

LINKS TO:

Stage 2, Module 16

Learning Object 2: Interesting facts

Exercise 1

Sample answers:

1.1 Think back over a wedding you have attended, or ask a relative or family friend about their wedding.**Write some notes about the wedding ceremony, and the reception.**

Last month we went to a family friend's wedding. The wedding ceremony was held on the beach, under a specially-constructed bamboo shelter decorated with flowers and white fabric. As the guests arrived, we were each given a glass of champagne or juice, and a seashell filled with confetti. There were about 30 guests, as well as both the bride and groom's parents. The bride wore a glamorous silver dress and the groom wore a cream suit. The ceremony was held at sunset. The wedding celebrant was a woman, and the bride and groom had written their own vows. There was a small wedding party — two groomsmen and two bridesmaids. There was also one little girl — the groom's niece — who carried the rings on a pillow. During the ceremony, the bride and groom promised to love and honour each other. Both the bride and the groom said 'I do'. The bride and groom exchanged rings, and at the end of the ceremony they exchanged a kiss. Everyone cheered when they kissed.

The reception was held at the bride's parents' home. All of the guests and the wedding party walked from the beach to the reception. The reception included speeches and singing. The groom sang a song he had written for the bride, and the bride sang a song she had written for the groom. Everyone cried at how beautiful the songs were!

The garden was decorated with candles and lanterns, and there were Balinese temple umbrellas and flags, and cushions and picnic rugs where people could sit and talk. The bride and groom are musicians, and their friends and family all sang and played music throughout the evening. During the speeches, everyone was offered a glass of champagne or sparkling water. There was a beautiful buffet meal of seafood, salads and cold meats. Dessert was an enormous croquebouche, which was lit up with sparklers and carried out into the garden by the bride's sisters.

The guests had been asked to make donations to a charity instead of purchasing gifts for the couple.

All of the guests were offered a CD of the music the bride, groom and wedding party had written especially for the event, which was packaged in a special case with images of the couple.

1.2 What aspects of the wedding you noted in Exercise 1.1 would you consider traditional elements of an Australian wedding? In what ways do these elements reflect traditions?

The following elements are part of traditional Australian weddings:

- having a bridal party of best man, a maid of honour and so on.
- exchanging vows, including saying 'I do'
- exchanging rings
- finishing, or sealing, the vows with a kiss
- music is often part of a traditional wedding, though not usually sung or played by the bridal party
- having a reception that includes eating, speeches and champagne toasts
- having a wedding cake.

These traditional elements reflect what I know of Australian weddings from the stories of my parents and grandparents. Although the ceremony and reception were quite different to the pictures I have seen of my parents' wedding, for example, the general sense of celebration and ceremony were quite similar. While the ceremony was not traditional in a range of ways, the way the groom waited under the bamboo structure for the bride, the general content of the vows, and so on, reflected a traditional Australian ceremony.

1.3 What aspects of the wedding were unusual, or non-traditional? Why do you think these non-traditional elements were included as part of the wedding?

Some of the aspects I think are non-traditional include:

- getting married on the beach
- having a civil celebrant instead of a minister of religion
- the bride and groom writing their own vows
- the guests being asked to donate to charity instead of giving gifts
- the couple giving each of the guests a commemorative gift.

I think that getting married on the beach, or in another scenic location, is becoming increasingly popular in Australia. It is partly a reflection of how much many Australians treasure the beach and the 'great outdoors'. Similarly, I think that having a civil celebrant and couples writing their own vows is becoming increasingly popular in Australia, both because Australia is an increasingly secular society, and because couples like to make their wedding more of a reflection of their personal commitment to each other.

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I had not been to a wedding where we were asked to donate to a charity instead of giving gifts before, but thought it was a really lovely thing to do. From what I know of the couple, it is a reflection of their ideals: both of them do charity work and are active in supporting a range of non-profit organisations. My mother thought this was quite unusual, and really wanted to buy them a gift anyway.

Usually, the couple who are marrying receive gifts from each of their guests. The gifts are usually objects to help them set up their home, such as kitchenware and white goods. Many Australian couples have a gift registry, which is a list of items selected by the bride and groom. Guests can then choose a gift to purchase for them knowing it is exactly what they would like.

The CD with music from the bride, groom and friends was a surprise. Again, I had not encountered this before, but it was a really lovely idea. We played the CD all the way home in the car, and it was a really charming and individual way for us to remember the celebration.

1.4 Choose two of the wedding icons listed below and do some research into their meaning and history. Write a summary of what you learn.

1.4.1 Throwing the garter.

Throwing the garter is a centuries-old European tradition. Throughout Europe, having a piece of the bride or groom's wedding clothes was thought to bring good luck, so guests at the wedding would often tear off pieces of their clothes. Eventually, it became the custom for brides and grooms to voluntarily throw various items of their clothing to the guests.

One old English custom was for wedding guests to sneak into the bridal chamber, picking up pieces of discarded clothing as they went, and throw them at the couple. Whoever threw something that hung on the bride or groom's nose was said to be the next person who would be married. Instead, these days, the tradition is that whoever catches the garter will be the next one to marry.

1.4.2 Exchanging rings.

Wedding rings are usually worn on the ring finger of the left hand in Australia, which is also true in most of Western Europe. In some countries, however, the ring is worn on the right hand. Wedding rings — and engagement rings — have been worn by women since Roman times. Historically, the wedding ring was linked to the dowry, or other economic promises, between the bride's family and the groom's family. In many older wedding vows, the giving of the ring was linked overtly to the handing over of money. For example, during the time of Edward VI (the 1500s), the exchange of rings was linked to the groom handing the bride a purse of gold and silver and saying: 'This gold and silver I give thee.'

The tradition of the groom also wearing a wedding ring has only been around since the early 20th century. It came about largely as the result of an advertising campaign by the American jewellery industry. The industry also ran a campaign trying to convince men to wear an engagement ring, but this has not been as successful. While many men have exchanged rings with their brides, since the 1920s, the tradition of wearing the ring every day was slower to catch on.

These days, most couples don't associate the exchange or wearing of a wedding ring with a financial promise, or exchange of goods, but see it as a symbol of their love and commitment to each other.

Exercise 2

Sample answers:

2.1 Write a summary of contemporary wedding traditions in Indonesia.

Javanese wedding traditions are very formal and ritualistic affairs. My research has revealed that even prior to the wedding itself, the actual proposal involves a ritual where the parents of the man (the would-be bridegroom), if it is possible, should send an envoy or envoys to the parents of the woman (the would-be bride), proposing that their son is willing to marry their daughter. Other rituals which must be followed before the wedding itself are the *Peningsetan* (traditional engagement), the *Siraman* (holy bathing) and the *Midodareni* (a ceremony on the eve of the wedding day). The wedding day involves an additional six rituals, as outlined in this work sheet, which the bride and groom are required to complete. The most important of these is the *Ijab*, which involves the groom accepting the marriage consent given by the family of the bride and paying the dowry that then legalises the marriage. It is an interesting cultural difference that, during the *Ijab*, the bride must be located in a different part of the house or mosque from the groom from where she listens as his acceptance of the marriage consent and his payment of the dowry is relayed by microphone.

2.2 What aspects of contemporary Indonesian weddings reflect traditional practices and beliefs? In what ways do they reflect these traditions?

The pomp, ceremony, rituals and tradition of Javanese weddings date back to the Hindu Mataram Kingdom that rules Central Java 1300 years ago. These days, on their wedding day, the bridegroom and his bride are made up and dressed to appear, and be honoured, as Javanese kings and queens for a day as they sit on their decorated thrones to receive their guests, reflecting many of the historical traditions.

2.3 What aspects of contemporary Indonesian weddings are non-traditional? Where have these non-traditional practices come from (if anywhere)? Why do you think these non-traditional elements have been adopted?

As it has been pointed out in this work sheet, Indonesia is a culturally diverse country consisting of more than 300 different ethnic groups, each following one of the five state-approved religions. Marriage ceremonies are conducted in accordance with the customs of any given ethnic group, as well as that group's religion. Ethnic Chinese weddings, where the couples are both of the Christian faith, tend to be the nearest to what we in Australia would recognise as a 'traditional white wedding', although their reception practices tend to follow the same procedure outlined in the work sheet.

2.4 Do some research into the meaning and history of the two Indonesian wedding traditions below. Write a summary of what you learn.

2.4.1 Religious marriage.

Unlike other countries, Indonesian law has no provision for non-religious civil marriages. The Indonesian Marriage Act of 1974 stipulates that marriage can be legally recognised if it is performed according to the religion of the two parties. In Indonesia, religion is the main focus of the marriage, fulfilling the legal requirements of the union. In Indonesia, marriage between different religions is not allowed unless the marriage is conducted according to the religious requirements of one of the five state-sanctioned religions.

For Muslims the first and most important requirement of the marriage ceremony is the *Ijab*, which can be conducted either by a *penghulu* (celebrant or marriage official) or by the father of the bride.

For Christians, the most important part of the wedding ceremony is the exchange of vows before God and the blessing of the marriage conducted by a priest or minister of religion in a church.

All Muslim marriages must be registered at the Office of Religious Affairs, and all non-Muslim marriages are registered at the Civil Registry Office.

2.4.2 Honeymoon.

Interestingly, the word for honeymoon in Indonesian is a literal translation made up of two words, that is *bulan* (moon) and *madu* (honey).

Early references to honeymoons can be found in the fifth book of the Hebrew Bible, Deuteronomy 24:5, where it is written 'When a man is newly wed, he need not go out on a military expedition, nor shall any public duty be imposed on him. He shall be exempt for one year for the sake of his family, to bring joy to the wife he has married.'

Originally 'honeymoon' was used to describe the period just after the wedding when things are at their sweetest and which, it was assumed, would wane in a month. In Western culture, the custom of a newlywed couple going on a holiday together has its origins in early 19th century Great Britain and appears to be a custom borrowed from the Indian elite where upper-class couples in the Indian Subcontinent would take a 'bridal tour' to visit relatives who had not been able to attend the wedding. From England, the practice soon spread to the European continent and further abroad.

Under Dutch colonial rule, Indonesia's aristocracy and ruling class would have been influenced by the Dutch and adopted practices such as honeymoons. Because Indonesia is made up of thousands of islands, Indonesian couples are lucky to have many beautiful places they can visit on their honeymoon. Popular local honeymoon destinations for people of all budgets include *Danau Toba* (Lake Toba) in North Sumatra and the resorts in Bali.

Exercise 3

3.1 Use the space below to compare the similarities and differences in traditional Javanese and Australian weddings.

Sample answers:

Javanese Wedding

- The groom, accompanied by his father accepts the consent of the bride's family to the marriage and pays a dowry.
- The bride is not present during this procedure and listens from another room.
- This ceremony, the Ijab, can be conducted by either a Muslim holy man (penghulu) or by the bride's father.
- To be accepted under the law, a marriage in Indonesia must be conducted according to the requirements of one of the five officially recognised religions.
- The religious ceremony is followed by no fewer than five highly symbolic rituals.
- The Ijab and other symbolic rituals are only witnessed by immediate family and very close invited friends. Everyone else who is invited is expected to attend the reception following the Ijab and rituals.
- The exchange of wedding rings takes place incidentally as a symbol of the bond of love between the couple and is not part of any of the traditional rituals.
- The wedding ring is worn on the right-hand, ring finger in Indonesia.
- The couple may go to a photo studio for a photographic session prior to arriving at the reception.
- The purpose of the reception is for the invited guests to give their prayers and blessings to the newlyweds and it is a serious occasion with no dancing or alcohol, but lots of handshaking, well-wishing and congratulations.

Australian Wedding

- Exchange of wedding vows in front of a priest in a church.
- Weddings can be either religious or civil ceremonies to be legally recognised.
- Both the bride and groom are present during the exchange of vows.
- A large attendance of family and friends is expected at the wedding ceremony.
- The exchange of wedding rings is an important part of the ceremony and is a symbol the love and commitment.
- The wedding ring is worn on the ring finger of the left hand.
- At the conclusion of the ceremony the groom usually kisses the bride.
- The couple, accompanied by the best man and matron of honour may go to a photo studio or natural setting for a photo session prior to arriving at the reception.
- The purpose of the reception is for the invited guests to celebrate with the couple and involves light-hearted humour, dancing and some alcohol.

Similarities

- Wedding rings are exchanged although this ritual is more important in Australian weddings.
- Newlyweds may attend a photo session prior to arriving at the reception.
- Wedding receptions are held but with vastly different emphases.

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3.2 How do the differences and similarities you identified in Exercise 3.1 reflect both historical and contemporary Indonesian and Australian values, attitudes and beliefs in relation to weddings and marriage?

Traditional Javanese marriage practices have ostensibly remained unchanged in 1300 years, dating back to the Mataram Hindu Kingdom. The fact that Javanese wedding rituals have undergone little, if any, change in 1300 years is evidence of the Indonesian and Javanese belief in the importance of marriage as a rite of passage in life and of the sanctity of the wedding ritual and all that it symbolises and represents.

In contrast, the role of religion in Australian weddings has changed over time, reflecting changes in Australian beliefs and values. The increasing popularity of secular wedding ceremonies reflects widespread changes in the belief systems of many Australians. While early settlers in Australia were often Christian, and believed that a religious ceremony was an essential part of a wedding, many contemporary Australians do not believe that a religious ceremony is essential.

In Australia, the increasing popularity of wedding ceremonies that take place in locations chosen by the couple, and incorporating individualised elements such as couples writing their own vows, reflects a widespread attitude that weddings should reflect the personal style of the couple, rather than (or in addition to) generic religious or cultural elements.

Overall, the differences between the traditional elements of Javanese and Australian weddings reflects the fact that in Indonesia, people generally place more value on traditional and religious aspects of a wedding, whereas in Australia, weddings more commonly reflect our more secular society and are, therefore, a combination of religious and secular elements.

3.3 From your research, do you think there are any universal values, attitudes or beliefs associated with weddings or marriage? Make a list of any that you can think of. Give reasons for your answer.

I think that there are some values, attitudes and beliefs that are widely associated with weddings and marriages. I think that a wedding is generally a commitment between two consenting adults to live together, share their lives, and bear and raise children together.

I think that it is widely believed that romantic love is at the heart of the union between a husband and wife. I think that most weddings are understood as a happy and significant time in the bride and groom's lives, and are celebrated as such with family and friends.

The families of the bride and groom are often heavily involved in the wedding, which is partly a joining of the two families.

Although there are some strong similarities across cultures, there are some places in the world where practices and related beliefs and values are quite different. For example, in some cultures people are married, or promised in marriage, before they reach adulthood. This is often where marriage is valued as a union between families, rather than individuals, or where romantic love as a precursor to marriage is not seen as important. In some cultures, the consent of both parties is not needed. In some parts of the world, for example, the groom must formally consent to the marriage, but the bride's consent is given by her family. This is a reflection of a difference in the value placed on men's and women's rights.