

The history of hand gestures

Listen to a lecture about the history of hand gestures to practise and improve your listening skills.

Before listening

Do the preparation task first. Then listen to the audio and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the first part (1–6) and second part (a–f) of the phrase.

First part

1. hand
2. widely
3. spare
4. make
5. high
6. thumbs

Second part

- a. a life
- b. up
- c. gesture
- d. five
- e. believe
- f. sense

Tasks

Task 1

Complete the summary with one, two or three words.

1. The salute

Thought to have originated from the (1)..... British Army, the Grenadier Guards. Soldiers touched head quickly before returning their hand back down to (2)..... .

2. Thumbs up

Originally thought to be a symbol to save the life of (3)..... in Ancient Rome. However, evidence suggests that the crowds actually (4)..... their thumbs if they wanted to spare his life.

3. High five

Origins are not from the world of baseball, but from the 1920s (5)..... . Possibly based on the 'low five', also called (6)..... .

4. Handshake

Evidence of this gesture goes back to (7)..... . In 17th-century art we see examples of handshakes between (8)..... . Now is used for a multitude of reasons.

Task 2

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

gesture	raise	references
universal	claim	greeting

1. The hand gestures the professor talks about are very common, if not , around the world.
2. Because it had chinstraps, soldiers could not their helmet easily so instead they would touch their head with their hand.
3. There are no reliable historical that crowds in Ancient Rome used a thumbs-down gesture.
4. Two sports teams to have invented the high-five gesture.
5. The handshake is a that dates back to Ancient Greece.
6. Handshakes are thought to be a of trust between equals.

Discussion

Are there any other hand gestures that are common in your culture?