

Flip Flop Diplomacy

How many diplomats wear flip flops at work? Not many I hear you say! Certainly few would meet the American president at the White House in Washington wearing them. Least of all in the middle of a harsh freezing winter in February! So who in the diplomatic world might wear them then? The answer was the Dalai Lama. Naturally, he was no ordinary visitor. His mere presence or impending presence was enough to send the Chinese government into a diplomatic overdrive of threats and retaliation. The question was would the Obama government listen to any of it? The visit would certainly test the administration's commitment to human rights and for its willingness to stand up to China. Before his arrival nothing was left to chance by the White House that minutely choreographed the diplomatic visit. It was as important how the Dalai Lama was to be received as what was to be discussed behind closed doors with him.

The exiled Tibetan spiritual leader always ruffles the Chinese government's feathers wherever he goes. The Chinese government said the visit would "seriously harm U.S.-China relations." Previous American presidents have trod carefully, wary of Chinese repercussions when meeting him. President Bill Clinton chose simply to 'drop in' when he was visiting other top US officials. While George W. Bush became the first US president to be filmed with him, giving him the Congressional Gold Medal in 2007. That alone infuriated the Chinese. However, even President Bush stopped short of allowing the TV cameras in to his meeting with the 75 year old Dalai Lama, as it would have been a step too far in antagonising Beijing. So President Obama opted for something in between those two approaches. He met him in the map room of the White House, thus avoiding the obvious symbolism of the Oval Office. While a single picture was released of the two of them no TV cameras were allowed.

Naturally, China condemned the event. That was to be expected from this ritualised diplomatic dance routine these meetings have become. Certainly, no one seriously expected the visit would end diplomatic relations between the two countries and indeed it didn't. In fact, the event was classed as low key. OK, there was a clear nod to Chinese sensibilities. It was however

Category: Diplomatic English / Dalai Lama / Diplomacy
Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate

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inevitably condemned by those who felt that human rights had been dropped down the US agenda. Afterwards the Dalai Lama said he understood that Obama must be practical in exercising his commitment to human rights worldwide. Asked, via a translator, if he was disappointed with the meeting he said, "No disappointment. The last six decades my heart hardened. I do not consider important political gestures. I don't care. The important is meet face-to-face."

The Dalai Lama is revered in much of the world. However, he is seen by Beijing as a separatist seeking to overthrow the Chinese rule of Tibet. He says though that this is untrue. China regards any official foreign leader's contact with the Buddhist monk as an infringement on its sovereignty over the mountainous region and as a particularly unwelcome snub. In other words it does not like outside parties meddling with its internal affairs. Not all governments however welcome the Dalai Lama, fearing strong diplomatic repercussions from the Chinese government. Business and trade opportunities beckon, forcing such issues as human rights to one side. The Dalai Lama is welcomed in many democratic countries around the world. While avoiding confrontation he gives many keynote speeches.

Luckily, the Dalai Lama appears to view his diplomatic meetings with American presidents in a more laid back approach. Asked about these diplomatic rituals he plays out year after year with so little results he said simply, "It doesn't matter how quickly something is achieved. More importantly it is a cause worth fighting for, even if the success is achieved after my lifetime." On meeting President George Bush in 1991 the Dalai Lama was asked if he had ever met an American President before. He replied: "Neither I nor any of my thirteen previous incarnations have ever met a president." Come to think about it, nor have I. Now where are my flip flops*...

* - see page 8

EXERCISES

1. **Flip flops:** What are flip flops? What have flip flops and diplomacy got in common? Which famous religious leader wears them?

2. **The Dalai Lama:** Who is the Dalai Lama? Where does he come from? Where does he live? What *country/region* does he represent?

3. **Geography: Tibet:** What part of the world is Tibet in? What country is Tibet now in? What is its capital? What countries surround Tibet? Draw a map on the board then look on Google maps to help you.

4. **Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self correct your work from page two - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

5. **Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

6. **Vocabulary:** Students now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

7. **The article:** Students look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

8. **Let's think!** Think of four other things you know about the Dalai Lama. Write them below. Explain to your partner why you chose these?

1	3
2	4

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

9. **Let's think:** In pairs write down four things you know about Tibet. Discuss together. What conclusions do you come to?

1	3
2	4

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

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10. Let's think! Below are four issues the Dalai Lama believes passionately about. What do you think of them? Discuss each of them with your partner.

1	Buddhism	3	Compassion
2	The Environment	4	Religious harmony

11. Let's think! Think of two *recent* diplomatic meetings between the exiled Tibetan leader and other world leaders. What two topics might diplomats have discussed? Write them below. Explain to your partner why you chose these?

Two recent diplomatic meetings with the Dalai Lama	Issues possibly discussed diplomatically with the Dalai Lama
1	1
2	2

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

12. Let's talk! Radio Vienna: *In pairs.* Imagine you are in a *Radio Vienna FM* radio studio that is located in the centre of Vienna. One of you is the presenter. The other student is the Dalai Lama. (*Let's ignore the translator issues here!*) The presenter interviews the Dalai Lama. **Extra:** - This interview can also be about the Dalai Lama's visit to the United Nations (**see case study**).

13. Let's do 'The Article Quiz': Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score one point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) Who is the Dalai Lama?
- 2) Who did the Dalai Lama meet?
- 3) How does the Dalai Lama regard his meetings with the US presidents?
- 4) Name the presidents.
- 5) What beckons?

Student B

- 1) What do the Chinese government think of the Dalai Lama?
- 2) Who fear who? Why?
- 3) What level was the meeting this year?
- 4) How do human rights come into the story?
- 5) Who got infuriated and when?

14. Presentation: In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a two minute presentation on either: **The Dalai Lama or Flip Flop diplomacy**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation. The class can vote on the best presentation. Class – After the presentations go through the strong and weak points on each presentation. Learn from the results.

15. Let's write an e-mail! Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher: **The Dalai Lama**. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

DIPLOMATIC DEBATE

Student A questions

- 1) What diplomatic issues concerning the Dalai Lama have been in the news this week?
- 2) What diplomacy issues concerning the Dalai Lama have been in the news during the last two months?
- 3) How does your country regard the Dalai Lama?
- 4) Is your government frightened of repercussions from the Chinese government against it if the Dalai Lama visits your country?
- 5) What, if any, political manoeuvring might be done if the Dalai Lama was visiting your country?
- 6) Has the Dalai Lama visited your country? If he did visit it how was he received? Was it diplomatically i.e. by the government or by a non-governmental organisation?
- 7) How can democratic countries, the Dalai Lama and China work together?
- 8) What do you think the Dalai Lama discussed with the American President?

Student B questions

- 1) What does the United Nations think of the Dalai Lama?
- 2) What does China think of the Dalai Lama?
- 3) How does China manage the Dalai Lama?
- 4) Instead of attacking him should China not engage with the Dalai Lama?
- 5) What does your government think of the Tibet issue?
- 6) Is your government afraid of China? Why? Why not?
- 7) Is it right that China should diplomatically bully anyone who opposes its views?
- 8) What challenges lay ahead for tomorrow's diplomats when dealing with the Dalai Lama?

SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	administrations	11	commitment
2	infuriated	12	choreographed
3	obvious	13	officials
4	ritualised	14	infringement
5	symbolism	15	opportunities
6	retaliation	16	confrontation
7	willingness	17	antagonising
8	incarnations	18	flip flops
9	sovereignty	19	repercussions
10	gestures	20	nod

CASE STUDY

Flip Flop Diplomacy

A visit by the Dalai Lama to the United Nations in Vienna

Allow 30 - 60 minutes

Groups / pairs / 1 to 1

Your represented country _____

Diplomatic information

Most of you are junior diplomats from around the world. You are a special guest at a meeting in Vienna at the United Nations building between the Dalai Lama, the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and other invited guests from different countries. This includes China.

The Austrian President and Prime Minister are hosting the event in Vienna.

The event is aimed at junior diplomats and is a key training meeting that is held yearly. The idea is to enhance and tone their skills. The meeting is in English.

Background

The Austrian President has invited the Dalai Lama to Austria. During his three day visit to the country the Dalai Lama has been doing a spot of sightseeing. His main mission however is to attend a special meeting in the United Nations building in Vienna.

The special diplomatic meeting is to discuss different diplomatic points to do with Tibet, China, trade and possible retaliation by China to any nation giving the Dalai Lama special status.

The Chinese government has protested about the training event. It has threatened retaliation to any country interfering in its internal affairs.

It has threatened not to attend the meeting but at the last moment has decided to attend, sending its ambassador in Austria to represent it.

Remember you are using diplomatic English!

Students - remember this is just a diplomatic English lesson!

CASE STUDY

Flip Flop Diplomacy

A visit by the Dalai Lama to the United Nations in Vienna

Task

Discuss the crunch debating issues. Try to do this diplomatically in order to set the right tone for the case study. The idea is not to walk out or to end up in a diplomatic scrum.

Students will be one of the following:-

The Dalai Lama

One student is the Dalai Lama. **Remember** the Dalai Lama does not seek any form of confrontation with China. The Dalai Lama is a peaceful man. He would prefer to abstain from key points on some of the issues to be debated.

The United Nations Secretary General

One student is the United Nations Secretary General

The Chinese Ambassador to Austria

One student is the Chinese Ambassador to Austria

UN diplomats from different nations

The remaining students are junior UN diplomats from different nations who are here to debate the crunch debating issues. You are keen to use these diplomatic talks to help your training. You think it will be good for your C.V.

Brainstorming session

After appointing a Chairperson to lead the session, brainstorm some ideas together about the issues. Discuss the background, the issues, and your own thoughts and ideas. What's the first thing you might do? (*To help you look on the internet*)

Presentation, Recommendations and Conclusions

At the end of the brainstorming session the Chairperson can sum up the groups ideas by giving a short **presentation** to the teacher. Present it visually or use the board etc... Try to be imaginative!

At the end of the presentation - sum up any agreed **recommendations and conclusions** made by the group.

CASE STUDY

Flip Flop Diplomacy - The crunch debating issues

Discuss the following:-

1	Tibet - What should the United Nations do on the issue?
2	Human rights in Tibet
3	Peace in Tibet
4	The 1959 Tibetan National uprising
5	The Chinese response
6	The Tibet issue, retaliation and trade with China
7	The future of Tibet?
8	The railway at the top of the world
9	The influx of Chinese culture and its peoples now living in Tibet

Write down as **notes** your ideas for debating, solutions and agreed points. You will need them later for your report.

Homework

Students to send a short written report by email to the teacher highlighting the proposed solutions discussed in the meeting.

The teacher can moderate the session

LINKS

<http://www.dalailama.com/>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6120RR20100203>

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90883/6896128.html>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8494533.stm>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/barackobama/6262938/Barack-Obama-cancels-meeting-with-Dalai-Lama-to-keep-China-happy.html>

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35480038/ns/world_news-asiapacific/

Flip flops: - Type of plastic open sandal with support between big toe and next toe. They are worn on a beach. They go flip flop when you walk! (V1)

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