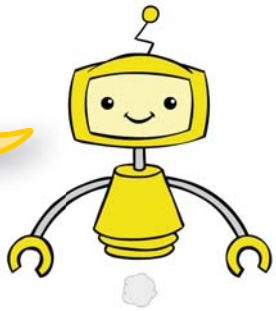
MODULE 16: WORK SHEET 1

I do!

I've been to so many weddings! Weddings on beaches, at sea, in churches and cathedrals, in temples and halls. I love the part where the bride and groom say 'I do' and — finally — kiss! But do all couples say 'I do'? Are all marriages sealed with a kiss? Let's find out more about wedding traditions.



LINKS TO:
Stage 2, Module 16
Learning Object 2: Interesting facts

PRIOR LEARNING:
Stage 2
Module 15 Work Sheet 4: *Please join us on our special day*

1 Get me to the church on time

Weddings in Australia can be made up of a range of rituals and activities, depending on the people who are being married, their backgrounds and their beliefs. Weddings can include a celebration of a couple's commitment to and love for each other, a religious exchange of vows, and the signing of legal marriage documents. Most Australian weddings combine two or more of these elements.

A major element of most weddings in Australia is the reception, where the couple and their guests share a meal and celebrate their marriage with drinks, speeches and, often, dancing.

Weddings in Australia reflect the diversity of our secular, religious and cultural heritage, although the majority of marriages performed in Australia draw on the ceremonial and celebratory traditions of our colonial heritage, with an emphasis on Christian symbolism and ceremonies.

Have a look at the photographs below of weddings in Queensland.

1885: Wedding in western Queensland

c. 1920: Outdoor wedding performed by Methodist Church preacher underneath the Burke and Wills Tree, north of Boulia

1942: Lieutenant Arnold W. T. Just and his bride, Private Verlie Tainton (Australian Women's Air Services) enjoying afternoon tea with their attendants after their marriage at St John's Cathedral.

1951: Wedding group outside a church

Source: Photographs from the John Oxley Library, State Library Queensland.

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As you can see, historically most weddings in Australia share a number of features. For example, most of the brides are wearing white, while the groom wears a suit. Flowers are carried by the bride, or placed on the table at the reception.

Even though these weddings share many similarities, there are also significant differences. Some of the differences are cultural (such as wearing Scottish kilts by the groom and groomsmen in the 1951 wedding), and others are a reflection of the times (such as the uniformed bride and groom in the 1942 wedding).

Since the 1950s, Australia has experienced enormous cultural changes, which have affected the way weddings are celebrated. The decline of the importance of religion in many Australians' lives has led to more weddings being held in settings such as beaches, boats, and parks rather than churches, and being officiated by celebrants rather than ministers.

2

Not one size fits all ...

In Indonesia, a wedding is the most important rite of passage in a person's life, because marriage and parenthood give a person full adult status.

The family is a very powerful force in Indonesian society, forming the basis of many Indonesian attitudes and systems of organisation. It is a microcosm of society. It is close, communal and hierarchical, with a sense of shared feelings of responsibility which begin in childhood and make the Indonesian adult think of the group first and themselves as someone who fits smoothly into the family feeling of the wider group.*

In Indonesia, one does not ask, 'Are you married?' but instead 'Are you married yet?' to which the correct response is, 'Yes' or 'Not yet'. The same is true of questions about whether a person has children. Unmarried adults are uncommon, although urban people are marrying at older than in the past and compared to those people living in rural areas. The primary purpose of marriage is to procreate and to continue the family lineage.

*Source: Oddling-Smee, David, *Indonesian Business Culture*, 1992, ACTRAC Products Ltd.

The Javanese wedding

Given the broad diversity of ethnic groups in Indonesia, it is natural that wedding customs and receptions will reflect this diversity. For the purpose of your learning we will concentrate on Javanese wedding practices, because the Javanese are the dominant cultural group in Indonesia.

The wedding ceremony is where most of the religious and cultural rituals take place and is only attended by very close friends and by close family members, who are expected to witness the actual exchange of marriage vows.

Javanese wedding traditions can be traced back to the Hindu Mataram Kingdom that ruled Central Java 1300 years ago. The bride wears traditional make-up with a special *gelungan* (hair style), along with ornamental golden jewellery and a special dress for the occasion. The bridegroom also wears traditional dress for this ceremony. The couple have to appear at their best because they are being honoured and treated by those present as king and queen for the day. They sit on their ornately decorated 'thrones', with all the pomp, ceremony and tradition of the Javanese court, to receive their guests.

The complete Javanese wedding ceremony is made up of a number of complex traditional rituals. Because of this, the role of a *pemaes* (a skilled, traditional bridal beautician), who not only prepares both the bride and groom for the wedding ceremony and celebrations but also oversees the undertaking of the various rituals, is of vital importance.

The *Ijab* ceremony

For Javanese couples, the *Ijab* ceremony, which is required to legalise the wedding, is undertaken at either a *masjid* (mosque) or at the bride's home. The *Ijab* involves the *penghulu* (celebrant or marriage official), who uses a microphone, reading the marriage consent given by the bride's family to the groom. The groom is accompanied by his father who will accept the consent and pay the dowry to legitimise the wedding. At this stage the bride and groom are not permitted to meet face-to-face, so the use of the microphone allows the bride, who is in another room of the house or mosque, to listen to the bridegroom as he accepts the marriage consent of her family.

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The entire exchange is quite simple:

> *Saya nikahkan engkau*, (name of groom) *bin* (name of father of the groom) *dengan* (name of bride) *binti* (name of father of bride) *dengan mas kawin* (amount of money or other things such as a Qu'ran) *dibayar tunai/utang*.
>
> I marry you, (name of groom) son of (name of father of the groom) with (name of bride) daughter of (name of bride's father) with a dowry of (amount of money or other things such as a Qu'ran) paid in cash / arrears.

The groom must respond to this, without hesitation, with the words:

> *Saya terima nikahnya* (name of bride) *binti* (name of father of bride) *dengan mas kawin tersebut dibayar tunai/utang.*

I accept the marriage of (name of bride) daughter of (name of father of bride) with the aforementioned dowry paid in cash / arrears.

The above exchange, known as the *Ijab*, is the only formal religious requirement needed to legitimise a Muslim wedding.

Other ceremonies

After the *Ijab*, a number of other symbolic ceremonies are undertaken according to Javanese custom commencing with the *Panggih* ceremony, which is the first meeting of the bride and bridegroom as husband and wife.

Following the intricate set of rituals that make up the *Panggih* ceremony, the newly wedded couple then undertake the ritual of *Wiji Dadi* where the bridegroom crushes a chicken egg with his right foot, which is then washed by the bride using water scented by a variety of flowers. This ritual symbolises that the bridegroom is ready to become a responsible father and that the bride should faithfully serve her husband.

The *Wiji Dadi* is followed by the *Kacar Kucur* or *Tampa Kaya* ritual. The groom hooks his little finger onto his bride's little finger and they walk to a chair at the front of the house, escorted by the *pemaes*, which is the site of the ritual. The bridegroom gives the bride some soybeans, peanuts, paddy rice, corn, yellow rice, herbs, flowers and an even number of coins of various denominations. This symbolises that the husband should give all his income to his wife. The bride carefully receives these gifts in a small white cloth above an old mat which is placed on her lap. This symbolises that she should be a good and careful housewife.

The *Dahar Klimah* or *Dahar Kembul* ritual is then undertaken by the bridegroom and bride. This ritual is, once again, led by the *pemaes* and involves the couple eating together and feeding each other in a ritualistic manner from a plate of yellow rice and other side dishes provided by the *pemaes*. This ritual symbolises that the couple should use and enjoy their belongings together.

The final ritual of the Javanese wedding ceremony is the ritual of *Sungkeman* where the couple kneel before their parents and ask for their blessing, first from the parents of the bride, then from the parents of the bridegroom. During the *Sungkeman* the *pemaes* takes the *keris** from the bridegroom and after the *Sungkeman* has been completed the bridegroom wears his *keris* again.

**keris*: a wavy double-bladed, traditional Indonesian dagger with symbolic significance for Javanese grooms.

Now for the reception ...

3

At many Indonesian wedding receptions there is the idea that the more people there are, the merrier it will be. Every relative, acquaintance, work or business colleague could be invited to the reception. It is also acceptable to join a group of people who have been invited, even if you have not personally received an invitation.

Indonesians are truly honoured by the attendance of guests at the wedding reception, because it demonstrates respect and honour for the family involved and support for the newlyweds.

The sincere welcome extended to guests is exemplified on invitations with words such as:

> '*Merupakan suatu kehormatan dan kebahagiaan bagi kami apabila Bapak/Ibu/Saudara/i berkenan hadir untuk memberikan doa restu kepada kedua mempelai.*'

This literally means that you do the family a great honour by attending and extending your prayers and blessings to the bride and groom.

Prior to the mid-1990s, it was customary for people to send extravagant floral displays to wedding receptions in Jakarta and other large cities, where they were placed outside the hall. Wedding guests also brought a wide variety of household goods as gifts. At very large weddings, which involved hundreds, or even thousands, of guests, this would invariably result in multiple duplications of gifts. Therefore, a relatively new practice arose from the mid-1990s onwards where invitations included a request to guests not to bring gifts or organise floral displays. This request is often framed with the words:

> '*Dengan tidak mengurangi rasa hormat, kami akan sangat berterima kasih apabila tanda kasih yang akan diberikan tidak berupa cenderamata atau karangan bunga.*'

This is a polite way of asking for money instead of gifts and translates, 'Without belittling your generosity, we would very much appreciate it if your well wishes are not in the form of a gift or flowers'. Because of this practice, as guests enter the reception and register their attendance at the reception desk, there will be an ornately decorated box with a slit at the top into which guests can insert an envelope with money.

The income level of individual families determines how elaborate the wedding celebrations and reception will be. These may range from simple meals in the family home, to small receptions at community centres, to grand extravagant affairs held in the ballrooms of five-star hotels. At most receptions the guests arrive, sign the guest book, accept their token of gratitude for attending, deposit their gift and enter the reception hall.

The path into the reception hall will be flanked with members of the extended families, often dressed in traditional dress, who greet each of the guests as they enter. The guests who arrive on time will be able to witness the procession of the wedding couple into the reception hall. Depending on their wealth, social standing or ethnic group, the bride and groom may be preceded by dancers who give a traditional dance performance before the wedding couple goes on stage.

Once the couple is seated, the speeches normally follow. A member of each family will address the guests to thank them for their prayers, blessings and attendance, and to offer elaborate apologies if the guests find any arrangements of the reception lacking in anyway.

After the speeches the guests are invited to come to the stage and shake hands with the bride and groom and their parents. After going through the receiving line, guests are invited to eat. If the queue to be received by the wedding party is rather long because of the large number of guests, it is quite acceptable to eat first and join the queue afterwards. The food at receptions tends to be a buffet where people stand and mingle while eating. Those who wish to sit may do so at the seating provided along the walls, but there are no large tables with prearranged seating as are often found in western weddings. Ethnic Chinese weddings held at function venues do provide round tables for guests during the reception but, again, the seating is not fixed and guests are free to mingle and sit at whichever table they wish (except at those reserved for the wedding party).

The length of time spent at a wedding reception is entirely up to the individual. Some guests, who may have other functions or wedding receptions to attend, may just come in to offer their congratulations, have a small snack and leave. Others, who are enjoying the spread of food provided and are familiar with many of the guests, may take advantage of the chance to chat and socialise and therefore may stay for some time. There is generally no dancing or alcohol. Many guests will go home after eating and will take their leave by shaking hands with the wedding party once again.

Although wedding receptions throughout Indonesia follow a similar pattern, those of the various different ethnic groups differ slightly in the style of traditional wedding dress; the stage decorations; the food served; and the type of music or dance performance provided (if any).

4 Exercises

Exercise 1

1.1 Weddings in Australia have changed significantly in the past 50 years.

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.

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 historical traditions?

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?

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

1.4.1 Throwing the garter.

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1.4.2 Exchanging rings.

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Exercise 2

Consider what you have learnt about Indonesian weddings.

2.1 Write a summary of contemporary wedding traditions in Indonesia.

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

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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?

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

2.4.1 Religious marriage.

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2.4.2 Honeymoon

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Exercise 3

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

Javanese wedding	Australian wedding

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Javanese wedding (continued)

Australian wedding (continued)

Similarities in both

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?

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 answers.