

## **CHAPTER 11 CLASS HANDOUTS**

**Note: Your instructor may ask you to download, print out, and/or e-mail the following class handouts for this chapter:**

**A CRITICAL INCIDENT: ARRIVAL OF THE IN-LAWS**

**INTERACTIVE PROBES FOR “ARRIVAL OF THE IN-LAWS”**

## A CRITICAL INCIDENT: ARRIVAL OF THE IN-LAWS

Ken and Kim have been married for six years. For most of those six years, they have been a happily married couple. Ken is a 33-year-old German American and works at a high-tech firm in Silicon Valley. Kim is a 30-year-old Chinese immigrant who is a pharmacist and works in a nearby hospital. The couple has a 3-year-old son, Kevin. For the past three years, Kim has spent countless hours at the immigration office, applying for her parents to emigrate from China to the United States. Ken has been very supportive of Kim throughout this process. At long last, her parents finally gained entrance to the United States. They have been here for eight months, living across the street from the couple. The grandparents are delighted to be reunited with their daughter, and they dote on their only grandson. While Ken and Kim are at work, the grandparents baby-sit Kevin. Because the grandparents do not speak English, they only speak Chinese to Kevin. To their delight, Kevin has been picking up Chinese quickly.

Recently, Ken and Kim have had many tense moments and communication difficulties relating to the in-law issue. To begin with, Ken feels he is never alone with Kim in the house anymore. His in-laws are always there. Kim and her parents chatter constantly in Chinese. They also laugh in that strange Chinese tone. To make matters worse, Kim has now started to speak to him in Chinese rather than English! Ken feels very left out in his own house. He hears the Chinese laughter from the kitchen and he feels like an outsider. He loves his family and he wants things back to normal—the way it was. He decides to have an upfront, honest talk with Kim about his frustrations.

He asks Kim to please tell her parents to reduce their visits from every day to only on the weekends. Moreover, they should really call them ahead of time rather than just popping in to visit. He asks Kim to register Kevin in a nearby English-speaking preschool so that he can play with other English-speaking kids. While Kim nods “uh- huh” to all his comments, nothing seems to change. Her parents continue to visit unannounced every day and often cook up strange-smelling Chinese food in the kitchen. Ken feels increased frustration in his own house.

Meanwhile, from Kim’s viewpoint, she cannot understand how Ken can be so selfish. Her parents are new immigrants to this country. They have no friends and they do not drive. She is glad that Kevin has a chance to learn Chinese from her parents. Before their arrival, she spoke to Kevin only in English so that Ken could be included in the conversation. Now that her parents are here, she feels that her Chinese roots are taking hold again. She hopes that by ignoring Ken’s “ridiculous” requests, he’ll eventually forget about them and come to his senses. Although at one point she yells back at Ken for raising his voice and making another of his “off-the-wall” comments, often she ends up only staring at Ken in silence. She does not want to upset her parents, who are playing with Kevin in the next room. Inwardly, Kim grows increasingly resentful. She loves Ken, but at the same time she feels that her marriage is spiraling out of control. She feels misunderstood all the time. She desperately needs some help and advice to handle her marital crisis.

How would you explain Ken's frustration and Kim's stress? Can you draw upon some of the ideas in Chapter 11 to help Ken and Kim to understand each other's intercultural lens with flexibility?

