**A Zodiac Story: The Giraffe and the Elephant**\*

In an up-and-coming multicultural community in the Zodiac city, a **Giraffe** had a new home built to her family’s specifications. It was a wonderful house for giraffes, with soaring ceilings and tall doorways. High windows ensured maximum light and good views while protecting the family’s privacy. Narrow hallways saved valuable space without compromising convenience. The house was so well done that it won the National Giraffe Home of the Year Award. The home owners were understandably proud.

One day the Giraffe looked out the window while working in her wood shop in the basement. Coming down the street was an Elephant. “I know him,” she thought. “We worked together on a Parent/Teacher Association (PTA) committee. In fact, we need to talk about an upcoming fund raising event for the school. The Elephant is an excellent woodworker. I think I’ll ask him to see my new woodshop and maybe we can plan the school’s fund raising event together.” So the Giraffe reached her head out the window and invited the Elephant in.

The **Elephant** was excited; he had enjoyed working with the Giraffe in previous school committee meetings. He looked forward to swapping ideas with the Giraffe and also chatting about how to improve their children’s under-equipped playground. Besides, he had heard of the state-of-the-art woodshop and wanted to see it firsthand. So he walked up to the basement door and knocked.

“Come in, come in!” said the Giraffe. But immediately they encountered a problem. While the elephant could get his head in the door, he could not go farther. “It’s a good thing we made this door expandable to accommodate my woodshop equipment,” the Giraffe said. “Give me a minute while I take care of our problem.” She removed some bolts and panels to allow the Elephant in.

The two acquaintances were happily exchanging woodworking stories in the basement when the Giraffe’s husband leaned his head down the basement and called to his wife: “Telephone, honey, it’s your boss.” “I’d better take the phone upstairs,” the Giraffe told the Elephant. “Please make yourself at home; this may take a while.”

The Elephant looked around, saw a half-finished children’s wood project in the far corner of the shop and decided to explore it further. As he moved though the narrow doorway that led to the corner area of the wood shop he heard a loud scrunching noise. He backed out, scratching his head. “Maybe I will join the Giraffe upstairs,” he thought. But as the Elephant started up the stairs, he heard the stairs begin to crack from his weight. He tumbled and fell back against the wall. The wall too began to crumble. As he sat there disheveled and dismayed, the Giraffe hurried back down the stairs.

“What on earth is going on?” the Giraffe asked in amazement. “I was just trying to make myself at home,” the Elephant replied. The Giraffe looked around. “Okay, I can see the problem. It’s easy to fix. The doorway is too narrow for you. You just need to get into better shape. There is an aerobics studio nearby. If you’d take some classes, we could get you down a few sizes.” “Maybe...,” the Elephant replied, looking quite unconvinced.

“And the stairs are too weak to carry your weight,” the Giraffe continued. “If you go to ballet class at night and cut down on your carbs, I’m positive you’d be light on your feet. I really hope you’ll do it, and do it fast. For the sake of our children and the community, we need to start working on the school’s fund-raising project together.”

“Perhaps,” said the Elephant. “But to tell you the truth, I’m not sure that a house designed for a Giraffe will ever really work for an Elephant unless there are some major changes.”

\*Source: Adapted from: R.Roosevelt Thomas, Jr. (1999). *Building a House for Diversity.* New York: AMACO-American Management Association.

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Interactive Probes for “A Zodiac Story”**

(Ask yourself and probe your classmates’ reactions)

1. To what extent can you relate to the Giraffe? Why?

2. To what extent can you relate to the Elephant? Why?

3. Can the Giraffe and the Elephant work constructively together? How? Offer some metaphorical or concrete suggestions.

4. Can culturally diverse groups in the United States live and work constructively together on an even playing field? Can you offer some imaginative solutions?

*(continue on next page if needed)*

Instructor’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Intercultural Communication Course Assessment**

Directions: Please rate the following statements based on your honest opinions.

Feel free to circle any number between 5 and 1 with 5 = **to a great extent [GE],** 4 = **moderate extent [ME],** 3 = **neutral [N]**, 2 = **less extent [LE],** and 1 = **least extent [LSE].**

Upon completing this intercultural communication (ICC) course, to what extent would you be able to:

GE ME N LE LSE

1. Explain culture as an iceberg metaphor? 5 4 3 2 1

2. Define ICC as a symbolic exchange process? 5 4 3 2 1

3. Apply the staircase model of ICC competence? 5 4 3 2 1

4. Analyze individualism-collectivism value differences? 5 4 3 2 1

5. Use an example to illustrate small power distance/large   
power distance miscommunication? 5 4 3 2 1

6. Compare the difference between feminine and   
masculine value patterns? 5 4 3 2 1

7. Acknowledge social identity diversity issues  
in a multicultural society? 5 4 3 2 1

8. Understand the difference between assimilated identity  
and ethnic-oriented identity? 5 4 3 2 1

9. Analyze racial–ethnic identity stories in  
accordance with various developmental stages? 5 4 3 2 1

10. Explain the “up and down” W-pattern of culture   
shock to a friend? 5 4 3 2 1

11. Apply constructive strategies to deal with   
culture shock stressors? 5 4 3 2 1

12. Understand reentry culture shock issues? 5 4 3 2 1

13. Compare linear versus relational worldview? 5 4 3 2 1

14. Extend intercultural empathy to nonnative English speakers? 5 4 3 2 1

15. Adapt your verbal communication style  
to your high- or low-context audience? 5 4 3 2 1

16. Recognize the verbal communication tendencies

(LCC vs. HCC) of host nationals in a new culture? 5 4 3 2 1

GE ME N LE LSE

17. Explain intercultural monochronic and polychronic   
time differences? 5 4 3 2 1

18. Compare high-contact versus low-contact cultural  
expectations concerning physical space usage? 5 4 3 2 1

19. Decode low-context and high-context   
miscommunication in everyday interaction? 5 4 3 2 1

20. Use examples to illustrate different intercultural conflict goals? 5 4 3 2 1

21. Define the different cross-cultural conflict  
communication styles? 5 4 3 2 1

22. Recognize your own stereotypes of outgroup members? 5 4 3 2 1

23. Understand the difference between   
stereotypes and generalizations? 5 4 3 2 1

24. Distinguish between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism? 5 4 3 2 1

25. Monitor your own prejudicial mindset with  
enhanced awareness? 5 4 3 2 1

26. deal with the challenges in intercultural  
relationships effectively? 5 4 3 2 1

27. Display cultural sensitivity to different relationship  
development norms? 5 4 3 2 1

28. Apply ethnorelative thinking in a new culture? 5 4 3 2 1

29. Overall, how has this course enriched your  
understanding of ICC issues? 5 4 3 2 1

30. Overall, how would you rate the benefits of the  
content of this course? 5 4 3 2 1

Sex:\_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male Ethnic background: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Took this course for: \_\_\_\_\_ General Ed \_\_\_\_\_ Major/Minor Major: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What was the one key idea that stood out to you in this course? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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*Source*: Dr. Stella Ting-Toomey, co-developed with Dr. Tenzin Dorjee and Mr. Peter Lee. (2011) Department of Human Communication Studies, CSUF. All rights reserved. Used with permission.