing *ka-lee-ya* samples is the only way that this can be determined.

Although you are quite excited about meeting the Amberanans, you know very little about their culture. You have heard rumors that the Amberanans are suspicious towards outsiders. You arrived on a flight yesterday, and had a rough night of sleep at the hotel. You and your companion have traveled upriver in a crude motor boat, the heat and humidity of the mid-day sun bearing down on you relentlessly.

Fortunately, you know that the representatives at the meeting will speak some English, although you know that the Amberanans are not well versed in American cultural norms. Missionaries traveled to this region ten years ago and taught some English to the Amberanan leaders, although religious conversion never took place.

**Your plan is simple: get permission from the tribe's leader to harvest samples of the *ka-lee-ya* plant and bring the samples back to the university as soon as possible.** You believe that if you can convince the leader of the tribe to back your cause, all of the Amberana will cooperate. You need their help to locate the *ka-lee-ya* plant—you will not be able to find it on your own.

As you and your associate enter the Amberanan settlement, you are amazed at the site: an entire village of huts made of intertwined living trees, vines and plants. After being greeted by the tribal religious leader (who chants in your honor), you are shown into a modest looking hut. There, the representatives of the tribe await you. You approach them—ready to act in your friendliest manner—and ready to ask the Amberana for the right to harvest the legendary *ka-lee-ya* flower . . .

## **A VISIT WITH THE AMBERANA**

### **Facilitator's Directions**

**Simulation Type:** Open, realistic, fictional

**Time Length:** 30-40 minutes

**Participants:** 6-7 per group [multiple groups can participate at once]

**Materials Needed:** None

#### **Goal**

This intercultural exercise simulates a meeting of American botanists who have traveled to the fictional country of Marañ (ma-RAWN-ya) to visit the Amberana (am-ba-RAY-na). The Americans are almost totally ignorant of their host culture, however, and must communicate with the Amberanans in an acceptable manner if they are to succeed in their quest.

Another goal of the exercise is to emphasize some of the areas in which cultures differ. Amberanan culture differs from American culture in several ways. By role-playing an exchange between Americans and Amberanans, participants learn about some of the areas in which cultures can differ.

#### ***Facilitating the Simulation:***

##### **Background**

This exercise simulates an intercultural exchange between Americans and a fictional culture. Participants role-playing either culture can learn from the experience. The task is simple, but the cultural barriers are considerable. One of the greatest challenges of this exercise is to teach the cultural patterns to the "Amberanan" participants in a short period of time.

##### **Briefing**

Divide the participants into small groups of 6-7 (more than one group can participate at once). Each group should have 2 "Americans" and 4-5 "Amberanans." The exercise can also be done as one large group (i.e., 2-4 Americans visiting 6-12 Amberanans). Give participants a copy of the appropriate briefing sheet (i.e., Amberanan or American).

Separate participants into two rooms: one for Amberanans, the other for Americans. Allow them several minutes to read the information on their briefing sheets. Then take a few minutes to acquaint the Amberanans with their new culture. Teach them the Amberanan gestures and phrases.

Before the Americans re-enter the room, solicit questions from them. Emphasize

that they must observe and adapt to the Amberanan ways if they are to be successful.

Be sure to emphasize that each group has different goals: the Amberanans' goal is to successfully exhibit the Amberanan cultural ways. The Americans' goal is to gain the Amberanans' assistance and approval to harvest samples of the *ka-lee-ya* plant.

### **During the Simulation**

Begin the exercise with the Amberanans ready to meet the Americans. As the groups come together, introductions will be made, and the talks will begin. When the Amberanans feel at ease, they will sit—on the floor, of course. If the Americans sit on chairs they will have offended the Amberanans. The Americans will probably begin their discussion by searching for the tribe's "leader" (another potential *faux pas*), and then broach the issue of harvesting the *ka-lee-ya* plant. Once the talks progress beyond this point, the Americans will still have to deal with the culture shock of different gestures, unfamiliar phrases, and different values.

The negotiations may reach an impasse due to the fact that the Americans want to harvest what is essentially a sacred plant of the Amberana. Hopefully, the Americans can phrase their proposal in such a way that the Amberanans will find acceptable.

The Americans may truly offend the Amberanans. If this happens, emphasize to the Amberanans that they should continue to show respect to their guests until the end of the meeting (15-20 minutes) even if they feel that they cannot make an agreement.

### **Debriefing**

Begin by asking each small group whether or not they came to an agreement, and what that agreement was. If a group did not come to an agreement, ask them why they did not.

*Then, as a large group, ask the following discussion questions:*

#### **1) [For the Americans]: "What kinds of cultural differences did you notice in your discussion with the Amberanans?"**

*Differences exist in the areas of language (limited command of English, Amberanan phrases), nonverbal communication (hand gestures, sitting on the floor) and values (reverence for nature, no concept of ownership or hierarchy).*

**2) [For the Amberanans]: “What things did your American guests do that you found offensive?”**

*Chances are, the Americans will violate some of the Amberanan cultural norms such as sitting on chairs, trying to find the “leader,” or failing to show the proper reverence to the Amberanans’ concept of harmony with nature.*

**3) What are the ‘real world’ implications of an exercise such as this one?**

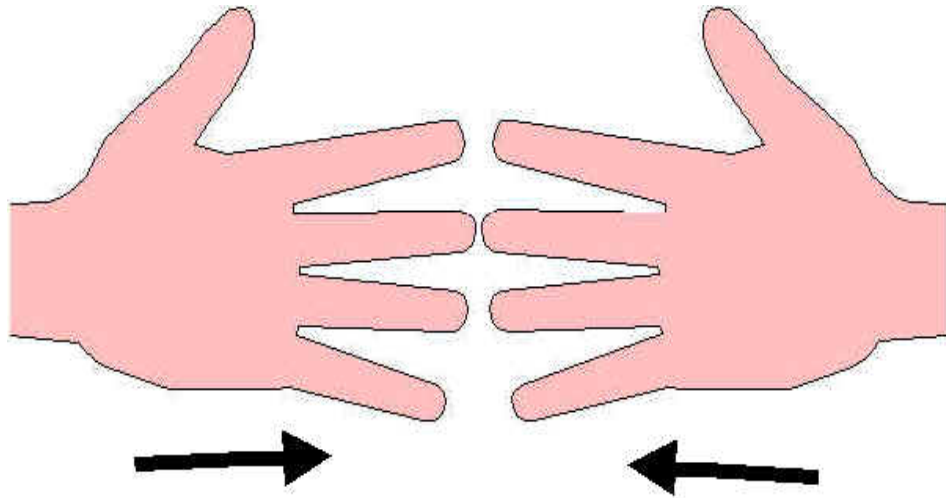
*That different cultures have different ways of doing things, and successful intercultural communication sometimes entails being aware of and adapting to different cultural patterns. So many of the patterns and protocols that we possess are not universal—and the successful intercultural communicator must be aware of these possibilities and be ready to adapt.*

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## **SUMMARY OF SIMULATION**

- 1) Divide participants into small groups of 6-7; sub-divide these small groups into 2 “Americans” and 4-5 “Amberanans.”
- 2) Separate the Americans and the Amberanans. Allow each group time to read their briefing sheets and learn their task. Briefly train Amberanans in the cultural aspects that they must demonstrate.
- 3) Reunite both groups and begin negotiations. The Americans must successfully observe and follow the Amberanan cultural ways in order to succeed.
- 4) After about 15-20 minutes, end the simulation and begin the debriefing; ask each small group to reveal whether or not they came to an agreement.
- 5) Ask discussion questions.

**Diagram 1:** Gesture of refusal / disagreement [front view]:



**Diagram 2:** Gesture of agreement / appreciation [front view]

