

BARNGA

Overview	<p>BARNGA is a simulation game that encourages participants to critically consider normative assumptions and cross-cultural communication. It was created by Sivasailam “Thiagi” Thiagarajan in 1980, while working for USAID in Gbarnga, Liberia. He and his colleagues were trying to play Euchre, but all came away from the instructions with different interpretations. He had an ‘A-ha’ moment that conflict arises not (only) from major or obvious cultural differences but often from subtle, minor cues. He created the game to tease out these subtleties. In this activity, students play a card game silently, each operating with a different set of rules, unbeknownst to them.</p>
Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To learn to communicate effectively across cultural groups. 2) To help students interrogate assumptions they may have about group norms and to critically analyze where those norms have come from, determining whether or not they continue to be useful in new contexts. 3) To understand what happens when we are not utilizing the same “rules” or “norms” as others in the group. 4) To interrogate what the role of communication is in helping us either be confused or understand one another.
Implementation	<p>This exercise is best implemented early in the semester when students are first learning how to communicate effectively with one another. It illustrates what happens when that communication breaks down.</p> <p>It is also effective for first-year seminar courses with students who are transitioning to the university with new norms and rules, different from what they are used to.</p> <p>Finally, this is great for building intercultural awareness. We tend to make a lot of assumptions about other groups based on our norms.</p>
Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) BARNGA is complicated. For further insight into the game how it is played in a classroom, please view this video. 2) The game will require most of a class period (roughly 45 minutes to an hour) for students to complete and debrief. 3) Consider the special restrictions of your class. BARNGA will require that students be able to move around and sit around tables or clusters of desks. It will not likely be a doable activity in lecture halls. 4) Students with disabilities that affect their ability to move around the room or hold cards may have difficulty taking part in this activity.

Materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) BARNGA Game Rules2) Tournament Guidelines and Discussion Guide3) Shortened deck of cards, enough for each group (2-7 and Aces)4) Table Marker for grouping5) Scrap Paper6) Pens or Markers
Citations	Sivasailam “Thiagi” Thiagarajan with Raja Thiagarajan, <i>BARNGA: A Simulation Game on Cultural Clashes</i> , Boston: Intercultural Press, 2006

Session Sequence

Lesson Structure	Time <i>(Estimated amount of time for each component)</i>	Activity Content and Instructions
Introduction	3 mins	The instructor welcomes the class and provides an overview of the activity: In this activity, you will learn a new game but learn how to communicate effectively through playing the game. We will also learn how to work well in a cross-cultural group.
What is BARNGA?	5 mins	<p>Give a brief overview of the game and how it will be played</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Today we will be playing a simulation called BARNGA. The name BARNGA comes from the name of a town in Liberia, where the game originates. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide a brief history of the game, as outlined in the overview, if necessary 2) In small groups, you will receive some rules for BARNGA, which no one has played before. You will get a few minutes to study the rules and practice playing the game at your table. 3) After a few minutes, the rules will be taken away and from that moment on, there will be no verbal communication – that means no speaking, no writing out words, and no signing of words. 4) A tournament will begin, and people will be moving from table to table. 5) After a few rounds, we will discuss what happened.
Practice and Simulation	25-30 mins	<p>Break students into small groups (4-6) for the simulation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reiterate rules: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. You will have 5 minutes to study the rules and practice 5 tricks. b. The rules will then be taken away and NO verbal communication will be allowed. You may gesture or draw pictures (No Words!) but you cannot speak, sign, or write words. c. The tournament will begin, and you will have a few minutes to play at your home table in silence. d. Tournament scoring is explained in the guide. e. Each round will last a few minutes and at the end of each round players should move as outlined on the tournament guide.

		<p>2) Give students time to review the rule sheets, ensuring that the different rules are distributed evenly among the groups.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Have them take rule sheets from under the table tents, look them over, and then begin practicing. Have them try to deal the cards out while they are looking over the rules. b. After a few minutes of practicing, collect the rules. Do not make a big of this; just say it is time to start playing and they no longer get to have the rules. <p>3) Announce the start of the tournament:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue to tell students that they keep score as explained in the guide. (Do not respond if they ask for your interpretation of the guide, politely say to read the guide sheet, which they get to keep throughout). b. Remind and reinforce – no verbal communication! c. End round one after 5 minutes d. Hold 3 or 4 rounds, but do not announce this – just end after 4 rounds. <p>4) Announce the end of the tournament.</p>
<p>What is a Debrief?</p>	<p>5 mins</p>	<p>Bring the class back together for a large group debrief and use the first few minutes to explain what a debrief entails.</p> <p>1) Set up the class in a circle or other arrangement for debriefing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do not let them start talking about how things went until they have calmed down. b. Many students may be frustrated, others will be laughing and wanting to share, but explain that we want to hear everyone so hold onto your thoughts. <p>2) Explain what debriefing is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A time to discover together what happened and what it all means. We will examine all the pieces of the puzzle and this takes everyone’s participation. b. Debriefing gives us a chance to reflect on a common experience, in this case playing BARNGA. c. Debriefing helps to make the discussion as rich as possible and helps us collectively learn from each other.

<p>Let's Debrief P. 1 (Descriptive)</p>	<p>10 mins</p>	<p>Lead the first debrief</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What was going through your mind when...? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. BARNGA was introduced? b. You first began the game? c. The rules were taken away? d. You had to move? e. You were playing with a new table? 2) Did what you were thinking and feeling change during play? 3) What were your greatest successes and frustrations? 4) If the rules come up, press for other frustrations, too
<p>Let's Debrief P. 2 (Applied)</p>	<p>20 mins</p>	<p>Lead the second debrief</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Some possible problems to highlight that arose during the game: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Each group did its best, but all had different sets of circumstances and ground rules. b. Most discovered different rules but did not know exactly how they were different. c. Even if you knew how rules were different, it was not clear how to bridge those differences. d. Communicating with others is difficult and requires sensitivity and creativity. e. When the differences are hidden or few, it may even be more difficult to resolve them than if they were many and obvious. f. Despite many similarities, people have differences in the way they do things...you have to understand and reconcile those differences in order to function effectively in a group. 2) Ask students: What were other problems that arose during playing the game? 3) Split students into groups of three and have them take 10 minutes to answer the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What specific "real-life" situations does BARNGA simulate? b. What does the simulation suggest about what to do when you are in this situation in the "real world"? c. What were the underlying causes of the problems that arose in this session? d. Have you ever had an experience where there was a rule difference that you did not know about? How did your view of things change once you became aware of it? In retrospect, how would you do things differently if you knew in this game?

		<p>e. When are you all likely to encounter situations in the real world like BARNGA? What would you like to happen when you next experience 'rule' differences? How will you increase the likelihood of having a positive experience?</p> <p>4) Bring the class back together as a full group and have students share out from group conversations:</p> <p>a. What interesting things did you discuss? What was surprising?</p> <p>b. What did you think the simulation suggests about the "real world"?</p> <p>c. What do you think the simulation teaches us about communication and conflict?</p> <p>d. Ask - How is BARNGA related to this course?</p>
Let's Debrief P. 3 (Takeaways)	5 mins	<p>1) Give each student an index card and have them write down one important thing they learned from BARNGA.</p> <p>2) Collect cards and re-distribute them randomly.</p> <p>3) Go around and ask each student to read out loud the card they now have.</p>
Closing	5 mins	<p>1) Thank everyone for their participation in playing BARNGA.</p> <p>2) Reiterate certain points and takeaways from the debrief.</p> <p>3) Emphasize applicability to the course.</p>