

# 3 UNIT

## We are what we share

Our culture is defined by a variety of factors. The first is by the language we use to express ideas, or by the way we express ourselves through our voices and our bodies, or even the absence of language. The second factor covers the visible expressions of a culture, such as traditions and customs, where rules, rites and rituals are part of common, shared knowledge of those who belong to it, and similarities and differences are evident to those who don't. The third factor covers beliefs, ways of thinking and fundamental values. We often find that these values are shared by many different cultures, even if their expression varies considerably.

It may be useful to distinguish between culture in mind and culture in action. Our culture in mind includes values which humans often share, whatever their culture. Our culture in action is our behaviour and reaction when we're guided by our own culture rather than that of the other person. It's often in this area of culture that misunderstandings occur.

This unit looks at the shared values of culture in mind.



# Starting out

Most people we know personally have remarkably similar lives. They live in similar homes, have had a similar education and are often doing very similar jobs, at least in terms of status. Even when outward appearance varies, our values are very similar, and can even be considered as universals in all cultures around the world.



An American cowboy on the prairie



Pastoral nomads in Inner Mongolia

**1** Work in pairs. Discuss which of the words and expressions you can use to describe the photos.

- place to live
- food
- family life
- relationships with other people
- work
- possessions
- customs and traditions
- values

Now talk about the advantages and disadvantages of their lifestyles. Would you like to live like them?

**2** Read the poem.

## We Were Nomads

Justin Germino

We were nomads  
looking for a home  
lost in a modern time  
and never truly known

We wandered for years  
sun weathering our face  
fighting hate and famine  
looking for our place

Places traveled in between  
whether country or a city  
some met with curiosity  
others with only pity

We were nomads  
looking for a home  
lost in a modern time  
and never truly known

Now work in pairs. Talk about the nomadic lifestyle which the poem describes and compare it with your discussion in Activity 1. Is it very different or very similar to what you discussed?

# Speaking through cultures

Our values guide us not simply in our everyday behaviour towards, but in our responses to, events, circumstances and stimuli either which happen to us or which we seek out. In this section, we talk about the philosophy and values of heroes and anti-heroes in the East and in the West. We look at some of the language we may be confronted with when an expected code of behaviour, based on shared values, is somehow transgressed (违背), and suggest some language to respond in an appropriate way. Finally, we look at the role of superstitions, the irrational and non-scientific beliefs which can to a lesser or greater extent influence our behaviour.

## Listen out

### Conversation 1

**1** Work in pairs. Talk about the heroes of films you saw recently on television or at the cinema and answer the questions.

- 1 What was the last film you saw?
- 2 What was the story about?
- 3 Who was the most important character? Were they a hero or an anti-hero?

**2** Listen to Conversation 1 and check words and expressions the speakers associate with heroes (H) and anti-heroes (A).

- idealism
- humourless
- ruthless
- lacks commitment
- prepared to lay down his life
- real person
- solitary
- commitment to peace and justice
- takes himself exceptionally seriously

Now work in pairs and check your answers.

### Cultural information

**Heroes and anti-heroes** figure regularly in fiction, plays and films in the West. A hero is someone larger than life or more powerful in a way than other more ordinary people. They show idealism, courage, nobility and moral goodness, and we're invited to admire them as role models. They are usually set a challenge which threatens to defeat them, but which they finally overcome after extraordinary bravery or skill. Harry Potter is a typical hero in film and fiction.

But the anti-hero can often be a solitary figure without followers, someone lacking in passion and idealism, or someone with anomalous (异常的) behaviour or beliefs, who may fail many times and become confused. For example, Batman in *The Dark Knight Rises* is an anti-hero, full of agony, guilt and confusion. The figure occurs more in literature, such as *Don Quixote* by Cervantes.

While they often appear in films, they tend not to appear in US television series, where the traditional hero is admired and the traditional villain ends up as the loser. Yet in European television series and films, the anti-hero is extremely common. UK soap operas are often set in poor districts of big cities (*EastEnders* in London, *Coronation Street* in Manchester) and depict the lives of relatively poor and humble people. A recent genre of television drama in Europe are dramas from Scandinavia, where the main characters possess unenviable histories, yet against the odds of the darkest crimes imaginable, manage to solve them in a way which demands if not love, at least respect.

**3** Work in pairs. Look at Conversation 1 and decide where the expressions go.

- a Batman is an example of anti-hero
- b He's a bit of an anti-hero
- c He was extremely cruel and merciless to his enemies
- d doesn't have many traditional heroes
- e they probably never existed at all
- f we do have a few all-American heroes
- g He even appears in a card game
- h full of idealism and commitment to peace and justice

**Fan** Did you see the Batman movie last night on TV?

**Jake** What? Was it on again? No, I've seen it several times. Which one was it?

**Fan** What was it called? The something Knight Rises? Something like that.

**Jake** OK, *The Dark Knight Rises*. Yes, that's a good one. (1) \_\_\_\_\_, isn't he?

**Fan** What do you mean by that?

**Jake** Well, a traditional hero is someone like Superman, (2) \_\_\_\_\_. He's prepared to lay down his life for his beliefs. But in fact, he's actually quite humourless, because he takes himself exceptionally seriously.

**Fan** So you mean ... a bit like Batman?

**Jake** No, that's the point I'm trying to make. (3) \_\_\_\_\_, full of agony and guilt.

**Fan** I see. So an anti-hero isn't always a villain?

**Jake** That's right. Batman isn't a villain, but he's quite solitary, full of guilt and he lacks commitment and idealism.

**Fan** I see what you mean. I suppose Cao Cao is an anti-hero.

**Jake** Who is that?

**Fan** Cao Cao, from the Three Kingdoms period. (4) \_\_\_\_\_, but he was praised above all as a great ruler and military genius.

**Jake** And was he a real person?

**Fan** Oh yes, although there were many semi-fictional stories written about his adventures. A number of films too.

(5) \_\_\_\_\_, Killers of the Three Kingdoms. (三国杀)

**Jake** A card game!

**Fan** And he wasn't considered evil, only ruthless.

**Jake** Yes, he certainly sounds like an anti-hero. It's also interesting how many American heroes originally appeared in comic books, and in cartoon form, but were never intended to make you laugh. Superman and Spiderman are just as humourless as Batman and Robin.

**Fan** Perhaps it's due to the fact that the US is a young country, and (6) \_\_\_\_\_, so they've invented them. In China we have the same tradition of heroism, but most of the heroes tend to come from centuries ago. We have a saying 人生自古谁无死, 留取丹心照汗青 which means *Everyone will die and I prefer to strive for a loyal heart recorded in the history books.*

**Jake** ... which is very similar to what inspires American heroes. Well, (7) \_\_\_\_\_, such as Abraham Lincoln, George Washington ...

**Fan** True. Many Chinese heroes are figures from distant history, whose deeds have often been exaggerated, or even from mythology – (8) \_\_\_\_\_.

**Jake** Ha, like Batman! He's pure fiction!

Now listen to Conversation 1 again and check your answers.

## Conversation 2

**4** Work in pairs. Look at the cultural values and attitudes and match them with some extracts from Conversation 2. Some cultural values and attitudes can go with more than one extract.

criticizing others	losing temper
honesty	modesty
making compliments	saving or losing face
being polite	showing hospitality

- 1 She was so rude to me last week, in front of lots of our friends. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Well, we'd agreed to invite some friends over for a drink before we all went out for dinner. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 So she started screaming at me ... \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 And it was so embarrassing that I felt really, you know, stupid. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 I was brought up never to criticize people ... \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 He's such a nice guy. A very thoughtful and polite person. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 ... never boast about anything. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8 She embarrassed me in front of our friends. \_\_\_\_\_

Now listen to Conversation 2 and check your answers.



## Cultural information

**Stereotyping** refers to our perception of the characteristics and attributes of a group, such as a culture, rather than of the individual. In cross-cultural studies, it is sometimes a useful device, and is often apparent when people talk about "a national character", eg the English are cold and unfriendly. But often there are opposite reasons for certain behaviour which may be less apparent, eg the English have deep respect for personal privacy. In Conversation 2 Annie's comments about Brazilians may well represent a stereotypical view of the people from that country and culture, but as soon as they're expressed in a negative way, there's a risk that stereotyping gives way to prejudice, which we clearly wish to avoid.

So it's fun, useful and sometimes insightful to talk about cultural characteristics in a general way, but if they become a negative description of general behaviour, attitudes and beliefs, then they must be avoided.

**5** Work in pairs and answer the questions.

- 1 Is Valeria likely to be Annie's (a) flatmate, or (b) relative?
- 2 Did Annie leave the apartment in a mess because (a) she had to leave early, or (b) she didn't want to tidy up?
- 3 Did Annie feel ashamed because Valeria (a) hadn't tidied up the flat, or (b) was criticizing Annie in front of people?
- 4 Is Annie criticizing Brazilians because she thinks (a) they're too emotional, or (b) they're just rude?
- 5 Did Pete do the washing-up because (a) he felt embarrassed that Valeria was criticizing Annie, or (b) he likes washing-up?
- 6 Does boasting about her boyfriend mean that Valeria is (a) aware of other people's sensitivities, or (b) not very modest and rather self-centred?



- 7 If you have something out with someone face to face, does this mean (a) you've lost face, or (b) you wish to discuss the problem?

Now listen to Conversation 2 again and check your answers.

### Conversation 3

6 You're going to hear someone from Dubai (United Arab Emirates) and someone from Dominica (Caribbean) talking about the superstition of the Evil Eye and how it influences them. Listen to Conversation 3 and find out:

- what the Evil Eye is
- what you should do to ward off the Evil Eye

Now work in pairs and check your answers.

7 Work in pairs and complete the sentences.

- 1 ... Islam is quite strict about \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 Anyway, the baby girl was absolutely \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 But the grandmother replied, "She has \_\_\_\_\_."
- 4 My mother-in-law nudged (用肘轻推) me and whispered, "You're not \_\_\_\_\_!"
- 5 ... the Evil Eye isn't just a superstition, but something \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 ... we're not supposed to say \_\_\_\_\_, but how ugly!
- 7 That happens in the Caribbean too. We certainly do things to ward off \_\_\_\_\_, as we say.
- 8 But we also give the child a bracelet or necklace to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 9 Babies and children are thought to be the most \_\_\_\_\_ especially when a childless woman or a stranger says something complimentary about them.
- 10 In the Caribbean, just before baptism, you know, when the baby is received into the church, we give it a bath with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ as protection.

- 11 And in the Gulf, we \_\_\_\_\_ in front of \_\_\_\_\_, to keep bad luck away.

Now listen to Conversation 3 again and check your answers.

### Cultural information

**Superstition** is a belief that things such as magic or luck have the power to affect your life. It is irrational in the sense that there's no scientific reason for this cause and effect, and it is therefore based on ignorance and fear. In many cultures superstition is discouraged either by the church or the government as it undermines their influence or authority. Many modern-day thinkers claim religion itself to be mere superstition.

Yet superstitions, such as the Evil Eye, are common all over the world, and often an important influence of people's customs, traditions and behaviour, as well as a source of interest and intrigue for those outside the culture who don't share the beliefs. The unlucky connotation of the number 13 is said to have originated in the number of people who attended Jesus Christ's Last Supper before the Crucifixion (耶稣受难). Even today, some Western hotels tend not to have a 13th floor. When you cross your fingers to wish someone luck or to make a wish, this is thought to be a secret sign to identify Christians, who were banned during the early Roman Empire, to each other. Breaking a mirror is meant to bring bad luck, because they're believed not just to reflect your image but to hold your soul. In the southern states of the US, there used to be a tradition that, on the death of a member of a household, all mirrors were covered in order not to trap the soul of the departed.

## Speak out



Conversation 1



Conversation 2



Conversation 3

**1** Work in pairs and talk about your answers to the questions.

- 1 Who are the traditional and modern-day heroes in China, in films, television and literature? What heroic qualities do they possess?
- 2 Are there any well-known Chinese anti-heroes? Do you think an ordinary person can ever reveal extraordinary qualities?
- 3 Which values and attitudes influence your behaviour or choice of words? Think about:

criticizing others	losing your temper
honesty	making compliments
modesty	being good-humoured
being polite	showing hospitality
saving or losing face	

Choose two or three and describe situations where someone has displayed these qualities and attitudes.

- 4 What stereotypes are there about other cultures? Which stereotypes are positive and which ones are negative? Can you think of a positive explanation for a negative stereotype? For example, the English are often considered to be cold and unfriendly. In fact, they have great respect for other people's privacy.
- 5 Is there a similar superstition to the Evil Eye in China? Do you believe in it?
- 6 Do you believe that all superstitions should be avoided? Or do you think that in a developed and mature society there may be a place for irrational beliefs and behaviour which reflect past traditions and customs?

## Act out

**1** Work in pairs. Choose a film or book you both know and think about the values it shows, such as heroism, patriotism, love, justice, evil etc. Follow the instructions and act out the following conversation.

**Student A** Ask if Student B saw the film / read the book you chose. *Did you see / read ...?*

**Student B** Say yes or no, and check its name. *Which one was it?*

**Student A** Express uncertainty about the name. *Something like ...*

**Student B** Say what you think of it, and express an extreme fact or opinion. *It's now the most popular / best-selling ... of all time.*

**Student A** Give an opinion about the characters. *I loved all those ...*

**Student B** Give a further opinion about the characters Student A mentions. *Yes, they sure are more ...*

**Student A** Express an opinion about the values they show. *They have an extremely ... sense of ...*

**Student B** Add further opinions about their values. *Not only that, but it's interesting how / why / what ...*

**Student A** Talk about their beliefs and attitudes. *They believe in ...*

**Student B** Talk about if the values are from modern day or from history. *Many are figures from ...*

### Language to help you

#### Expressing uncertainty

What was it called?

Which one was it?

The something ...?

Something like that.

#### Expressing extreme facts and opinions

... takes himself exceptionally seriously.

He was extremely cruel and merciless to his enemies.

He even appears in a card game!

He's pure fiction!





**2** Work in pairs and act out the following conversation.

**Student A** Talk to Student B about a common friend.

**Student B** Express a critical opinion about the friend.

**Student A** Ask why Student B is so upset about the friend.

**Student B** Explain what happened / what the friend did.

**Student A** Sound sympathetic.

**Student B** Continue your account of what happened.

**Student A** Sound sympathetic again and encourage Student B.

**Student B** Talk about the friend's behaviour and why you wouldn't behave in that way.

**Student A** Agree with Student B and sound sympathetic.

**Student B** Say what you plan to do.

### Language to help you

#### Expressing critical opinions

Don't talk to me about ...

She was so rude to me last week.

... the place was a tip.

It was so embarrassing.

She can't stop talking about ...

I think I'll just ...

You bet I'm upset!

#### Sounding sympathetic

Oh, I'm sorry, what happened?

Go on.

No way! That's outrageous!

It's not fair.

**3** Work in pairs and act out the following conversation.

You're two friends talking about a superstition which many people follow in China. Talk about different aspects of the superstition. Make assumptions based on the aspects of the superstition.

### Language to help you

#### Making assumptions

It's supposed to be something to do with ...

You're not meant to say that!

We're not supposed to say ...

Babies and children are thought to be the most ...

...

I'm sure there must be ...

#### Agreeing and sharing

Absolutely!

That happens in ... too.

We do that in ... too.

#### Sounding enthusiastic

You know how we adore ...

... was absolutely perfect in every way.

... one of the ... I've ever seen.



# Speaking about cultures

Our intellectual, emotional and spiritual make-up is partly influenced by a rich narrative of traditions, life wisdom, dreams, superstitions and ways of thinking. Myths play an important part in this make-up, as we'll see from our look at flood myths. We consider different cultural attitudes to life and death, even though the experience of both is universal. We take a look at some important differences in ways of thinking which can cause a challenge when two cultures meet and wish to relate in some way, either for business or social purposes – where some cultures are very direct, others can be more circuitous, as different values take precedence in the first stages of an exchange or a relationship.

## Find out

### Traditional family values



**Flood myths** are a common theme in stories from different cultures around the world. From Mesopotamia to China, from India to the Americas and from Australia to the Arctic, it seems that everyone has an ancient story of a drowned world.

The flood may be caused by a rise in sea level, or by non-stop rain, but the flood myths share many features. The deluge (洪水) is often seen as a punishment for people not respecting the gods or the natural world. Many stories include the idea of building a huge boat to save some special people and animals from drowning. There is also the notion that after the flood, the world is cleaner and society is improved.

A native American flood myth is retold as a children's story, *The Otter, the Spotted Frog &*

*the Great Flood: A Creek Indian Story* by Gerald Hausman. In this story, the frog advises the otter to build a raft. The other animals laugh at him, but the otter builds his raft, ties it to a tall tree, and survives the flood.

In the story from the Hebrew Bible, Noah is warned about the flood and instructed to build a big boat, called the Ark, and to take in pairs of animals to repopulate the world after the flood.

Stories about prehistoric floods may be an attempt by ancient people to explain the presence of sea shells and fossils on mountains and lands far from the shore.

People have tried to find archaeological evidence for a great flood, and have even looked for Noah's Ark. According to the Bible, it came to land on Mount Ararat in Turkey. In 2000, marine archaeologists found tools, fragments of ceramics and traces of wooden and mud houses deep below the surface of the Black Sea. They may not have found Noah's Ark, but they do know that people lived in a land that is now under the sea.

There is evidence of local floods at different times, but there is no agreement about whether there was ever a single great flood at a specific time. Flood myths may be interpreted as allegorical – a warning that we face disaster if we do not respect nature. We still worry about floods today as scientists predict that global warming will result in a rise in sea level.

**L**ife and death are experiences shared by all cultures, although the nature of the symbols, rituals and beliefs surrounding the end of life brings into focus some important cultural values. For everyone, death is associated with the core values of life which are sacred to a society and which are most commonly displayed.

Colour is one of a number of symbols representing death and eternal life. In Western Europe and in those cultures originally from Europe, black is the colour of mourning. It's felt to represent the darkness and sadness into which the death of a loved one plunges those who are left behind. White or black symbolizes death for Sikh and Hindu people, but if the deceased person has lived a long and happy life, other colours may be used according to the age, marital status and caste. Hindu women dress in new saris of red and pink to attend funerals. At their marriage the new wife is given a necklace. On the death of her husband the new widow takes it off and leaves it with him. Sikhs often dress a dead man in a Western-style suit and turban (包头巾), and a dead woman in a Punjabi suit. If she was young, bright colours are used, an older woman is dressed in paler colours.

Food also plays an important part in many cultures. Traditionally, in the US, Canada, the UK and Ireland, family and friends were offered food and drink at a "wake" in the house of the deceased person, with the body present, often with the coffin open for viewing. In Ireland this tradition continues in small town communities, and has a more celebratory atmosphere. Hindu relatives of the deceased eat only simple vegetarian food for 13 days. After the funeral, most cultures greet the mourners with refreshments (茶点). Jewish mourners are usually given a hard-boiled egg as a symbol of life.



The symbols and rituals associated with the death of someone reflect many different fundamental beliefs. Buddhists, for example, believe in *samsara*, the eternal cycle of birth, death and rebirth in various ways – they believe that one can return to life in human, divine or animal form. So death is simply the passage from one state to another, which will continue until nirvana (涅槃), the highest aim of Buddhist practice. Hindus also believe their *jiva*, or soul, passes through different states of life and death. Reincarnation (转世说) was also a significant belief for the Mayans of Central America as well as various native North American tribes. While for Christians, Jesus is the reincarnation (转世化身) of God. Their belief of an afterlife is confined to the promise of heaven or the threat of hell, and as with other religions one's behaviour and actions during life will influence where one's afterlife will be spent. Muslims and Christians believe in the Day of Judgement when each soul is judged according to their actions during their earthly lives.

**D**ifferent ways of thinking are often concealed in cross-cultural exchanges but equally often lead to confusion and misunderstanding. An American business person likes to get straight to the point, in order to be clear and unambiguous about what they want. A Chinese business person might be much more circumspect (谨慎的), take more time to consider all sides of a proposal, and want plenty of time to develop the relationship before talking business.



According to Geert Hofstede, a Dutch scientist, influences on our ways of thinking include:

- Power distance, which focuses on the relationship, distant or close, between the boss and the employee, and the responsibilities the employee is allowed. According to Hofstede, Latin (both Latin European and Latin American), Asian and African countries generally show higher power distance values than the US, the UK, the UK's former colonies and non-Latin European countries, such as the Netherlands.
- Individualism vs collectivism, which focuses on the extent of personal achievements and individual rights, as opposed to the individual's membership of and contribution to the society they live in. Since collectivism is a

predominantly Confucian concept, China ranks highly on the collectivist index.

- Uncertainty avoidance, which reflects how we deal with anxiety by controlling uncertainty. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, where uncertainty is less tolerated, usually maintain strong codes of belief and are relatively inflexible. Other cultures with low uncertainty avoidance may prefer unstructured situations and are more pragmatic and flexible about the rules. Hofstede's research suggests that Greece, Portugal and Guatemala have the highest uncertainty avoidance score, and Denmark, Jamaica and Singapore the lowest.
- Masculinity vs femininity, which is to do with characteristics or roles appropriate to the two genders. For example, in the Middle East, women appear to play a subordinate role to men, although another interpretation is that the woman is being cared for by the man, once they're married.
- Long-term orientation, or how far into the distance a culture or society looks. So, long-term plans for the greater good, or short-term solutions guided by tradition, face, and social obligations. For example, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea are more comfortable with taking the long view than Western countries.
- Indulgence vs restraint, which is the extent to which a society allows the enjoyment of life as opposed to one influenced by a sense that indulgence should be restrained. Restraint is mostly found in East Asia, the Islamic world and Eastern Europe.

Many of the different ways of thinking are influenced by religious and philosophical influences and values. So if you plan to visit an unfamiliar country, try to find out more about these influences and values, so that your stay will be rewarding not confusing.



## Speak out

1 Look at the photos and think about what is culturally similar or different to what happens in China.



Hindu women attending a funeral



A man living in a senior care center



Animals entering Noah's Ark



Afghan youths praying and fasting during Ramadan

Now work in groups of three or four. Talk about your answers and discuss cultural similarities and differences.

**2 Work in pairs and talk about the best answers to the questions.**

- 1 A friend and you have just watched the video clip about Singapore and its concern about social pressure, broken homes and neglect of family values. What do you think or say?
  - (a) It could never happen in China.
  - (b) We have similar pressures, but the extended family ensures that everyone accepts their responsibilities both to the family and to society.
  - (c) The government should support the family by providing children housing near the elderly parents, and providing parents with the right to sue children who neglect their responsibilities.
  - (d) "So much has changed in Chinese society and so quickly that we need to review the responsibilities of both the family and the government."
- 2 A friend is talking to you about a myth of God creating the world in seven days. What do you think or say?
  - (a) I don't agree because I believe it's Pangu who was the first living person and who created the world.
  - (b) "That sounds really intriguing. Tell me more."
  - (c) "That's interesting because we have a similar creation myth in China."
  - (d) "It's a myth, so it's not real, and I'm not very interested. What's on television?"
- 3 A friend has told you that he attended an African funeral where the relatives of the deceased touched, kissed and washed the deceased's body. What do you think or say?
  - (a) I'd never do that!
  - (b) I understand the custom, but it's unthinkable in China.
  - (c) "That's intriguing. I respect their customs."
  - (d) "That's really creepy! Don't tell me any more!"
- 4 A non-Chinese friend would like to meet you, and calls you to make a date for an informal drink. There's no small chat and the conversation ends as soon as you've agreed on a time and place. What do you think?
  - (a) I hate it when they're so business-like. After all, we're going for a friendly drink, not a business meeting.

- (b) It's odd behaviour, and not what I'd do, but I guess it's how some cultures behave.
- (c) Nothing strange in their behaviour. We're both busy people.
- (d) Friendships are based on trust, which means not knowing what or why people do things. When we're together, we get on fine, and that's the main thing.

**3 Work in pairs and talk about your answers to the questions.**

- 1 Do you think a Western-style welfare state, which provides medical care, pensions for the elderly, benefits for those in need, is necessary in our 21st-century society? Or should the family continue to look after its members as it has done in the past?
- 2 What famous Chinese myths are there? Do you think they're also well-known beyond China?
- 3 Can you think of a well-known person or a surprising event in recent history which might become a modern-day myth in the future?
- 4 What funeral rituals are there in China? Think about:
  - what to wear
  - what to eat
  - before the funeral
  - during the funeral
  - after the funeral
- 5 Are there funeral customs and traditions which you think are old-fashioned or inappropriate in modern-day China?
- 6 Have you ever experienced an encounter with a visitor to China which makes you feel uncomfortable? Do you think it had anything to do with different ways of thinking? Or was the person you met simply rude?
- 7 What's your opinion of the Hofstede model of ways of thinking?

## Try out

Many cultures use traditional sayings and proverbs to express universal values and beliefs. Indeed, although expressed in different ways, these universal values and beliefs are shared by many cultures.

Chinese sayings are good examples of proverbs expressing universal truths, and it's their succinctness and poetry as much as their appeal to shared values that raise them to a status and value beyond a simple translation of the words. Proverbs and sayings from other cultures also tend to rely on brevity and the poetic effect of the words they use.

### SCENARIO

Your college is holding a world culture festival to show students different cultures worldwide. Your classmates and you want to join in it and have decided to produce a sketch based on a Chinese saying or proverb to show a core value in Chinese culture.



Work in groups of four and discuss.

1 Make a list of famous Chinese sayings or proverbs. The following are some examples:

- 小葱拌豆腐，一清二白
- 留得青山在，不怕没柴烧
- 不为五斗米折腰
- 采菊东篱下，悠然见南山
- 忍一时风平浪静，退一步海阔天空

2 Talk about the values which each proverb or saying suggests.

3 Read some common English proverbs in the Cultural information box and decide if there's anything similar in Chinese.

### Cultural information

**English proverbs and sayings** come in a number of forms or patterns:

Imperative, negative: Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.

Imperative, positive: Strike while the iron is hot.

Parallel phrases: What you see is what you get.

Rhetorical questions: Is the Pope Catholic?

Declarative sentences: A stitch in time saves nine.

Here are some other common English proverbs and sayings:

Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

Well begun is half done.

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.

Good things come to those who wait.

A poor workman blames his tools.

# 2

Choose one of the proverbs or sayings and talk about how you'll demonstrate its meaning in a sketch.

**1** Check you all agree on the meaning of the proverb or saying.

**2** Talk about how you wish to illustrate the meaning.

- Think about what might happen if someone didn't show the values which the saying or proverb suggests.
- Think about a dramatic event.
- Think about the consequences of the dramatic event.

# 3

Write the script of the sketch. Make sure you don't include the actual words of the saying or proverb. Decide who is going to play each character and then rehearse the sketch.

# 4

Work with the whole class. Choose the best sketch.

## Communication tips

### Preparing, writing and acting out a sketch

Writing a sketch which you're all going to act out has to be a collaborative affair, in which you listen to everyone's ideas with respect, and then negotiate a group decision. For the sketch itself, most of your dialogue will be similar to conversational English in any context, but it may be worth considering a structure: setting the scene, introducing a sudden event, sounding dramatic, and looking back.

#### Discussing

I take your point but I would have thought ...  
That's very interesting, but could we look at it in a different way?  
I see what you mean. I hadn't thought of it in that way.  
But don't you think ...?

#### Negotiating a decision

OK, well, why don't we ...?  
How would it be if we ...?  
Perhaps we can do ... and later do ...  
That's it! I think we're nearly there!  
That's a great idea.

#### Setting the scene

A long, long time ago ...  
When I was younger, ...

#### Introducing a sudden event

All of a sudden, ...  
Out of nowhere came ...

#### Sounding dramatic

It was only when I ...  
Only later did I ...  
Not until ... did I ...  
No sooner had I ... than ...  
Never in my life have I felt ...

#### Looking back

I've never felt so ...  
Why on earth didn't I ...?  
What a fool I was to ...



# Reviewing

## Cultural information

Heroes and anti-heroes  
Stereotyping  
Superstition  
Traditional family values  
Flood myths  
Life and death  
Different ways of thinking  
English proverbs and sayings

## Language to help you

### Expressing uncertainty

What was it called?  
Which one was it?  
The something ...?  
Something like that.

### Expressing extreme facts and opinions

... takes himself exceptionally seriously.  
He was extremely cruel and merciless to his enemies.  
He even appears in a card game!  
He's pure fiction!

### Expressing critical opinions

Don't talk to me about ...  
She was so rude to me last week.  
... the place was a tip.  
It was so embarrassing.  
She can't stop talking about ...  
I think I'll just ...  
You bet I'm upset!

## Sounding sympathetic

Oh, I'm sorry, what happened?  
Go on.  
No way! That's outrageous!  
It's not fair.

## Making assumptions

It's supposed to be something to do with ...  
You're not meant to say that!  
We're not supposed to say ...  
Babies and children are thought to be the most ...  
I'm sure there must be ...

## Agreeing and sharing

Absolutely!  
That happens in ... too.  
We do that in ... too.

## Sounding enthusiastic

You know how we adore ...  
... was absolutely perfect in every way.  
... one of the ... I've ever seen.

## Communication tips

### Preparing, writing and acting out a sketch

#### Discussing

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**Negotiating a decision**

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**Setting the scene**

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Only later did I ...

Not until ... did I ...

No sooner had I ... than ...

Never in my life have I felt ...

**Looking back**

I've never felt so ...

Why on earth didn't I ...?

What a fool I was to ...