Shoes at the Door

How different meanings can turn a mistake into a conflict

6-9.WG.5.3 "Analyze how miscommunication or misunderstandings of different cultures can lead to conflict."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the students' mistaken guesses and circle Amrit's mistaken guess. Number two actions that helped clear up the misunderstanding.

A Visit to the Gurdwara

1. When a middle school service club visited a local gurdwara, a Sikh place of worship, the students were invited to help serve a free meal called langar. At this gurdwara, visitors covered their heads and left their shoes in racks before entering the prayer hall. A sign near the doorway said, "Please leave shoes here." Two students thought "here" meant somewhere near the entrance. They walked past the racks because they guessed the shelves were only for muddy shoes. Their shoes were clean, so they kept them on.

2. A volunteer named Amrit noticed the shoes and asked the students to stop. He said, "We take off our shoes before we go in." One student replied, "They're clean," thinking Amrit was worried about dirt on the floor. Amrit heard the reply as a refusal to follow a shared practice, and his voice grew sharp. The student felt accused and stepped back from the doorway. Neither side had asked what the other meant, so a small mistake now threatened to end the visit.

3. Their teacher asked Amrit to explain the custom, then asked the students what they had understood from the sign. Amrit explained that at this gurdwara, everyone removed their shoes before entering the prayer hall as a sign of respect, whether the shoes were clean or dirty. The students explained their guess about the racks and apologized. Amrit showed them where to place their shoes, and the group entered together. The visit continued because both sides replaced guesses about each other's intentions with questions and clear explanations.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did the students keep their shoes on even after reading the sign?

2. Why did "They're clean" fail to address Amrit's concern?

3. How did Amrit's interpretation of the reply make the disagreement worse?

4. How did the teacher's questions help the visit continue?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a guest starts eating at a family meal where the hosts usually wait for an elder to begin. In four sentences, explain the guest's possible intention, how a host might interpret the action, how conflict could begin, and one question or explanation that could clear it up.

ANSWER KEY

Shoes at the Door

GRADES 6-9 · 6-9.WG.5.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the students' mistaken guesses and circle Amrit's mistaken guess. Number two actions that helped clear up the misunderstanding. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the students keep their shoes on even after reading the sign?	**They thought "here" meant somewhere near the entrance and guessed the racks were only for muddy shoes. Their shoes were clean.**
2	Why did "They're clean" fail to address Amrit's concern?	**The student thought Amrit was concerned about dirt, but the practice was to remove shoes as a sign of respect, whether they were clean or dirty.**
3	How did Amrit's interpretation of the reply make the disagreement worse?	**He heard it as a refusal to follow the practice, and his voice grew sharp. The student then felt accused and stepped back.**
4	How did the teacher's questions help the visit continue?	**The questions let Amrit explain why shoes were removed and let the students explain what they thought the sign meant. Both sides understood the mistake.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The guest may think starting first shows appreciation for the food. A host might think the guest is ignoring the family's practice of waiting for an elder. If the host scolds the guest without explaining, the guest could feel unwelcome and argue. The host could ask what the guest understood about when to begin, then explain the family's practice.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of each person's interpretation. For Part 3, look for distinct interpretations, a plausible path to conflict, and a question or explanation that addresses the misunderstanding.