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England

Nationalism and Identity

Forewarned

The attitude of the English towards other nations is not so much xenophobia (fear of foreigners) as xenopili (pity for foreigners for having the misfortune to be, well, NOT English). As Cecil Rhodes once observed, 'To be born English is to win first prize in the lottery of life'. It is hardly surprising, then, that the English should feel a bit sorry for all the runners-up.

The last invasion of England was perpetrated 900 years ago by the Normans. They settled, they worked hard, they tried to integrate and fit in, they tried to share their wisdom and experience with the locals. They failed. The English did what they do best. They ignored the funny cooking smells, the unfamiliar clothes and peculiar accents and set about the long, slow, arduous task of turning the invaders into Englishmen.

It took centuries of course, but it worked. 'Norman' is no longer a name redolent of invasion and locking up one's daughters: it is a quintessential English first name.

The Venetian Ambassador, Andrea Travisana, visiting London in 1497 made the following observation about the English: 'They do not believe that there are any other people than themselves, or any other world than England; and whenever they see some handsome foreigner, they say, 'He looks like an Englishman,' or, 'What a pity he is not English.'

The English today are not as unanimous in this view as they once were, some regarding England as a place to escape from at every opportunity, but the majority remain innately mistrustful of 'abroad' - dodgy food, dodgy water, dodgy plumbing, and, worst of all, dodgy foreigners.

This is what you are up against. It is useless to imagine that you can succeed where so many have failed. But since it is the proudest boast of the

English that they cannot begin to understand foreigners, it would be gratifying to steal a march on them by trying to understand *them*.

How They See Themselves

The English see themselves as law abiding, courteous, tolerant, decent, generous, gallant, steadfast and fair. They also take pride in their self-deprecatory sense of humour which they see as the ultimate proof of their good nature.

Though they put themselves down in public, in their heart of hearts they believe the English to be superior to all other nations, and are convinced that all other nations secretly know that they are. In a perfect world, the English suspect that everyone would like to be more like them.

Geography reinforces this belief as the inhabitants look out to the sea all around them from the fastness of their 'tight little island'. Nobody would ever question the aptness of the newspaper headline: 'Fog in the Channel - Continent cut off.'

The English are convinced that the best things in life originate in England or have been improved there. Even the weather, though it may not be pleasant, is far more interesting than anyone else's and is always full of surprises.

How They Think Others See Them

The English are dimly aware of foreign criticism but feel it should not be taken too seriously They are convinced, with some justification, that no-one really understands them. In the words of a much loved song-writer Michael Flanders: 'The English are moral, the English are good, And clever, and modest, and misunderstood.'

This is not a cause for national concern, since they do not want to be understood, feeling it to be an invasion of their privacy.

In general the English are aware of their faults - class consciousness,

insularity and a fixation with tradition -but think these are outweighed by their good points. They are used to being seen as stereotypes and prefer it that way: they don't mind in the least that England is seen as peopled by bowler-hatted city types, football hooligans, silly-ass nobility and cheeky cockneys, all meeting at an ancient pub for a pint of warm beer.

How Others Actually See Them

To outsiders the English are intellectually impenetrable. They express little emotion, their culinary appreciation is incomprehensible and the pleasures of life seem to pass them by as they put up with shoddiness and discomfort. They are seen as hidebound, prejudiced and uncooperative - a people largely unmoved by developments in the world around them, who live in a land of costume dramas, shrouded in grey skies, sustained by deep-fried sausages.

How They Would Like To Be Seen

The English pride themselves on their sense of fair play, and rather assume that it is recognised and generally admired by all. They would like to be loved and appreciated for what they see as their sterling qualities. These attributes, which they bring selflessly to the world forum, include a reflex action which leads them to champion the underdog and treat persecutors with a firm hand, truthfulness, and a commitment never to break a promise or to go back on their word. Foreigners are expected to understand that if an Englishman hasn't kept his word, there is a very good reason for it.

The English sincerely believe that they acquired the largest Empire the world has ever seen as first prize in some sort of sporting contest, which they won fair and square. (The point is that that they did indeed play by the rules, but only because the rules, like those of cricket, were made up by the

English.)

If possible, try to find it in your heart to be charitable about these and other beliefs, even if you are convinced they are delusions. Aside from anything else, the moment you disagree with their vision of themselves, most English will take your side and agree with you. Respect for the underdog, you see.

How They See Each Other

Nowhere is the English people's instinctive distrust of the unfamiliar more clearly seen than in their attitude to the denizens of their own country.

Since time immemorial there has been a North-South divide in England. To the Southerner, civilization ends somewhere around the Watford Gap (just north of London). Beyond that point, he believes, the inhabitants are all ruddier in complexion, more hairy, blunt to the point of rudeness, and obsessed with stew —all of which he generously puts down to the cooler climate.

In the North they caution their children with tales of the deviousness of the inhabitants 'down South'. They point to their softness, their fussy food and their airy-fairiness on all matters of real importance.

Nevertheless, *any* English person no matter how hairy or soft, is entitled to special treatment.

When it comes to their neighbours in the British Isles, the English are in absolutely no doubt as to their own predominance. This they see as no petty prejudice but rather as a scientific observation. The Irish are not to be trusted because they are too feckless, the Scots are not be trusted because (though clever) they are too careful, and the Welsh are simply not to be trusted.

However, the Irish, the Scots and the Welsh should take heart. To most of the English they are not quite as foreign as their cousins across the Channel. They should also remember that 'foreign-ness' for the English

tends to start at the end of their own street.

How They See Others

The rest of the world the English see as a playground: a series of interlocking peoples, customs and cultures all of which can be enjoyed, used, or discarded as the whim takes them. Their own experience has taught them to expect the worst of any situation, be pleasantly surprised if it doesn't happen, and slightly gratified with their own sensible misgivings if it does. Despite this, the English do like many individuals who are foreign since they generally know at least one foreigner who is almost 'one of us'.

But there are very few nations they either trust or take seriously. Take the French. The French and the English have been sparring partners for so long that the English have developed a kind of love-hate relationship with them. The English love France: they love its food and wine and thoroughly approve of its climate. They have a subconscious historical belief that the French have; no right to be living in France at all, to the extent that thousands of English try annually to turn certain areas of France into little corners of Surrey.

However, the actual French are perceived as a bit too excitable for any people with ambitions on the world stage. It is thought that a few more decades of English influence would improve them no end.

With the Germans the English are less equivocal. Germans are regimented, far too serious, and inclined to bullying; they have not even the saving grace of culinary skill. The Italians are too emotional; the Spanish cruel to bulls; the Russians are gloomy; the Dutch solid and sensible; the Scandinavians, Belgians and Swiss, dull. All oriental peoples are inscrutable and dangerous.

The Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans are in a special category: they play cricket.

Special Relationships

There are several favoured nations with whom the English feel a special affinity. They have close ties with the Australians, despite their disconcerting lack of restraint, the Kiwis, who have model manners but an annoying tendency to thrash them at rugby, and the Canadians who elicit sympathy for being weighed down by permanent snow and being constantly mistaken for Americans.

The English like Americans and in many ways would probably like them even more if only they didn't insist on being quite so... well... *American.* The English regard Americans as English people who turned into something else as the result of an unfortunate misunderstanding, and who would be a lot happier if they just had the sense to turn back again. Then they would start talking Proper English.

English viewers watch participants on American television 'confess-it-all' shows with fascinated disbelief and blame falling standards in their own cultural life on American influence. In the final analysis, however, they don't complain too much to the Americans about this as they are keen to maintain good relations with them for the sake of commercial and political advantage.

Naturally, this does not stop English people from feeling quite free to compare their two countries - to America's disadvantage. A smug feeling prevails that having a history that goes back a bit further than the day before yesterday is a sign of a superior culture.

Character

Individualism

The English have a well-developed sense of individual personal freedom which at its most dogmatic says: 'I will obey the law only because I choose to do so. And only then because it either makes sense or there's no good reason not to - given that I am the ultimate judge of both conditions.'

Whoever called the English 'the Island Race' only got it half right. Every English person is his or her own island. Only wars unite the English, and over the years they have become quite good at them. But natural modesty demands they should always look like losing until just before the end. It makes victory that much sweeter, and really annoys the loser.

They are fond of their rights, including the right to privacy and the right to preserve one's personal space. This is an area surrounding each individual, which it is not good manners to invade. People will leave a step between themselves and the next person on an escalator even when it's crowded, or a vacant seat between themselves and their neighbour in the cinema, even when they know that in due course they are certain to be asked to move along to make more room. This has nothing to do with a morbid fear of body odour, it is more an extension of the 'an-Englishman's-home-is-his-castle' belief. Think of it as an invisible moat. Learn to shake hands at long distance.

Keeping a Stiff Upper Lip

This characteristic pose involves keeping the head held high (pride), the upper lip stiff (to avoid the visible tremble which betrays emotion), and the best foot forward (determination). In this position, conversation is difficult and intimacy of any kind almost impossible. But it portrays the presence of that attribute which the English were traditionally expected to project - absolute self-control.

It has long been acceptable to show one's feelings at football matches, funerals, or when welcoming home someone thought to have been dead. But at all other times English people find a display of emotion discon-certing, though it is more acceptable if the perpetrator looks suitably embarrassed afterwards.

In recent years, however, there have been a increasing number of public occasions at which the English have allowed themselves to become

positively Mediterranean.

Moderation

Moderation means a lot to the English, even to those who are incapable of moderate behaviour themselves. No matter how they are behaving, they share a fundamental dislike of any behaviour that `goes too far'.

`Going too far' in behavioural terms in polite society covers displaying an excess of emotion, getting hopelessly drunk or cracking off-colour jokes and then laughing at them noisily. Altogether beyond the pale'" is the man or woman who creates a scene in public. The English consider that anyone who does so is automaticallyy in the wrong, even if they are actually in the right.

The whole business of making a fuss has its own vocabulary: guilty parties being said to be creating a `to do', a hullabaloo, a palaver, a kerfuffle, a song and dance - all of which are seen as socially undesirable.

When confronted by a kerfuffle in a public place such as a bus, English people will mostly duck down behind their newspapers and pretend it isn't happening. Extreme outbursts, such as road rage or football hooliganism, will incur a chorus of disapproval. Even though such behaviour is quite common and quite in character, it is still perceived as un-English.

For the English, the admired way to behave in almost all situations is to display a languid indifference to almost everything. Even in affairs of the heart, it is considered unseemly to show too much enthusiasm.

Paradoxically, the sentence `This time you/he/she/they have gone too far' is the unmistakable prelude to a great deal of immoderate behaviour on the part of the speaker, who will then undoubtedly go too far him- or herself.

Two-Facedness

With their emotions buttoned up and their composure in place, the

English present a reassuring consistency to each other and the world at large. Underneath, however, they seethe with a kind of primitive unruliness which they have never quite been able to master.

There is an unpredictability about the English. You can never be sure which stance they are going to take. So, at a supermarket checkout, clutching two items, you may find someone with a trolley-load standing back to let you go first. Yet you may encounter the same person in a crowded pub barging in front of you to get to the bar. Climate has a lot to do with it. Heat waves bring out the beast in the English. Cold and drizzle calm them down.

There is an illogical relationship between the head and the heart. English people are capable of admiring something without enjoying it, and enjoying something they suspect is fundamentally reprehensible.

Such two-facedness in the English character prompts the most common criticism of them - that they are hypocrites. They certainly appear to be, but appearances can be deceptive. The English believe that even the truth has two sides.

Attitudes and Values

The English are governed by a simple set of attitudes and values to which everyone pays lip service, whether they believe in them or not. There is, however, one exception to this rule, and that is:

Common Sense

Common sense is central to the English attitude to almost everything in life. It is common sense to carry an umbrella in case of rain. It is common sense not to sit on cold stone (which can give you haemorrhoids). It is common sense to wear clean underwear in case you are run over and taken to hospital.

To fall foul of changing circumstances is inexcusable. Every plan for an

outdoor event will have its indoor alternative in case the worst comes to the worst. Even accounting systems have a line for 'Contingencies'. It is common sense to 'Be prepared' at all times.

However, the fact that when they sit down to a business meeting the English are more likely than any other nation not to be prepared for it does not deter them from believing that common sense will usually prevail.

A Good Sport

If an English man or woman refers to you as 'a good sport', you will know that you have really arrived. For to them this is a qualification normally never awarded to a foreigner, and by no means within the grasp of all the English.

The term is not exclusively a sporting one. It describes the sort of behaviour both on and off the playing field that characterises everything they really respect. In all physical trials, the good sport will play without having been seen to practise too hard and will, ideally, win from innate superiority. He or she will then be dismissive of their victory and magnanimous towards the loser.

It goes without saying that the good sport will also be a good loser. There will be no arguing with umpires or outward signs of disappointment. On the contrary, a remark such as "The best man won!" tossed airily to all and sundry is obligatory even in the face of crushing defeat.

Don't let this fool you. The English are fiercely competitive, especially in matters of sport, and they would rather be crossed in love than beaten on the tennis court. But to let their disappointment be seen would be going too far.

Stoicism

Stoicism, the capacity to greet life's vicissitudes with cheerful calm, is an essential ingredient of Englishness. It is not the same as the unfeeling

woodenness implied by the expression 'stiff upper lip', nor is it oriental fatalism or Scandinavian gloom. It is the extraordinary forbearance that enables English people to spend long, wearying hours making their way to and from work on a transport system that many third-world nations would be ashamed of and, having arrived, respond to the question "How was the journey?", with a breezy "Not so bad, thanks."

The English, who suspect that all foreigners tend to overreact and 'make a meal of things', will warm to you if you display understated good humour in the face of adversity. You may then achieve the status of ar admirable stoic, such as the circus worker who, having had his arm bitten off by a tiger was admitted to hospital and when asked the standard question before treatment "Are you allergic to anything?", replied "Only tigers".

A Puritan Streak

The English are not a deeply religious nation. Hundreds of years ago they decided that Roman Catholicism with its teachings about original sin and the unworthiness of the human race could not really have been meant for them. So they designed a church of their own - the imaginatively-named Church of England.

Over the years- Protestantism has ramified into a bewildering number of churches and sects which cater for every nuance of belief, from 'high church' C of E (just a sliver away from Catholicism) to the Seventh-Day Adventists.

Attendance at Church of England services is not obligatory and, indeed, not a widespread habit. Membership, on the other hand, is assumed to be the norm, and any bureaucratic form which requests information about your religion mirrors the attitude of the nation to the rest of Christendom in its instruction: 'If not C of E, state "Other".'

In general, the English do not take soul-searching seriously, and are one of the least introspective of all peoples. This doesn't prevent them from

brooding every now and then, usually after a major sporting defeat or several weeks of continual rain. But what they do have is a strong puritan streak which runs so deep that few are aware of it. The restrictive licensing laws are a case in point. Though these have now been relaxed, the English still fundamentally believe that it is wrong to indulge yourself for 24 hours a day.

Booty is another example. Having debated for decades whether or not to have a national lottery, they now natter about whether or not the prizes should be quite so gargantuan. They feel there is something faintly indecent about people being able to win such huge amounts of money all at once. And that it would be only fair and decent if the person who has won a huge sum would spread it about a bit.

They also worry about moral standards on television and have a 9 p.m. watershed after which the children ought not to be around to be corrupted by explicit sex, bad language and violence - all the things, in fact, that their 13-year-olds get up to in the playground.

English puritanism is best expressed in the belief that if something is unpleasant, it must be good for you. There can be no other explanation for the existence of tapioca pudding.

Inventiveness and Initiative

The bounds of English inventiveness and resourcefulness have yet to be discovered. The garden sheds of England are abuzz with creativity as chaps called Ron dream up useful and much-needed devices, such as the perfect egg boiler, the self-creasing trouser or a little ladder to let the spider out of the bath. Of course few of these ever reach the market place, but perhaps one day they will. Just recall an eccentric cove called Babbage, who tinkered endlessly with his 'mechanical calculating engines' while his friends indulged him. Computers, to which his inventiveness gave rise, now rule the world.

In a tight spot the English will demonstrate remarkable initiative. For example, on a lonely road in a rainstorm at dead of night, a German motorist being brought to a half| by a detached windscreen wiper, a broken fan belt, or leaky radiator, will call for help and then wait till dawn for the repair truck. His English equivalent suffering the same mishaps will find a temporary solution with respectively a paper clip, his wife's pantyhose and a blob of used chewing gum, then blithely continue on his way.

Clubbability

Belonging is important to the English. Individuality is all very well, and in some cases commendable, but on the whole being part of a team is their preferred situation and they are never happier than when they are surrounded by a group of people with whom they either have, or affect to have, everything in common.

For this reason English life is enriched with clubs and societies, many of which appear to have no sensible or productive purpose (mostly because they don't). The archetypal English club is the fictional Pickwick Club in Charles Dickens's book, a group who were devoted to dining, telling stories, and going on little journeys. Or the Anti-Caravan Club which was formed as a joke to enable those who hated caravans to feel they were not alone, and which at one time had more members than its allegedly useful, pro-caravanning counterpart.

If you long to dress up in Civil War gear and biff other, similarly-attired men and women, join the Sealed Knot. If you hanker to impose free-market policies on the nation, knock on the door of the Carlton Club. Lovers of buttons have the British Button Society, fans of junk (well, why not?) head for the Ephemera Society. If you want to protect the English language, try the Society for the Prevention of Inadvertent Transatlanticisms (SPIT).

Whatever their avowed purpose, all English clubs are primarily social groupings whose members take comfort in being able to relate to each other

without actually having to. A train full of people will turn into the Signal Failure Club at a moment's notice given the right circumstances. Membership guarantees human warmth, support, bonding, comradeship and group identity - all with the copper-bottomed guarantee that, away from the club gatherings, none of its members need get involved in the others' lives, or even acknowledge the others' existence should they happen to meet.

Class

The English urge for togetherness manifests itself in a devotion to the class system which, though constantly under threat, remains stubbornly central to the way of life of vast numbers of the English. Its importance to them can hardly be overrated and it should never be dismissed. For English men and women, their class is the largest club to which they belong.

The English class system is highly visible, with officially, carefully defined structures that go from Dukes, Marquesses, and Earls, to putting all those letters the English like to have after their names in precisely the right order: KG, OBE, BO, RIP, ETC.

The system actually has less real influence than might be supposed. Those at the top end of the scale are usually reluctant to make a big deal of it, because that would be showing off, while those nearer the bottom are usually at pains to show how unimpressed they are by the whole thing, as befits good individualists.

Among the upper classes, respect is reserved for old-established families irrespective of titles, or the lack of them. At the other end of the scale, there is a sort of reverse snobbery about being working class. It used to be the proletarian dream to become middle class and drop all working class connections. This has gone into reverse and to be middle class is now seen as effete and conformist - despite the fact that almost everyone now is.

Karl Marx spent years in England writing about 'class war', but never grasped that the real struggle is no *between* the English upper, middle, and

working Classes but *within* them. The struggle is at its fiercest within the biggest section which is the middle class, which has in turn divided itself into an upper, middle and lower class: However, with every year that passes, the divisions get more blurry around the edges.

English society is now recognised by market researchers as consisting of five alphabetical groups. The upper echelons are ABs and the middle are BCs. The lower stratum divides again into Ds and Es. The Ds consider themselves to be underprivileged and hold everyone else in contempt. The Es are the underclass and thus usually left out of the picture. The overwhelming majority of the indigenous English are, in fact, BCs. In this group, the Cs constantly aspire to be Bs, and the nightmare for Bs is to become Cs.

Because of this, the BCs can never relax. They are conscious that in every aspect of life they should projec| the 'right' image, one based on their perception of what others think of them. This involves what they wear, what they say, what they eat and drink, where they live and-with whom they are seen.

Although they firmly assert that greater social mobility is desirable, the English generally believe that one should marry within one's own peer group. It saves arguments over whether or not you are going to relax in your 'sitting room' or your 'lounge', and whether or not that room is going to house a life-size ceramic leopard.

Placing Each Other

Nothing upsets an English person so much as not being able to 'place' another - or worse, making a mistake about someone's social position. If they are not totally sure, they will resort to a fiendish series of social tests.

Accents can instantly place an individual. A regional drawl is no longer considered the fatal flaw it once was, but what used to be called an 'Oxford' accent or 'BBC pronunciation can still give advantage to someone with it.

Probably even more telling than vowel sounds is vocabulary. People will distinguish one another by whether they say 'lunch' or 'dinner' at lunchtime, have a 'pudding' or a 'sweet' or 'afters', sit on a 'sofa' or a 'settee', or go to the 'loo' or the 'toilet'. There are a myriad such distinctions which allow one group to assess another.

Manners at mealtimes provide yet another opportunity for categorising. The big divide comes in the method of holding one's knife and fork. Some hold both firmly with the handles covered by the palm. Others hold them loosely like drumsticks with the handles sticking up. Eating peas in either pose is something that needs watching.

Even the consumption of soup can define the diner, some following an ancient maritime tradition and tipping the bowl away to avoid the soup spilling on to their laps in the event of a swell.

The Pub

English town pubs used to be divided into a public bar, where you might play darts or bar billiards, and a relatively posh lounge bar, where the seats fittings were slightly more plush. Nowadays, more often than not, the whole thing has been transformed into a wine bar, or an Irish theme pub.

By contrast, the village pub is a classless institution dating back several centuries. It usually has one bar plus a 'snug' or small restaurant. In many places it is the focal point of the community, a cross between a social club, a citizens' advice bureau and a parliament. Class and social distinctions are left outside. It has been observed that you could go to any village pub in England, and ask "Is the Major in?" and the answer would be either, "He's in the snug," or "You've just missed him."

The traditional English pint which once seemed on the brink of extinction has undergone a renaissance. Thanks to the efforts of the Campaigners for Real Ale (a quintessentially English organisation devoted

to the preservation, encouragement and consumption of traditional brews), a brimming glass of unfizzy, unchilled, hop-scented beer, hand pumped from a wooden barrel in the cellar is increasingly available in all its glorious regional and local variations.

The habit of drinking 'rounds' is responsible for perhaps two-thirds of pub sales. It is not the done thing to drink with others without buying your round. The advantage is that only one person needs to leave the group in order to get six drinks instead of six people queuing up individually. The disadvantage is that you can end up drinking six pints when you only came in for one.

Culture

England is the country of Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Dickens and Beatrix Potter. The first is, by common consent, a hero of the human race, a Titan of literature against whom all other writers in the world over the past 400 years have been measured. The next three are worthy names in most literate households. But the work of the fifth is best known; for while the others tended to write about people, Beatrix Potter wrote about animals.

So it is that a mention of Peter Rabbit, Mrs. Tiggy-"Winkle and Jeremy Fisher elicit an immediate response from English audiences while the agonies of King Lear, Coriolanus and Othello leave the better read of them intellectually stimulated but emotionally stone-cold.

Other nations may thrill to Henry V's call to arms at Agincourt or warm to Juliet's tearful pleas to her Romeo, but English audiences of all ages reach for the tissues on hearing how Jemima Puddleduck outwits the fox, adjusts her bonnet and escapes the cooking pot to live another sunny day. Close on the heels of Beatrix Potter comes A.A. Milne, whose *Winnie-The-Pooh* - written by an adult for other adults but passed off as a children's book -is read by adults for the rest of their lives.

Anthropomorphic juvenilia apart, the English cherish their literary

culture mostly by ignoring it. They treat it as they treat their best tea service: it's nice to know it's there, but perhaps it's best saved for special occasions.

In any case, to make too much of their cultural treasures would be showing off. This applies both to the nation and to the individual who is unusually well-read. Where a German might impress with a display of his erudition, it would not he welcome in England - except as a pretext for self-deprecating humour. You might, for example, mention Hamlet, but only to set up a joke about Shakespeare having been savaged by a Great Dane.

Television

Television is the closest most English people get to culture. British television, especially the state-run British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), coasting along on its former reputation, is really trading on past glories these days. Not only is there substance to allegations of 'dumbing down' - they have been dumbing down unsuccessfully. Many of the quality programmes on British television are, embarrassingly, now American.

Television on all channels majors in sports coverage and heroic struggles occur between television companies to win exclusive rights to televise the most popular events. But even the English cannot quite live by sport alone. Pandering to the competitive nature of their audiences, broadcasters screen large numbers of quiz and games shows, a wealth of news and discussion programmes and the occasional original drama series. These are bulked out with comedies, mini-series, and soap operas - which are a national obsession. It is said that even Her Majesty the Queen watches *Coronation Street* (perhaps attracted by the name).

For the rest, it is old films of which the nation never tires. Programmes aimed at the more intellectual members of society are screened late at night so as to cause the least inconvenience to the majority.

The Press

Although inclined by nature to mind their own business (or perhaps because of this trait), the English have a congenital weakness for newspapers that go out of their way to mind other people's. Some of the more downmarket ones in the attempt to boost their circulation interpret 'freedom of the press' as publishing newspapers free of anything resembling news.

In England, particularly among men, one's choice of newspaper is a badge of identity, a declaration of where one stands, and an affirmation of political belief - as in this tongue-in-cheek profile of newspaper readers:

The Independent is read by the people who think they should run the country, *The Guardian* by the people who think they do run the country, and *The Times* by the people who actually run the country. *The Financial Times* is read by the people who own the country, *The Daily Telegraph* is read by people who ran the country 50 years ago and *The Sun* is read by people who don't care who runs the country so long as the female on page 3 has got nice knockers.

The Arts

It has been wisely observed that the English do not much like music but they do love the noise it makes. Indeed, on the whole this sums up the English attitude to practically all the arts. They are vaguely in favour, so long as they do not have to think about them too much.

They will tolerate ballet so long as it *Swan Lake* or *Nutcracker,* and opera so long as it is *Carmen* or *Traviata.* They dislike modern art, but like saying how much they dislike it, so contemporary British artists earn a living being as controversial as possible.

They prefer American films to their own, but every year the obligatory 'quirky British comedy' about a bunch of losers will break through. While Hollywood promotes the message that everyone ought to be rich and

beautiful, England has cornered the market in films which suggest that people tend to be anything but, and that life is generally a bit of a bummer. No other country could make a success out of *Brassed Off,* or *The Full Monty.* America may be the land of success, but nobody can do failure like the English.

The only art form that arouses real emotion among the English is musicals. These the public will happily pay for. When Lloyd Webber meets Beatrix Potter, nobody will be able to get a seat.

Public Transport

The English take masochistic pride in the unreliability of their public transport. Every year, the railways are taken completely by surprise by the wholly unexpected phenomena known as 'autumn' and 'winter'. Trains are delayed and cancelled due to such freaks of nature as 'leaves on the line' and 'snow'. If it is pointed out that snow is not exactly unexpected in England, the explanation will be that it's the 'wrong kind of snow'.

Buses are almost invariably late, but cheerfully try to compensate for this by arriving in groups of two or three when they do finally show up. The only exception is when the passenger arrives exactly on time - in which case it is guaranteed that the bus will have arrived and left two minutes early.

Contrary to legend, the English are an instinctively punctual people, but it is by no means bad form to arrive 15 minutes late. It will be put it down automatically to transport problems, and hosts will, in fact, rather expect it.

The Not So Open Road

Almost everyone over the age of 17 either owns or has access to a car and uses it frequently, especially for short journeys in suburban areas. This leads to enormous traffic and parking problems in towns and to terminal motorway congestion. The average speed in built-up areas is now 11 miles

an hour - a speed exceeded a hundred years ago by a horse-drawn carriage.

The problem is doubled by the halving of available road space at any one time by roadworks. Highways are under constant siege as vast stretches are cordoned off behind lines of red and white cones. Whole communities spring up with portable site offices, portable lavatories and car parks of their own as road-menders are joined by men working for the gas, electricity, water, telephone and cable TV companies. More often than not this happens serially. When the last of them folds his tent, it's time for the road-menders to move in again.

Questions.

1. What is the attitude of the English towards other nations? What is the historic aspect of this phenomenon?
2. What is the implication of the newspaper heading “Fog in the Channel - Continent cut off”?
3. Are the English worried that they may be misunderstood or misjudged?
4. What are the English “sterling qualities” as see by the English themselves?
5. Dot he English trust other peoples of Great Britain? What are their reasons?
6. How do the English perceive other nations?
7. Dot he have any favorites? Dot he English like them without reservation?
8. Comment on the saying “An Englishman’s home is his own castle.”
9. What political gesture signals absolute self-control? Is it appropriate to ever lose it?
10. What behaviour does “going too far” imply? How do the English react to it?
11. Why are the English considered hypocritical?

12. Give examples of the English common sense.

13. Does the term "a good sport" refer only to sports?

14. How do the English understand stoicism? In what situations do the display it?

15. Are the English a deeply religious nation? What are their strongest **beliefs?**

16. Give examples of English creative initiative, both big and small.

17. Why do the English join clubs?

18. Describe the English class system. Is it rigid or mobile?

19. How can a person be socially placed?

20. What kind of place is a pub? What makes it a pleasant and democratic?

21. What kind of literature is the most popular among the adult English?

22. What is usually on TV?

23. Comment on the profile of newspaper readers.

24. Are the English lovers of arts, according to the author?

25. What problems of public and individual transport are the most common in England?

II. Tasks for discussion.

1. What are the main points on which the English and foreigners disagree about the English stereotypes?

2. What English qualities do you admire or resent?

3. How do you form your opinion of this people or any other peoples? What sources do you find most reliable:

- personal experience
- friends', relatives' experience
- literature
- mass media
- other.

4. Do you think the English class system encourages stoicism? To what extent is it similar or different from other countries (e.g. the USA, Russia, European countries).

5. Is the Russians' attitude to their literacy heritage similar or different from that of the English?

6. Compare the set of programs on English and Russian TV.

7. Can you suggest any solution to traffic and parking problems in Moscow and other big citites?

The USA

Nationalism and Identity

Forewarned is Forearmed

Americans are like children: noisy, curious, unable to keep a secret, not given to subtlety, and prone to misbehave in public. Once one accepts the Americans' basically adolescent nature, the rest of their culture falls into place, and what at first seemed thoughtless and silly appears charming and energetic.

Visitors may be overwhelmed by the sheer exuberant friendliness of Americans, especially in the central and southern parts of the country. Sit next to an American on an airplane and he will immediately address you by your first name, ask "So - how do you like it in the States?", explain his recent divorce in intimate detail, invite you home for dinner, offer to lend you money and wrap you in a warm hug on parting.

This does not necessarily mean he will remember your name the next

day. Americans are friendly because they just can't help it; they like to be neighbourly and want to be liked. However, a wise traveller realises that a few happy moments with an American do not translate into a permanent commitment of any kind. Indeed, permanent commitments are what Americans fear the most. This is a nation whose most fundamental social relationship is the casual acquaintance;,

How They See Themselves

As befits a nation originally settled by misfits, convicts, adventurers, and religious fanatics (a demographic mix that has changed hardly at all in 400 years), the United States retains a strong flavour of intransigent non-co-operation. Americans are proud to be American - it's the best country in the world - but each individual will explain that he, personally, is not like other Americans. He or she is better. Americans are proud to be different from each other, and from the world. As a nation of immigrants, they can be of any global ethnicity. There is no such thing as a plain American, anyway. Every American is a hyphenated American. The original 'melting pot' has crystallised into a zillion ethnic splinters: Croatian-Americans, Irish-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Eritrean-Americans, and so on. A typical American might introduce him or herself as Patrick Ng, Octavio Rosenberg, or Ilse-Marie Nugumbwele.

An American will say "I'm Polish" or "I'm Italian" because his great-grandparents were born in Poland or Italy. It doesn't matter that he speaks not a word of any language besides English and has never been farther east than New York City or farther west than Chicago. He knows how to make kolatches (if he's Polish) or cannelloni (if he's Italian), and that's what counts.

The only noticeable difference between an American and the people of other countries is that an American is likely to have had his/her teeth straightened.

How They See Others

Only 20% of Americans own passports. They don't really need them because an American can travel for weeks and still be on home turf. The fact that everyone who lives within 3,500 miles of an American is also an American gives the average citizen a seriously provincial point of view. Because Americans visit foreign countries relatively seldom*, they assume that people all over the world are just like themselves, except for not speaking English or not having decent showers.

Some Americans believe that foreigners really do speak English (they study it in school, you know), but refuse to do so out of prejudice. The delusion that 'they're just like * Canada doesn't count. us except for their language, food, and clothing' comes from the reality that all Americans descend from immigrants including those who crossed the Bering Strait thousands of years ago. Thus people in other countries aren't really aliens, they're just potential Americans, or rather, potential hyphenated Americans.

Special Friends

Americans have a special relationship with Canadians, with whom they share the world's longest undefended border (though crossing it has become more difficult lately). In fact, a great many Americans aren't fully aware that Canada is a separate sovereign nation. Canadians look and talk like Americans, travel agents describe Canada as a "domestic" destination and the Toronto Blue Jays won the World Series baseball championship (once). Any champion baseball team must be from the United States, no matter what its supporters think.

Europe is not fully differentiated in the American mind. American

travellers on guided tours can happily swing through five countries in seven days, returning home with the vague notion that the Eiffel Tower is somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Tower of Pisa - which, by American standards, it is. The distance from London to Istanbul is less than that between Pittsburgh and Phoenix and only two-thirds the mileage from Maine to Miami.

Americans feel sentimental about England. They import much of their literature and some of their better television programmes from Britain, and anyone ovet 50 reveres the country that produced the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. There's also the Royal Family element: lacking a domestic equivalent, Americans lap up the latest imported blue-blooded scandals. Royal events attract huge American television audiences, who sigh at the glorious un-American pomp of it all.

It has been said that the U.S. and U.K. are 'two nations divided by a common language' and occasionally this leads to some bizarre misunderstandings. For example, in the U.S. 'pants' are trousers and 'knickers' are golfing attire. In spite of the misunderstandings, or possibly because of them, the two nations do intermarry at a prodigious rate, bringing the countries closer than ever.

Character

Winner Takes All

Like every other nation, America knows that it's the best country in the world. The difference is that Americans have proof. People from all over the globe make enormous sacrifices to come to the United States, often risking their lives in the process. What more evidence is needed?

A spirit of rugged individualism pervades virtually every aspect of American life. Americans' heroes tend to be outlaws, like wild west

gunfighter Jesse James, or entrepreneurs, like Sam Walton, founder of the Wal-Mart chain of superstores. Their ogres are totalitarians of every stripe, including communists, presidents of major corporations, law officers and politicians. Every American worker has fantasies of one day going into business for himself. Individualism extends even to matters domestic: over a quarter of American households consist of only one person.

Being Number One is very important to an American. In the United States it's definitely not how you play the game that matters. It isn't even really whether you win or lose. It's whether you look like you win or lose - more specifically, win. Winning is central to the American psyche. As American football coach Vince Lombardi put it, "Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing". Virtually every event in American life, from school graduation to marriage to buying an automobile, is structured so that one party wins, or at least comes out looking better than any of the other participants.

What is more, Americans believe themselves to be the only nation that is truly capable of winning. They are always being called in at the last minute to bail some backwater nation out of the soup. Having God on your side in a fight is good. Having the United States on your side is better. To an American, they're the same thing.

Once the battle is over and negotiations begin, however, Americans change from warriors into wimps. As humourist Will Rogers put it, "America never lost a war and never won a conference in our lives. I believe that we could, without any degree of egotism, single-handedly lick any nation in the world. But we can't confer with Costa Rica and come home with our shirts on."

The Feel-Good Factor

Winning is important to Americans because it makes them feel good, and good is the American thing to feel. Americans spend thousands of

dollars on books, drugs, and various forms of psychotherapy in order to feel good. The 12th most widely prescribed psychiatric drug in the country is an anti-depressant. Americans attend therapy groups, participate in self-discovery retreats and religious revivals, go for hot stone massages, aromatherapy, Shiatsu, and so forth. (Much of this activity takes place in California, the feel-good state.)

The American reaction to any kind of adversity or crisis is to look at the bright side, whether or not there is one, and if possible accentuate the positive. "If life hands you lemons, make lemonade", they will chirp as they examine the smashed wreck of their car or the hurricane-ravaged ruin of their home; "I always hated that kitchen."

Feel-goodism affects all aspects of private and public life. Universities hand out academic awards to anyone with even a passable performance. The American business world is full of rosy projections and enthusiastic estimates. The government and various associations pass out awards and citations of achievement like so many Christmas cards. It's a rare American who doesn't have on his wall at least one Certificate of Excellence, whether in Management, Salesmanship, or Best Attitude.

Every American bookshop has shelves and shelves of self-help books in the belief that you can achieve true happiness by following their advice. Titles such as *The South Beach Diet,* since becoming thinner will make you more attractive; *The Purpose-Driven Life*, a book that teaches how to improve your life in a religious context and *Who Moved My Cheese,* a laughably simplistic business guide that has been on the best-seller list for almost a decade and whose entire message boils down to "If your well goes dry, seek water elsewhere." *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands,* which describes how to keep a man happy, and presumably at home instead of down the road on a bar stool. The *New York Times Book Review* gives such books their own bestseller list so they won't crowd out the real books.

Elementary schools focus on teaching children self-esteem, urging them

to feel good about their accomplishments (even if such accomplishments don't include the ability to perform long division without a calculator). Some schools have stopped giving spelling tests because many of the children couldn't get all the words right and the resulting failure damaged their confidence, i.e., made them feel bad.

Insecurity

The dark side of American cheerfulness is the undercurrent of insecurity and depression that drives much of the country's commerce and nearly all of its psychiatry. Deep down, Americans are deeply fearful, pessimistic, and unhappy. They feel inadequate to meet life's challenges.

On September 11, 2001, the nation's fears were realized. The assault dramatically changed the American world view as security cameras, checkpoints, and bag searches became routine for institutions as diverse as high schools and museums.

Americans are more afraid than ever. They are afraid of terrorists. They are afraid they will lose their jobs. They're afraid that after working so hard, someone (whether the government through taxes or a thief through force) will take the things they value away from them, that a terrorist will target them personally. They're afraid their children will grow up to become criminals, pornographic film stars, or, worse still, politicians. They're afraid that eating raw oysters will kill them, that their neighbours make more money than they do, that they have cancer.

If they are single they're afraid they will never get married, if married they're afraid they will get divorced, if divorced they fear they will never meet anyone attractive ever again. To prevent these dire events Americans move to the suburbs, buy insurance, avoid shellfish, go into therapy, install security cameras, and join clubs for singles. Often this only makes the anxiety worse by bringing sufferers into contact with people who have the same problem.

Being depressed is unattractive and thus not suitable for public display.

The preferred reaction is treatment, either with drugs or psychotherapy or both, and concealment. If pressed about his or her state of mind, an American will admit, "I was pretty anxious about the situation at first, but I'm sure everything will be OK." ;

When seeing each other off on a journey, Americans will say "Have a safe trip". The travellers will have updated their wills and made sure the insurance is current, because you never know what can happen, and it probably won't be good.

It's a Conspiracy

Americans see conspiracies behind every event, from the Kennedy assassination to the worldwide spread of AIDS. After all, things don't just happen by chance, do they. Someone must be pulling the strings.

Who really runs the world? A conspiracy, obviously. Opinions differ as to whether it involves the Illuminati or the Trilateral Commission, or possibly the Catholic church, but the underlying paranoia remains the same. Terrorism has now provided justification for their fears as they look suspiciously at foreigners and install metal detectors at the doors of their offices.

Behaviour

Family Values

Conservative politicians in particular like to natter on about family values. The problem is that in America nobody is exactly sure what `family' means. The American divorce and illegitimacy rates are high, homosexual couples are having and adopting children in greater numbers, and nearly a third of Americans live alone anyway.

Marriage in the United States often looks more like serial monogamy than lifetime partnership, especially in the major cities. Just under half of all

marriages end in divorce. However, this statistic is misleading: many people, such as Elizabeth Taylor Hilton Wilding Todd Fisher Burton Burton Warner Fortensky, wed repeatedly, but three-quarters of Americans who marry for the first time stay married. The others go through several spouses before settling down. And approximately 10% of men and 6% of women never marry at all.

The latest controversy is that of same-sex marriages, which were legitimized by local authorities and then struck down by Federal courts. The fact that many samesex couples are faithful for decades, while many hetero-sexual couples divorce after days, apparently is not supposed to affect the debate.

When Americans say `family', they mean a nuclear family of Mom, Dad, and the kids. That such households are melting down at a prodigious rate doesn't affect the cultural ideal one iota.

Another component of the ideal family is a nonworking wife, the caring, nurturing mother who greets children after school with a plate of home-baked cookies. Such women, while they do exist, are nearly extinct.

Culture

Though the fine arts do exist in the United States, often heavily subsidised by government and charitable foundations, the country's true pulse is popular. Ever the beacon of democracy, America produces culture of the people, by the people, and for the people, all the people, all over the world.

American popular culture is, in fact, the most popular pop culture ever invented. Dubbed versions of *Sex and the City* and *The Simpsons* blare from televisions in Brazil and China, Spanish senoritas munch McDonald's in Madrid, and Thai taxis travel to the rhythms of Madonna.

Like King Canute, foreign governments occasionally try to stop the

rising tide of American cultural influence, and like the hapless king they always fail. The tsunami that is American popular culture sweeps aside everything in its path.

It's Not Real Life, It's Television

Television is the single strongest cultural influence on American life and the widely recognised lowest common denominator. More homes have televisions than indoor plumbing, and the average high school student spends more time watching television than sitting in the classroom.

Television defines a reality of its own; news that isn't covered on television didn't happen, and television-only events (such as the wedding or the death of a fictitious character) provoke nationwide reactions and notch up record viewing audiences. Daytime shows lean towards soap operas with plots that revolve around infidelity and medical crises, and talk shows in which hosts prod their guests to reveal personal details no sane person would want to make public. Dramas and crime shows take over the evening programming, with the result that by the time he is 18 the average American child has seen 16,000 televised murders.

The American passion for getting something for nothing reaches a frenzy in evening game shows. Another evening staple is the hard-boiled investigative show, which dwells on lurid topics such as body-snatching, drug dealing, and juvenile male prostitution. To this has been added another genre - the real-life crime show, on which a camera crew follow the police around for an evening and film them making arrests.

Every time you think that no depth is unplumbed, sure enough, television finds a format even more degrading. The show *Survivor*, for example, pits a dozen castaways against each other in meaningless competitions; the individual who can endure the most humiliation gets a million dollars. *Temptation Island* films a number of supposedly happy couples marooned on an island with a variety of sexy singletons who try to

break them up.

Television has reached its acme, or perhaps more accurately its nadir, with the introduction of cable and satellite TV, which provides hundreds of channels of drivel. Specialised programmes include The Weather Channel, 24 hours a day of ;barometry and precipitation forecasts; Music Television (MTV) and its country music and soul music imitators; C-Span, which shows the U.S. Congress in session and is widely applied as a soporific; and Court TV, which allows viewers to shriek at the television judge the way sports fans might shriek at a referee.

Few topics are considered cultural minefields. Turn on an American television any afternoon and you can see people discussing, in intimate detail, before millions of viewers, topics that natives of other nations wouldn't whisper about in the dark. One may hear the testimony of a man who had a sex-change operation so he could live a fulfilled life as a lesbian, or a wife who had a baby by her sister's husband and wants another so the child will have siblings (her own husband doesn't know about the situation, but presumably will soon if he's at home watching television). Talk-show guests include everything from homosexual fathers to bisexual nuns to children who killed their parents, interspersed with advertisements for laxatives.

Faced with such unabashed exhibitionism, one is tempted to scream, "Is nothing sacred?" The answer, of course, is "Well, actually, no. Not on television, anyway."

Eating and Drinking

You Are What You Eat

Americans approach every meal mindful that the food will either be bad for them or, worse, make them fat. Food contributes to disease, particularly heart disease, and one never knows which mouthful could be fatal. Suspicious dishes include steak (a `heart attack on a plate') and any high-

fat,' high-cholesterol, high-calorie, low-fibre food, such as sugar, butter, cheese, ice cream, white bread, or fried anything. Hot dogs, an American staple, have been linked with leukemia in children. Even spinach and beets are not exempt, since they are high in oxalic acid, which is harmful in large quantities. In the endless American battle for eternal youth, glowing good health and an attractive figure, food is on the front lines, and flavour is the first casualty.

The American dietary obsession is fed by a seemingly endless series of scientific studies that demonstrate the wholesomeness or toxicity of various foodstuffs. That these studies are almost always funded by an interest group with an axe to grind does not seem to matter. For example when one study found that eating massive quantities of oat bran reduced cholesterol and thus might help prevent heart attacks, the price of oats skyrocketed and American supermarkets were instantly flooded with products containing oat bran, including oat bran candy bars and oat bran beer.

Health-conscious Americans will eat any substance however unpleasant or tasteless if they can be convinced it will keep them healthy or make them thin. Restaurants put special symbols on their menus to indicate dishes that are `heart healthy' (low in cholesterol and saturated fat) or `light' (an indefinite term that implies, but does not necessarily mean, low calorie or low fat). Supermarkets have aisles of items marked `low salt', `low calorie', `low fat', `diet', 'cholesterol-free' or `imitation'. (The label `low flavour' would be superfluous.) Americans buy uniform strips of `bacon' extruded from soyabeans, liquid fake eggs in little plastic cartons, fat-free cheese that resembles recycled running shoes, carbonated sodas flavoured with chemicals they can't even pronounce, and high-fibre bread bulked out with wood pulp.

The food itself isn't nearly as repellent as the food bore. A food bore will preach about the benefits of whatever regimen he or she is following, and (especially in California) is only too willing to explain just how a particular

diet is beneficial. Any culinary discussion is larded with comments like "Eating more vegetables prevents cancer, you know", or "It isn't fat that makes you fat, it's carbohydrates that make you fat", or "Do you *know* how veal is raised?"

Forbidden foods, particularly chocolate, arouse the same illicit thrill in Americans that other cultures reserve for sex. American diners feel a delicious quiver of guilt with every mouthful of chocolate mousse or boston cream pie. Rich, `sinful' desserts have sinister names like Devil's Food Cake, Chocolate Madness, or Death By Chocolate. They're just explaining what every American already knows: eating may be hazardous to your health.

The American Breakfast

Breakfast has an honoured place in the American diet. Restaurants post signs advertising `Breakfast served until 11 a.m.' or, in the case of all-night diners, `Breakfast 24 hours a day'. Breakfast food, which can be highly regional, includes cold cereal with milk, bacon, coffee, oatmeal, sausage, ham, eggs, scrapple (made from the parts of the pig unfit for sausage), coffee, biscuits (like English scones), home-fried potatoes, toast, fried corn meal mush, maple syrup, coffee, waffles, corned beef hash, pancakes, coffee and grits.

Grits are a quintessentially American dish. They are made from maize that has been soaked in water and treated with caustic lye to scientifically remove every vestige of colour and flavour. Grits look like white, lumpy oatmeal and have less taste than wallpaper paste unless and until they are liberally doused with butter, salt and gravy (especially red-eye gravy, which is made with pan drippings and coffee). Southerners adore them. Northerners think they're the reason the South lost the Civil War. Starting somewhere around Maryland an invisible line crosses the country: above it grits are banned as being unfit for human consumption, while below it

they're considered essential for life.

Restaurants

American restaurants range from informal, where the counter attendant says "Hi, what'll you have?", to formal, where the waiter says "Hello, I'm Alan and I'll be your server for this evening. Shall I tell you about tonight's specials?" On occasion, the waiter or waitress may even sit down and chat for a few moments to discuss the intricacies of the menu.

In casual restaurants, Americans like intrusive service. Some restaurants are famous for the surliness of their waiters and waitresses, using bad manners to attract masochistic munchers by the roomful. But the most typical American restaurants offer no service at all. In 1954, entrepreneur Ray Kroc bought the rights to the McDonald brothers' hamburger stand in San Bernardino, California, and began selling franchises. There are now more than 30,000 McDonald's in more than 122 countries serving 47 million meals a day. The McDonald's recipe for success involves providing a limited menu of popular foods, mainly hamburgers, French fries, and milkshakes, minimising labour costs by breaking preparation down into quantified routine tasks, using disposable packages to eliminate the cost of dishwashing, pricing the product affordably, and maintaining strict quality control.

Whatever else one could say about McDonald's food, it is eminently predictable. A Big Mac bought in Boston is indistinguishable from the same item in Bangkok. It is so standardised that *The Economist* of London publishes an annual Big Mac Index to demonstrate the relative purchasing power of various currencies.

However, some of the best and least expensive restaurants in the country are the small, independent operations run by recent immigrants. Cambodians, Chinese, Japanese, El Salvadorians, and Ethiopians bring their native dishes to add to the United States' already heady culinary stew. *The*

great melting pot occasionally produces some odd restaurant bedfellows, such as CubanVietnamese, Mex-Italian, or Hungarian-Puerto Rican.

Tea or Coffee

Americans drink coffee. Tea in most parts of the country means iced tea, specifically iced tea with sugar (the amount of sugar generally increases as one heads south). Otherwise tea service consists of a mug, paper cup, or little metal pot of hot water with a tea bag beside it. Sometimes a waiter will bring an elegant wooden box filled with different types of teas (mainly herbal) from which to choose while the water is cooling. Ready-made hot tea is never served; Americans believe that when a restaurant pours boiling water directly over the tea in the kitchen it violates the customer's constitutional right to control the tea's strength.

Alcohol

The amount of alcohol Americans drink has been declining steadily for decades. On average, they consume two gallons of liquor (American gallons, naturally) a year per person. By comparison, soft drink consumption is 54 gallons per person.

In most of the country (with the exception of Utah, which is full of teetotalling Mormons), it is perfectly legal and acceptable to have a drink. How and where it is served is another matter, because the sale and consumption of alcohol is regulated locally by individual states, counties, and towns. In some states one can drive up to a window and buy beer, even though drinking it in the car is illegal. In others heavily guarded, officially sanctioned State Stores are only open during office hours and offer a minimal selection.

Root beer, in spite of its name, is not alcoholic. It's the American equivalent of ginger beer, but flavoured with sassafras and sarsparilla roots. Even Americans acknowledge that this may be an acquired taste.

Traditional American beer is unique. It is not particularly good, just different from the beer the rest of the world drinks. One reason is the climate: in the United States most beer is designed to be consumed in huge quantities, while watching sporting events, during weather hotter than 90°F (32°C). Hence the need for a high water content, to promote sweat, and a very low serving temperature, to prevent heatstroke. Too bad that the cold kills what little taste the beer had in the first place. Dietary and safety concerns have married one another in the form of light beer, which is lower in calories, lower in alcohol, and (a truly awesome achievement) even lower in flavour than ordinary beer.

In the past decade or so, however, a beer revolution has taken place. New 'micro-breweries', are springing up like mushrooms, local operations that produce relatively small quantities of darker, stronger, richer and more flavourful European-style beers than the mass-produced canned stuff. Loosening of local alcohol laws has also allowed some restaurants to brew their own beers on the premises, and nearly every city with any pretensions has at least one 'brewpub'. It's a trend that encourages experimentation, which means it can lead to occasional lapses such as Christmas Cranberry Lager or Pumpkin Stout. But, hey, this is America.

Government and Bureaucracy

Government in America is like a layered pyramid. Over everything is the Federal government, which has certain responsibilities specified in the Constitution. Then there are 50 individual state governments which handle matters that are not allocated by the Federal government, such as education, liquor regulation, and automobile registration. Such laws can vary widely by state, leading, for example, to the flow of couples who got to the state (Nevada) where it is easiest to get divorced.

States are subdivided into counties, which are further divided into cities and townships. The bottom line is taxation: some U.S. citizens must pay

taxes to their city, county, state, and federal governments, and then be grateful to live on anything left over.

Inviting business associates to social functions held outside business hours. The worst offences of this sort take place in Washington, D.C., where the average congressman receives three or four invitations a day to cocktail receptions, lectures, charitable events, benefit dinners, and so forth, and where hostesses are measured not by how well their guests are entertained but by who shows up for the party.

The warm personal relationships Americans feel at work do not translate into strong corporate loyalty. Almost no-one stays with a job for his or her entire career. American workers will drop the present employment for something better without a moment's worry about what the change may mean for their employer. This is because they have seen how loyal their employer is to them - to put it bluntly, not very. The profit motive drives all American commerce, and if staff cutbacks are required to maintain the balance sheet, a corporation will rarely show any mercy in sending half the sales department out for a long walk.

Americans on the east and west coasts have strikingly different business styles. On the east coast, the goal is to appear to work as much as possible. Thus, in New York and Washington, employees, especially at law and publishing firms, stay on late into the evening and come into the offices on weekends. In Los Angeles the goal is to appear not to work at all, so deals worth hundreds of millions are discussed at the poolside. Neither coast does any more actual work than the other. Los Angeles continues to produce films and television, and New York keeps the stock market and corporate headquarters going, but both have the smug satisfaction of pointing to the other and saying, "See? We don't work ourselves to death/lie around the pool wasting time like they do out on the East/West coast."

Language and Ideas

American speech is remarkably straightforward. They tell it as it is, even when it's not a particularly good idea to do so. Linguistic subtlety, innuendo, and irony that other nations find delightful puzzle the Americans, who take most statements at face value, weigh them for accuracy, and reject anything they don't understand. They call spades spades, or possibly 'earth-reorientation equipment' if they work for the government, and have trouble with complex metaphors.

The Americans' love of tinkering, of making things better, of including those who might be left out, and of avoiding negatives means that they view speaking English as just one more assimilation project. Thousands of words have been added from immigrants' languages (such as `schmuck', a stupid or contemptible person), or conflated out of two words (such as `brunch', a combination of breakfast and lunch), or abbreviated into and used for something only marginally related (such as `nuke' for `heat in a microwave oven', `ace a test' for `getting a top grade', or 'repo' for `repossession of an item that is behind on its payments'). Americans love new words and adopt them with alacrity. They also use them to death, as anyone who has had to listen to a business meeting about `empowerment' can attest.

Slang

American idioms are colourful, varied and erratic, the sports-based ones particularly so.

Much of American slang derives from sport, such as avoiding the lines of authority by `doing an end run', failing in an attempt by `striking out', or taking on an easy task because it's a`slam dunk'. Carrying on an ordinary sports conversation requires only a minimum of knowledge. A question such as, "Who do you favour for the big one?" works well, especially in early January, as does the comment, "How about them Dodgers/Steelers/ Bullets/Broncos/Yankees/Falcons/Bears/Eagles/Red Sox?" Suitable post-game comments include "If you ask me, there were some pretty funny calls

in that game", or "A good team makes its own breaks". These work for almost *any* sport except possibly chess or bridge.

Learning American slang, or indeed any slang, is shooting at a moving target. Teenagers and technology constantly create new words and new uses for old words. For example, `burn' can now mean `copy', as in "burn me a DVD of that new movie, willya?" Local slang spreads rapidly through television, movies, and the Internet, so formerly arcane terms like the New York `skanky' (unsavoury, disgusting) become commonplace country-wide. Fortunately slang becomes obsolete rapidly, so there's very little point in trying to keep up.

Political Correctness

Discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or sex is not permitted. All-male and all-white clubs have toppled like dominoes under threats of legal action. Besides, minorities and women have money, and every organisation appreciates members who can afford the dues.

Political correctness now debates the worthiness of many words. The worst word of all, one that should never be used under any circumstances, is the racial epithet beginning with `n', even though you will certainly hear the word used in conversation or lyrics. Words referring to body functions are polite by comparison.

Hundreds of euphemisms have sprung up to cope with problematic issues and vocabulary. The handicapped are now 'mobility-challenged', the blind `seeing impaired' and the not so bright `special needs students' or 'knowledgebase non-possessors'. People don't have pets, they have `companion animals'. Nor are they short or fat, but `vertically challenged' or `persons of size'. No-one has a failure, he or she has a`deficiency rating'.

The American language embraces the bias towards good feelings. Someone doesn't have a near brush with death; he or she has a`life-affirming experience'. Stocks that plummet to half their value are not losers,

they are ‘non-performers'. Applicants who do not receive a job offer are `selected out'. An upbeat business vernacular calls every problem a`challenge' and every massive layoff` 'rightsizing'. Mindless cheerfulness particularly pervades the real estate profession, in which `cosy' is code for `smaller than a refrigerator carton' and `country charm' means 'no retail establishments within walking distance'. Disney theme parks are special hotbeds of such optimism, with perky, well-groomed employees who do nothing but smile, smile, smile.

All this boundless good nature can grate on visitors from more reserved nations. It's enough to give them a de-enhanced attitude.

I. Questions.

Section 1.

1. Why shouldn’t Americans be taken at face value?
2. What is meant by the American “melting pot”?
3. Why do so few Americans have own passports?
4. How can Americans’ special relationship with Canadians and the English be accounted for?
5. Why is it so important for any American to be Number One?
6. How do Americans try to feel good?
7. What are the Americans afraid of and why?
8. Why is ‘family’ rather a vague notion in America?
9. Why is American pop culture so popular all over the world?
10. What is a standard TV menu in the USA? Does it shock viewers of other nationalities?
11. Why are Americans so choicy about what they eat? Who encourages a dietary obsession?
12. What do Americans eat for breakfast? Does it sound tempting?
13. What makes McDonalds an international brand?
14. How is tea served?

15. Is he US a heavily drinking country? Is American beer appreciated in other countries?

16. What is the US political structure? Do Americans have strong corporate loyalty?

17. How do Americans adapt the English language to their own use?

18. Is the American slang worth learning? Why or why not?

19. Give some examples of political correctness in the American language.

Section 2.

1. How do Americans and the British behave in desperate situations?

2. How do these two nations go about complaining?

3. How do the handle unwanted invitations, untimely visitors an the like?

4. Americans and Britishers behave rather differently when giving or receiving gifts, don't they? Why?

5. What is an "understatement " ? Is it an antonym to "honesty"?

6. What is "the American dream"? Is it a myth or reality?

7. Why is the British currency still a pound not a euro? Is it due to tradition or economic reason?

8. Which jokes, American or British, do you find funnier and why?

Tasks for discussion.

1. Do you find Americans, as described by the author, a likeable people? Give your reasons.

2. Do Americans have good ground to feel privileged or superior to the rest of the world?

3. Why is September, 11, 2001 considered a landmark in the US history?

4. Do Americans impress you as a particularly cultured and educated nation? Give examples of their most striking successes and failures in these fields.

5. What do you think about the Americans' obsession with dieting and healthy way of living? Is it spreading to the rest of the world? What economic effect does it have?

6. Which variant of the English language would you rather master, British or American? Why? Which speaking habits are closer to Russians?

1. The Royal Family

For more than a thousand years Britain has always had kings or queens except for the ten years between 1649 and 1659. In the past, kings had great power and they really helped to make history. They started wars, made laws, and did things in their own way. But gradually more and more power went to Parliament. What does the Queen do now? Why does Britain need monarchy? And does it?

1. Elizabeth II calls the Windsor family a 'Firm'. She thinks of it as a business rather than a family. And the main business of the royal family is... well, probably being royal. And they are paid for it. The Queen is one of the richest women in the world and yet she gets about 8 million pounds a year to be Queen. But many people agree that she does hoi job well and she deserves her salary.

2. Being Queen is a really busy job. Elizabeth II gets up early and begins the day by looking through the newspapers. Then she reads letters from the public (she gets more than 1000 each week), and tells her staff how she would like them to be answered. The Queen has daily meetings

with her Private Secretary who helps her to go through her paperwork, and lots of meetings with ambassadors, new judges, and bishops.

3. In the afternoon Elizabeth II often goes out on public engagements — she gets thousands of invitations each year. She opens new hospitals, bridges and factories.

4. Once a week, the Queen has a meeting with the Prime Minister and they discuss government business and important things that are happening in the country.

5. In the evening the Queen reads the report of the day from Parliament. She isn't a politician, and in modern Britain the power belongs to the government, but she must agree to every new law. It's a formal agreement; no king or queen has refused a new law since 1701!

6. Being Queen is not a 9 to 5 job, and Elizabeth II has to work from early in the morning until late at night. And people watch her all the time.

7. Of course, she has some free time, and some private life, but less than most people.

8. In her spare time Elizabeth II enjoys horse racing, fishing, and walking in the countryside. She also enjoys photography and likes taking photos on her travels.

9. Many people think that the Royals are useless and monarchy is outdated. But... the British people seem to like them that way. They like to read about the royal family, royal scandals and shocking secrets. They like to watch royal ceremonies, they are proud of the tradition of monarchy. Britain has had kings and queens for a thousand years — probably they'll have them for another thousand.

10. According to a survey conducted during the Queen's Golden Jubilee, six out of ten people in Britain thought the monarchy was not out of date. But young people were less sure. Those aged under 24 were split evenly. One half liked the Royals, the others thought they were not important anymore and said they weren't happy with the cost of keeping the

Royal Family.Kings and queens expect to be treated differently from other people. So you'd better know some simple rules in case you bump into a member of the royal family.

—Women are expected to curtsy. Men are expected to bow.

—Shake hands if a hand is offered.

—It's bad manners to meet royalty with gloves on because, in the past, gloves were associated with warfare.

—Until recently it was thought impolite to turn one's back on the Queen of England. People would walk backwards out of their presence. In certain ceremonies lords and other officials still do.

Tasks for discussion.

1. Are there any advocates of monarchy in Russia? Do you think their number will increase or decrease in the future? What do these trends depend on?

2. Why is a proper burial of the last Russian royal family so important?

Home Sweet Home

WHY IS OWNING A HOUSE *SO* IMPORTANT IN BRITAIN?

1. Although in some countries (for example Greece) it is perfectly acceptable and normal to live with your parents even when you are in your thirties, in modern Britain children are generally encouraged to leave home as soon as they have finished formal education. Because quite often going to university means living a long way from home for three years, many British kids effectively leave the 'family nest' at seventeen. What happens if

they don't? Well, although some families, especially up North, would be ok with that, many parents would not be very happy. Many British parents believe that because they have already spent at least seventeen years bringing up children, they now deserve a rest. And, of course, young people themselves want to live on their own to feel independent.

2. Of course, things are not as simple as that. As most jobs are concentrated in London and in the South of England, many people from all over Britain want to live in a relatively small area. This inevitably means very high house prices. A small (and believe me, when 1 say small - it is small!) flat in London can cost anything between £200,000-£250,000 and the prices are rising. Renting is also very expensive, so here are more reasons to become a house owner - those of status and social security. The bigger and more expensive your house is. the more you can show that you are successful as a person. Besides, having a house gives a sense of stability and security. Most people who own a house have a. mortgage. This means that you do not have to pay all the money in one go but pay some money every month until you have paid off the total cost of the house.

WHAT *HOUSE?*

3. There are all sorts of different houses that you can buy in Britain (if you have the money that is). We asked some British people to tell us about their houses.

TERRACED

4. Hello, I'm Tracey and I live in a terraced house in Glasgow, Scotland. A terraced house is a house joined to a row of other houses. It is not very big, only two bedrooms but my husband and I live on our own, so there is enough space for us and our dog, Spot. The only problem with a terraced house is the noise if you are unlucky enough to have noisy neighbours. Fortunately, we do not have that problem.

SEMI-DETACHED HOUSE

5. Hi, my name is Erik. I'm fifteen. I live with my parents in a small

town in the Soufh-East of England. We have a semi-detached house. This means that my house is joined to another house. It has a kitchen, lounge, bathroom with a toilet and three bedrooms. Oh, yes we also have a small garden. British people like having a garden, you know. It is quite a modern house, so we have central heating. I would really like an open fireplace but modern houses do not have them.

DETACHED HOUSE

6. Hi there. I'm Paul from London. I live in a detached house with my wife, two kids and a cat. It is quite a large house with a nice back garden and five bedrooms. Having a detached house is more expensive than a semi-detached or terraced one. I like it because when you are sitting in the garden, nobody else can see you. I would like to buy a country cottage somewhere nice and quiet but how would I find a job there?

A BLOCK OF FLATS

7. Hello, my name is Yasmin. I'm fourteen and live in Liverpool, the hometown of the Beatles. My family comes from Bangladesh but I was born in England. We live in a council estate in a block of flats. This means that we did not have to buy our flat. It was given to us for free by the local government. This is because my father doesn't have a well-paid job, so we could not afford to buy or even rent even a small flat. My mum doesn't speak English, so there are very few jobs that she can do. Most British people would not want to live in a block of flats because quite often they are badly built and are associated with poverty and crime.

HOUSEBOAT

8. I'm Mark. Guess where I live - I live in a boat! Many people's dream would be to live in a large country mansion or picturesque country cottage, but I think that living in a houseboat is a lot more exciting. I do not have a regular job, so I can stay in one area for a few months and then move somewhere else. England is just perfect for that because it has lots of canals. There are other people like me who like living in a boat, so I never

feel that I'm completely alone but at the same I feel completely independent. If you think I'm strange, I know somebody who lives in a caravan and another friend who lives in a lighthouse!

Stately Homes

1. It was different in the old days. The rich were very rich and the poor were very poor. But is it really different now? Some of the aristocratic families of Britain still have a lot of money, and some still live in magnificent 'stately homes' built by their families hundreds of years ago.

2. Castles with strong walls and towers may be almost a thousand years old, but most stately homes date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and many are filled with wonderful collections of paintings and furniture. But even for the richest, life in these old houses is expensive. There are roofs to repair, hundreds of rooms to clean, and miles of parkland to look after. To make money, owners of stately homes often make their parks into playgrounds. They set up zoos, safari parks, model railways, small museums — anything that people will pay to see.

3. Not everyone is lucky enough to keep their old home. Many of the people who once owned the castles and palaces of Britain cannot afford to look after them now. But the buildings still stand, full of wonderful antiques and art treasures.

4. A large number of them now belong to the National Trust, a private organisation which buys historic buildings. The old owners still live there, and keep the atmosphere of a beautiful private home, but the houses are open to the public too. In this way everyone can enjoy the great cultural treasures of the past.

Questions.

1. How early do children leave home in Britain and for what reasons?

2. Why is it so important to own a place of your own?

3. What are the most common types of houses in Britain? Do people feel priviledged if they are given a free flat?

4. Is it an easy task to keep up a stately home? What is the function of the National trust?

II.

1. Do you live with your parents or on your own? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

2. What house would you like to own one day? Would you need a mortgage on it?

A nation of animal lovers

If you go for a walk with a friend, don't say a word for hours; if you go out for a walk with your dog, keep chatting to him (George Mikes)

1. It is no secret that British people love their pets to bits and would do anything to make their life happy. But just how far does this love go? The answer is QUITE far. Today, half of the 24.2 million homes in Great Britain have a pet. Cats are especially popular because many people who live alone and go to work like independent pets. There are eight million cats in Britain. Other popular pets are dogs, birds, rabbits, fish, guinea-pigs and hamsters.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

2. The British have always loved animals. Great Britain was the first country to create a society to protect animals in 1824. The society still exists today, and it is called the RSPCA — the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The RSPCA finds new owners for 96,000 homeless animals every year. Britain was also the first country to introduce dog biscuits. They were invented in 1860 by James Spratt, an American who was visiting England. When he saw dogs eating leftover biscuits in the street, he decided to make biscuits just for dogs.

PET ACCESSORIES

3. Today's posh pets need more than good food. They want to be pampered, just like humans. In Great Britain, you can see an astrologer who will do a special horoscope for your pet. Or you can take your pet to see a psychic or psychologist. You can buy pet accessories and designer clothes, too, like leather jackets, special flashing collars for walking at night, pet perfume — you name it, they have got it! There are also special accessories designed to keep your pet fit such as treadmills for dogs to exercise indoors or orthopaedic beds for dogs that suffer from a bad back. There is even a special pet hotel in Newcastle upon Tyne that offers cats and dogs an opportunity to exercise in the indoor gym, relax in the Jacuzzi or watch videos of their owners on personal TV and video sets.

NEED TO GO ON A BUS - HAMSTERS GO FREE!

1. Jordan Underwood, the 10-year-old owner of Nibbles the hamster, was very surprised when a bus driver asked him to pay an additional Ю*p* on top of his own bus fare to take his hamster on a bus in Northampton. The boy was so upset that he complained to the bus company and the story got

into the national newspapers.

2. The bus company took a few days to decide what to do and then acted as follows. The company not only apologised to the hamster and his owner for the extra charge and gave Jordan a free bus pass for a month but also gave the hamster his own life-time travel pass. The boy and hamster were then taken for a tour around the town on one of the company's buses, which had a sign reading "The Hamster Special".

3. The bus company also issued special travel regulations for hamsters, which say:

4. 'First, hamsters are encouraged to travel free of charge on any of our services, preferably accompanied by a fee-paying human.

5. 'Second, young hamsters will be asked to give up their seat to an elderly or disabled hamster.

6. 'Thirdly, we request that hamsters do not use mobile phones or Walkmans while travelling on our buses for the comfort and convenience of other hamsters.'

7. Jordan was very pleased that the company acknowledged its mistake but thought that it was not enough to compensate the emotional damage that the conflict created for his hamster! He said: 'I think they should do something more. They could buy him a bigger cage or a wheel.'

Tasks for discussion.

I.

1. Give expamles from the text to prove that the British are thrue animal lovers.

2. Do you think that their love sometimes takes too extravagant forms?

3. What does the story the hamster illustrate?

II.

1. Are Russians fond of their pets?

2. What legal campaign has begun recently in this country? Has if brought any results yet?

3. Do you agree that a nation's attitude to animals reflects the level of its social development? How are the correlated?

How the British relax

1. As British people say, "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. " Like everybody else. British people like doing things outside work.

2. Gardening is a well-known favourite. As the weather in Britain is relatively mild, British people manage to do gardening almost all the year round. Sometimes this can be just doing a bit of weeding and sometimes, serious vegetable and fruit growing. In fact, regardless of the size of the garden, the British can always find plenty to do in it. Mowing grass is also very important. Every Sunday morning (except for winter) they come out to mow their lawns. To outsiders, it almost seems like an obsession but to a British person it is an important social duty. The British see an unmown lawn, not only as a sign of laziness, but also as disrespect to others (and you can get fined for it as well).

3. Walking is also very popular. Ask any British person if they have a pair of walking boots and the answer will probably be yes. Except for dry summer davs, the beautiful British countryside is pretty muddy, so you need a good pair of walking boots or 'wellies' to enjoy your walk. Walking as a leisure activity has a long tradition in England. You can buy a variety of maps and guides to walking routes. Organised walking is also popular and is a good way to discover local sights of interest with a group of like-minded people and a good guide.

4. Cycling is another popular activity,. Unfortunately, many British roads are very busy and don't have cycling paths, so cycling can be a bit

dangerous in Britain, many people find quiet country roads and spend their whole holidays exploring their homeland on their bikes. More extreme sports like rock climbing also attract people. And, of course, the famous British eccentricity is the cause of unusual sports like extreme ironing. Extreme ironing is a serious sport where teams of people compete at who can do their ironing in more extreme conditions. Extreme ironing is now an international sport with serious competitions and organised events.

5. Of course, not all British people keep fit by engaging in extreme sports. Many go to the gym. swimming pool or fitness classes. However, it has to be said that the British are not the sportiest nation in the world. You see, watching TV often gets in the way. Increasingly, British people spend their free time watching TV. Sad, but true. The only comforting thing is that they are not on their own — most of the world seems to be doing the same!

6. As far as actually going away on holiday, many British people choose to spend their holidays abroad, preferably somewhere warm and dry. Spain, France and Greece are regular destinations due to convenient location and kind climate. City breaks are also a good idea for changing the scenery and enjoying new places without too much trouble.

Tasks for discussion.

I.

1. What are the British people's favourite leisure time activities?
2. Why is gardening so popular?
3. What aitems doe one need to go walking in Britain?
4. Does one nedd special equipment and sports facilities to be fit?
5. Where do British people prefer to spend their holidays?

II

1. How do Russian relax? What factors account for their preferences?
2. What are favourite Russian resorts?

British Humour

Do you get it?

—What is an ig?

—An Eskimo house without a loo.

1. It is common to hear foreigners use the phrase: 'typical British sense of humour', but what exactly does that mean? As a nation, the British are proud of their particular sense of humour and believe that it is unique. British people often say that foreigners, in particular, the French and Americans, don't understand British jokes. This statement is, of course, a bit unfair, but it does reflect some differences in what people in different countries and cultures find funny. The strange thing is that British humour is based on two rather contradictory foundations. On the one hand, there is a typically dry, almost sarcastic understatement. On the other, there is a national obsession with something called 'toilet humour'.

UNDERSTATEMENT AND IRONY

2. The first characteristic is probably the most famous. British people use understatement almost all the time. Perhaps it is connected to the terrible climate in Britain. The statements like: 'It's a bit chilly, isn't it?', or, 'I'm just a bit tired' are often used when it is terribly cold, or you are absolutely exhausted.

3. Understatement is closely connected to a more general term: irony. Quite often foreigners have to spend some time getting used to British people being constantly ironic - in other words — saying the opposite of what they think or feel. The statements: 'Lovely weather we're having at the moment', or, 'Turned out nice again, didn't it?' are to be used when it is raining heavily, or the weather suddenly turns bad after you leave the house without a coat or umbrella. Another example of irony used for humours purposes: We visit our friend in the hospital. We know from his

wife that the prognosis is bad, and also that our friend has been informed of his condition. When we enter, we ask him how he's feeling. 'Well,' he says, 'I have been better.[1] Of course, in some countries it would be unusual to make jokes when you are ill but in Britain it is absolutely normal. It is well-known that British people do not like showing their feelings and emotions, so they often turn to irony to conceal what they really feel.

4. Both understatement and irony depend a lot on tone of voice. This is why it can take time for foreigners to get used to British irony: it is often difficult to detect.

5. Example: Mother comes into the TV room and discovers her 11-year-old son watching a film instead of doing his homework, as he was supposed to ten minutes ago. Pointing to the screen she says, 'Don't let me distract you from your duties, son, but when you're finished with your serious studies there, maybe we could have a rest and do a little bit of maths.'

6. What the mother says could be said in an ironic tone of voice, but it could also be said in a normal, matter-of-fact tone as well. In the second case the mother would pretend to be respectful but she is really not. Confused? A lot of people, especially foreigners, because they are concentrating on the tone of voice and are not listening to the actual meaning of words completely miss the ironic intention of the speaker.

TOILET HUMOUR

7. The other end of the scale is toilet humour. Quite often these jokes (usually visual, as in television comedy programmes) are connected with taboo bodily functions. Toilet humour is something every schoolchild in Britain becomes an expert in very early in life.

A very mild example:

1st MAN: I've just bought my wife a bottle of toilet water for 100 pounds.

2nd MAN: You could have had some from my loo for nothing.

Questions.

1. What makes the British sense of humour unique?

2. What is “understatement”? Why is it usually associated with the British reserve?

3. Why is it difficult for foreigners to detect British irony?

4. What is “toilet humour”?

Here are some other examples of simple English jokes that have been separated from their answers (punch-lines). Try to choose the correct end to the joke from the list below:

1. TEACHER: What do you know about the Dead Sea?

PUPIL: ....

2. TEACHER: What do you call the small rivers that flow into the river Nile?

PUPIL: ....

3. 1st BOY: Do you always bath in dirty water?

2nd BOY:

4. STRANGER: I'm looking for a man with a wooden leg called Johnson.

LOCAL: ....

5. DINER: Waiter! Will my hamburger be long?

WAITER: ....

6. 1st FRIEND: I know a cafe where we can eat dirt cheap.

2nd FRIEND:

7. DINER: Waiter! What's wrong with this fish?

WAITER:

8. CORONER: And what were your wife's last words, sir?

HUSBAND: ....

9. NERVOUS PASSENGER: How often do planes of this type

crash?

AIR HOSTESS: ....

10. PASSENGER: Guard! How long will the next train be?

GUARD:

Now choose the punch-lines for each of the jokes above:

a. About six carriages, sir.

b. But who wants to eat dirt?

c Dead? I didn't even know it was ill.

d. I don't see how they can make a profit selling this chicken at 2p per pound.

e. It was clean when 1 got in.

f. Juveniles.

g. Long time, no sea, sir.

h. No. It will be round and flat, sir.

i. Only once, sir.

i. What's his other lee called?

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

These jokes include: misunderstood words, sarcasm, ignorance, pun answers, ambiguous word order, etc.

1. TEACHER: What do you know about the Dead Sea?

PUPIL: Dead? I didn't even know it was ill.

2. TEACHER: What do you call the small rivers that flow into the river Nile?

PUPIL: *Juve<u>niles</u>* (from juvenile = young)

3. 1st BOY: Do you always bath in dirty water?

2nd BOY: It was clean when I got in.

4. STRANGER: I'm looking for a man with a wooden leg called Johnson. (AMBIGU OUS WORD ORDER)

(NOTE: ...a man called Johnson with a wooden leg)

LOCAL: What's his other leg called?

5. DINER: Waiter! Will my hamburger be long? (TIME)

WAITER: No. It will be round and flat, sir. (SIZE)

6. 1st FRIEND: I know a cafe where we can eat dirt cheap. (DIRT = VERY)

2nd FRIEND: But who wants to eat dirt? *(DIRT = EARTH)*

7. DINER: Waiter! What's wrong with this fish?

WAITER: Long time, no sea, sir. (NOTE: Long time, no see — I haven't seen you for a long time.)

8. CORONER: And what were your wife's last words, sir?

HUSBAND: I don't see how they can make a profit selling this chicken at 2p per pound.

9. NERVOUS PASSENGER: How often do planes of this type crash?

AIR HOSTESS: Only once, sir.

10. PASSENGER: Guard! How long will the next train be? (TIME)

GUARD: About six carriages, sir. *(LENGTH)*

Practical Jokes

*The **British are fond of practical jokes. Some of them, played on April 1st, have become record-breakers.***

- In 1698, a number of Londoners received invitations to see the lions washed in the Thames. This event was described in newspapers. However, the same trick was successfully repeated in 1860, and again a lot of curious Londoners came to enjoy the lions washed.
- One practical joke genius from Dover played a joke on his fellow citizens. On March 31st, a large number of dog owners received a very official-looking document. It was marked "Urgent", and it had the

municipal coat of arms at the head of the page. The document was signed by the Mayor of the town. It ran as follows: "Owing to a sudden outbreak of hydrophobia, it has become necessary to take special measures of precaution against this terrible malady and to have all the dogs of the town vaccinated." So, all dog owners had to appear at the Town Hall at 10 o'clock sharp on the following morning, April 1st, accompanied by their pets. By ten o'clock hundreds of dogs of all breeds and sizes were barking and wagging their tales in front of the Town Hall. The astonished officials did not know what to do. Gradually it dawned upon the dog owners that they had been made April Fools.

- Once the BBC told a story of a building that had been built upside down by mistake. They showed an example of modern architecture which actually looked better when it was turned the other way. Many people believed the story, and perhaps the architect himself was given food for thought.
- In 1957, BBC Television played an elaborate joke on its viewers. It showed a film about a spaghetti crop grown in Southern Switzerland, near the Italian frontier. Agricultural workers were picking long strands of spaghetti from bushes and the presenter of the film commented on the uniform length of the spaghetti and on the successful cultivation of 'these vegetables'. After the programme was over, hundreds of viewers telephoned the BBC. Some of the calls were from those who had enjoyed the joke. But there were a lot of calls from people who wanted to know where they could buy spaghetti bushes.

I.

1. What is a practical joke?
2. When are practical jokes practiced most often?
3. Are they usuallyu appreciated or do people get angry?

II.

1. Do you understand British humour?

2. Is there such a thing as typical Russian humour? What are the topics of most Russian jokes?

3. How do you feel about April, 1 practical jokes? Do you make them yourself or are you usually the target?

4. Do you have a good sense of humour? Can you prove it?

BRITISH SUPERSTITIONS

Most people in the world have some superstitions — they still live on in the age of science. Here are some British superstitions with long traditions. Some of them are similar to Russian ones, others are different.

- It's extremely unlucky to walk under a ladder propped against a wall or building. But if you must pass under a ladder, you can avoid bad luck by crossing your fingers and keeping them crossed until you see a dog. Another remedy is to spit on your shoe and leave the spittle to dry.
- It's unlucky to spill salt. If you do, you must take a pinch and throw it over your left shoulder.
- It's very bad luck to open an umbrella in the house — it will either bring misfortune to

the person who has opened it or to those who live in the house.

- It's unlucky to meet or pass someone on the stairs. If it's unavoidable, cross your fingers.
- It's unlucky to take the last piece of bread on the plate.
- It's bad luck to see one magpie. However, it's lucky to see two, etc.
- It's unlucky to put new shoes on the table.
- It's bad luck to pick up scissors that you've dropped.
- It's extremely unlucky to break a mirror. It means 7 years of bad luck.
- The number thirteen is very unlucky and Friday the 13th is a very

unlucky date.

- Burning cheeks or ears mean someone is talking about you. It's a friend if your left cheek is burning. It's an enemy if your right cheek is burning.
- A black cat crossing your path will bring you good luck.
- A horseshoe over the door of a new house brings good luck. But it must be

the right way up. The luck runs out of a horseshoe if it's upside down.

- Clover usually has three leaves, but a few have four. A clover with four leaves is supposed to bring good luck.
- It's lucky to touch wood. If you feel you've said something that is tempting fate, touch

some item of wood with the right hand.

Questions.

1. What British superstitions are similar to Russian ones?
2. Are you a superstitious person? Have you had any proof the some of them work?

The Barmy Army – Football : England's Glory?

Solicitors, doctors, bankers, teachers... What do all these groups have in common? Well, individuals from these professions have all been arrested at some point for football hooliganism. Surprising? In England today there is an epidemic of violence associated with football. But why is this? There are many reasons — connected with culture, money, history and nationalism.

Myth number 1:

Football is a working class game, for working class people.

Fact:

Probably more than in any other country in the world, football in England has a national following. Just switch on the TV on a Saturday. Much of the afternoon on the major channels is taken up by football coverage. People from all walks of life watch, play, and go to matches. It is also big business, with top players like Beckham getting paid around $40000 a week, whether they are fit to play or not. Much of the violence associated with football actually comes from the richer supporters. People with prestigious, well-paid jobs often go to football matches just in order to have a fight. It is as if they have the right to lose control and go mad for a while — to forget they are respectable people. This perverse situation even extends to semi-secret uniforms among hooligans. Many fans interested in ultra-violence wear the same checked Burberry clothing — an extremely expensive American brand. Other hooligans are members of the shadowy Combat 18 neo-nazi organisation that has provoked huge race-riots in the north of England.

Myth number 2:

Football hooligans follow a favourite team and especially their national team.

Fact:

Hooligans often don't even watch the match of the team they are supposed to be following. They are more interested in 'having a go' at supporters of the opposing team. They travel large distances in order to attack anyone in the vicinity of the ground, or the town centre. Sometimes they even fight their own supporters. Unfortunately this is especially true of the England fans. At the Turkey-England Euro2004 qualifier in Sunderland all the fighting was between rival England supporters — in particular between club supporters of Sunderland and Newcastle: two towns about 15 kilometres from each other, both premier division teams with an intense hatred and rivalry.

Myth number 3:

Football violence is unorganised and spontaneous.

Fact:

The police and the Home Office have tried to deal with hooligans travelling to England matches abroad by confiscating the passports of known hooligans and by monitoring ports and airports carefully. Groups of hooligans have recently gone as far as travelling through third countries. For example: if there is a match in Holland, then to avoid getting caught, hooligans have flown to Spain and caught trains to Holland to escape detection.

Once near the football ground, rival groups of hooligans even telephone each other by mobile to organise massive fights and to avoid the police. One English club side has even begun to employ former hooligans as security specialists, but this seems to have backfired, as the club in question still has some of the worst violence and racism in the country.

Myth number 4:

Football violence is an English problem.

It is true that a lot of club violence takes place in England rather than on the Continent. But much of the time it is limited in scope and ferocity. At a UEFA match in Turkey between Galtasarai and Leeds, two peaceful Leeds supporters were stabbed to death in the city centre.

Of course, 99% of supporters who travel to games are completely peaceful. 99% of supporters are not racist or neo-nazis. Unlike many European countries, families including women and children make up a large proportion of supporters who travel to games. Hopefully,. this kind of tendency will improve the game and discourage hooligans. Hooliganism is not an English problem alone. It is just that English hooligans are perhaps the most visible (partly because of the effective British police campaigns against them). Football will continue to be the 'beautiful game', the biggest spectator sport in the world. And Britain will always be the birthplace of this most English game. As the supporters of England like to sing: 'It's

coming home, it's coming home, it's coming. Football's coming home!' Hopefully, with an improved reputation, England will sometime soon host a major championship again.

Questions.

I.

1. What fundamental reasons underlie football violence?
2. Why does the violence come from the richer supporters?
3. Why do hooligans often even don't watch the team's matches?
4. How do hooligans get organized?
5. Is their hope that positive tendencies in football supporting will outweigh negative ones?

II.

1. Are there many hooligans among Russian football fans?
2. Are you a fan? How do you usually express your emotions?

WHEN IN BRITAIN

1. Visitors to Britain are often surprised by the strange behaviour of its inhabitants. The British like forming queues. In fact, queuing is supposed to be their national characteristic. 'An Englishman, even if he is alone, forms an orderly queue of one,' joked George Mikes.

2. So one of the worst mistakes is to get on a bus without waiting your turn in the queue. British are very sensitive to such behaviour and they may get really annoyed with queue-jumpers — people who don't wait their turn in the queue.

3. The British, especially the English, are more reserved than the people of many other countries. They don't like to show their emotions. They usually don't easily get into conversation with strangers. They don't like personal questions (for example, 'How much money do you earn?',

'How much do you weigh?' or 'Why aren't you married?'). They take more time to make friends. They would like to know you better before they ask you home. So don't be upset if your English friends don't invite you home. It doesn't mean they don't like you!

4. If you are invited to a party, it is considered polite to call and say if you can or cannot come. Most parties are informal these days, so you don't have to worry about what to wear — anything from jeans to suits will do.

5. If you are told to 'help yourself to something, it doesn't mean that your host is rude — he or she is showing that you are completely accepted and just like 'one of the family'.

6. If you enjoyed the evening, call your hostess the next day, or write her a short 'thank you' letter. Perhaps it seems funny to you, but British people say 'thank you, thank you, thank you' all the time! They say 'thank you' even if they give money to a shop assistant.

7. These days most people in Britain do not wear very formal clothes. Of course, when they are 'on duty' they have to obey certain rules. You cannot imagine a bank employee without a suit or a tie. But when he is no longer 'at work'' he can put on an old sweater and jeans, sometimes with holes in them.

8. If you go out to enjoy yourself, you can wear almost anything. It is no longer a requirement of theatres that the audience should wear evening dress. So what you wear depends, perhaps, on how much you paid for your ticket. At the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, for example, spectators in the stalls, the circle and the boxes are usually dressed formally, whilst those peering down from the amphitheatre may well be in jeans. People do, however, tend to dress more formally for ballet and opera than for the theatre and concerts.

9. In recent years smoking has received a lot of bad publicity, and fewer people now smoke. There is no more smoking on the London

Underground, in cinemas and theatres and most buses. Many companies have banned smoking from their offices and canteens. And non-smokers can be rude to smokers who break the rule and smoke in public places.

10. Pubs are an important part of British life. People, especially men, go to the pub to relax, meet friends, and sometimes to do business.

11. At one time, it was unusual for women to go to pubs. These days, however, there are only a few pubs where it is surprising for a woman to walk in.

12. Children under the age of 14 are still not allowed into some pubs.

13. Pub food is cheaper than most restaurant food, and you don't have to leave a tip. But you do have to go to the bar to get your food and drink. There are no waiters in pubs.

14. In some countries it is considered bad manners to eat in the street. In Britain it is quite common to see people having a snack while walking down the road, especially at lunchtime. On the other hand, the British may be surprised to see young children in restaurants in the evenings because children are not usually taken out to restaurants late at night and, if they make a noise in public or in a restaurant, it is considered very rude. In Victorian times it used to be said that 'Children should be seen and not heard', since children did not participate at all in public life. In recent years children are playing a more active role and they are now accepted in many pubs and restaurants.

15. Good and bad manners make up the social rules of a country and are not always easy to learn because they are often not written down in books! The British have an expression for following these 'unwritten rules': 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.'

I.

1. What did you learn from the text about the British ways and rules of behaviuour? What did you already learn from other sources?

2. How do the British show their friendliness?

3. Do the British observe a dress-code? When is it strict or lax?

4. How do smokers and non-smokers coexist in Britain?

5. Finish the expression “When in Britain…” and comment on it.

II.

1. If you were to compile a manuel for foreign visitors to Russia, what recommendations would you give?

2. Which rules of social behaviuour are similar for Russians and the British and which are different?

3. How does globalization effect social behaviuor ? Give examples.

Why are the British mad about Harry?

1. Who has the most recognized face in Britain at the moment? No, it's not the Queen, nor is it the Prime Minister it's not even Robbie Williams! The most recognised face belongs to a young man called Daniel Radcliffe. Although he is not generally known to the public as Daniel Radcliffe. In fact, some people don't even know that his name is Daniel Radcliffe, they only know his face as being that of his alter ego, Harry Potter. Daniel Radcliffe is the actor who plays Harry Potter on film and whose face looks out from a thousand posters across the nation. The image of Harry Potter is so familiar that even people who haven't read any of the books or seen any of the films know exactly who he is and exactly what he looks like.

2. The phenomenal success of JK Rowling's Harry Potter books has been one of the most talked about and unexpected success stories in the book world. The big surprise has been how many children have been drawn to the books, often with little encouragement from either teachers or parents. The subsequent success of the films and the merchandise that goes

with them is far less surprising, but the fact that thousands of children have actually read the original books has been seen as almost incredible. It has to be said that many parents and teachers have been as impressed by the books as the children and libraries and bookshops across Britain have had to deal with a great demand for the Harry Potter series.

3. Since the 1960s Britain has seen a steady decline in the popularity of reading amongst school-age children (especially boys), and this has been blamed on the lure of television, films, computer games and excitingly presented magazines. The popularity of the Harry Potter series was seen so unusual that many newspaper and magazine articles were written about it to try to understand its success. The theme of the books is not very original and there have been many similar tales published before without the same success. Why then, should these books be so popular in this day and age?

4. Firstly, Harry, like all the best heroes or heroines, appears to be a normal child. Of course, this is only on the surface, as the lightning scar on his forehead gives the reader a clue to who he really is. Thanks to JK Rowling's story telling talent, it is easy to believe that Harry's transition from sad schoolboy to famous wizard is the most natural thing in the world.

5. Secondly, British people always like to take the side of the underdog and Harry has all the attributes of one. Harry is an orphan and is forced to live with his cruel Aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon, and their dreadful son, Dudley.

6. Thirdly, the school which Harry is sent to, Hogwarts, has a lot in common with a classic British public school. For example, a lot of the problems that Harry and his friends are facing in Hogwarts are class-related, such as the question *of* 'pure blood'. It is well-known that in many public schools children from poorer and lower-class families are looked down on. The organisation of Hogwarts is also very similar to a public school with its strict teachers, boarding houses and attention to sports. However, it is still

easy for children to identify with Harry and his friends because they also behave like ordinary modern teenagers. And, of course, children (and their parents) just love all the horrible, dark things that happen in the books.

7. The popularity of Harry Potter and the sale of Harry Potter goods are likely to stay for the near future at least. However, amongst the hundreds of things for sale connected to the books and films, the most interesting development has been the dramatic increase in the sale of traditional broomsticks. Look towards Britain on a clear night and you never know what you might see flying in the sky!

About the writer — J. K. Rowling

J. K. Rowling was born in a small town near Bristol. She always liked writing and wrote her first story when she was only five! After school, j she went to university to study languages and then became a teacher of French. The writer says that Harry Potter was born on a long train journey and was originally seen as just a bit of entertainment for the writer's daughter Jessica. At the time, J. K. Rowling, known as Jo to her friends, was a single mother working hard to make enough money to support her daughter. It was the publishers who advised Jo to use her initials — J. K. instead of Jo, as they thought that adventures of an 11 -year-old boy would not be popular amongst teenagers if written by a woman. Now, Harry Potter books are so popular all around the world that J.K. Rowling has become one of the richest people in the UK. She is even richer than the Queen with an estimated fortune of 280 million pounds!

British tourist industry — new tourist attractions

Thanks to Harry Potter, Britain has got a tourism boost. As Harry Potter movies have been filmed all around Britain, there are now a few places that are proud to have been seen in the Harry Potter films. For

example, Harrow School, Durham Cathedral and now the Highlands in Scotland. Many people decide to visit those places only because they feature in the Harry Potter films.

About the main character — Daniel Radcliffe

Daniel Radcliffe who plays Harry Potter is a pleasant 15-ycar-old. People who know him say that he is a very friendly, kind and intelligent young man. He likes playing the guitar and does all the things that young people of his age normally do. However, playing Harry Potter has not been easy for him. Daniel says that there was a time when he was not sure where Harry ended and Daniel began. He felt so close to Harry as if they were the same person. Daniel even wanted to stop playing Harry Potter to concentrate on his studies and get his life back but later changed his mind. Right now, Daniel is filming the next Harry Potter film — Harry Potter and the half-blood Prince.

I.

1. What account for the phenomenal popularity of Harry Potter books?

2. What unexpected cultural effect did it have?

3. What makes Harry Potter such a likeable character? Is he equally popular among children and adults?

4. How did J.K. Rowling become a professional writer?

5. What economic effects does the series have?

6. Why has playing Harry Potter been not so easy for the actor?

II.

1. Have you read any or maybe all the Harry Potter books or seen the films? What are your impressions?

2. Do you think the books' success is long-lasting? Why?

3. Do you know anything about Daniel Radcliffe's further career?

TV or not TV?

Television has become an everyday part of our lives. It's omnipresent, always on... But is this a good thing or a bad one? Don't we spend too much of our precious time in front of the 'box'? Haven't we become lazier because of it? Is TV dangerous? Here's what different people say about television.

Who do you agree with?

For

• Some people say that television is dangerous. I don't think so. After all, it keeps you informed about what's happening in the world. You can also see films and plays, and be entertained... or you can watch documentaries and learn something new.

• In spite of all its defects, television can teach us a lot of things. The trick is to learn to control it and use it intelligently. The ideal is to turn on the TV only when there is a programme which is really amusing and interesting.

• A lot of rubbish has been written about television. I think it's a wonderful invention.

It's a cheap form of entertainment, which gives pleasure to millions of people, especially those who live alone. It's also a wonderful way of escaping from our dull reality.

• TV's just part of life really. It involves us in strong emotions: love, hate, passion. Even the silliest of 'soaps' help me to solve my own problems by showing me what might happen if I do certain things. Sometimes they show me what not to do.

Against

• Television is a terrible waste of time. I know a lot of people who just sit down in front of the 'box' and watch whatever's on. They spend

hours watch ing silly Mexican soap operas and second-rate American films when perhaps they ought to be doing something else. • In my opinion, television makes us lazier. We stay at home instead of going out. We read less. We think less. We even talk less. It cuts us off from reality. But isn't real life better than this passive enjoyment?

• There's too much blood and violence on TV. We begin to believe that the world is an unfriendly place, filled with cruel people and risky circumstances. The violent, crime-filled world shown on TV may turn people into criminals.

• Television is like a drug: we get addicted to certain TV series and simply can't switch it off. Most programmes are filled with silly commercials. What I hate most about TV is that it often uses strong language. It has a terrible influence on children and young people.

Questions.

1. *What are the pros and contras of television?*
2. *How many hours do you spend in front of the TV?*
3. *Do you believe that violence on TV may turn people into criminals ?*
4. *In what way does TV influence our language?*
5. *Some people say that television kills conversation. Do you agree ?*

Additional texts.

Strange British Customs

1. Once a year it is the custom for women to cook flat cakes in a frying pan, and run down the street, throwing the pancakes into the air, and catching them in the pans.

2. Sometimes men tie bells onto their legs and dance in the streets, waving their handkerchiefs in the air.

3. It is an old custom to tie ribbons to a tall post, and dance around it until all the ribbons are wound round it.

4. .Once a year a group of young men roll a large cheese down a hill, and then run down after it.

5. It is the custom on one day in the year to put apples into a bowl full of water, and try to pick them with your teeth.

6. Sometimes two young men sit over a river on a long pole, which has been covered in grease, and try to knock each other off it by hitting each other with pillows.

7. There's a nettle-eating contest in Britain every year. The contestants try to eat as many nettles as they can.

In fact all these extraordinary things are true.

1. This is the traditional pancake race, which is held on Shrove Tuesday.
2. This is Morris dancing and it is still sometimes seen, especially in villages and country towns, in summer.
3. This is the old English maypole. Many villages still have a maypole, although the dancers are usually children nowadays.
4. This is the custom of cheese rolling, which happens on Whit Monday.
5. This is part of the traditional Halloween celebrations held on 31 October.
6. This is an old competition, which is still seen at midsummer fairs.

Often the prize is a farm
animal, usually a pig.

7. This contest takes place every summer in Dorset. A word of warning: Don't try nettle-eating if you don't know the 'secret method'.

Class System

1. Some things about Britain make sense only to the British. Of these, probably the strangest is social class.

2. There are three main class divisions in Britain with some 'in between' variations (such as "upper middle'): upper, middle and lower or working class. And people in Britain are very conscious of class differences.

3. The different classes in Britain tend to eat different food at different time of the day (and call the meals by different names), they like to talk about different topics, they enjoy different pastimes and sports and have different ideas about the correct way to behave.

4. The easiest way to guess the class to which the person belongs to is to listen to the way he or she speaks. A person's accent in Britain is an identity card. Other people will be able to say what social background you come from, where you were born or educated, and what kind of job you do.

5. Changing an accent is difficult, even for actors. To achieve the desired accent, a British person must speak it from childhood. This is one of the reasons why people still send their children to expensive private schools. It is not that the education there is better, but because, as adults, they will have the right accent and manners.

6. A person's vocabulary is also very important. Here is a good class-test you can try: when talking to an English person, say something too quietly for them to hear you properly. A lower-middle or middle-middle person will say 'Pardon?'; an upper-middle will say 'Sorry? (or perhaps 'Sorry — what?'); but an upper-class and a working-class person will both say 'What?' The working person, however, will drop the 't' — 'Wha'?'

7. "Toilet' is another word that makes the higher classes exchange knowing looks. The correct upper word is 'lavatory' or 'loo'. The working classes all say 'toilet', as do most lower-middles and middle-middles, the only difference being the working-class dropping of the final 't'.

Here are some more examples:

Upper	**Non-upper**
napkin	serviette
sitting room	lounge
sofa	settee
pudding	desert, sweet
lunch (*about middle meal*)	dinner
scent	perfume

8. An interesting thing about the class system in Britain is that very often it has nothing to do with money. A person with an upper-class accent, using upper-class words, will be recognized as upper class even if he or she is unemployed or homeless. And a person with working-class pronunciation, who calls a sofa a settee, and his midday meal 'dinner', will be identified as working class even if he is a multi-millionaire living in a grand country house.

Famous Eccentrics

1. Britain is a small country but it has more eccentrics than any other country in the world.

A "CLASSIC" ECCENTRIC

2. James, or "Jemmy," Hirst was probably the most eccentric Englishman of the 18th century.

3. At school he liked to ride his teacher's pig and even taught it to jump low hurdles. But because of all his tricks he was expelled from school.

4. In the end he returned to his father's farm. From that day he never rode a horse but a bull called Jupiter. He usually did it in his best clothes. They consisted of a huge lambskin cap, an otter-skin coat, a waistcoat of duck's feathers, patchwork breeches, and red-and-white striped stockings with big silver buckles.

5. At Jemmy's parties the guests were served their drinks on their host's favourite coffin. Jemmy also had another coffin, with folding doors and a window. It stood on end and one could climb into it. Some people actually did. Then the doors closed automatically and could not be opened from the inside. Men had to pay a penny to be released and women had to give Jemmy a piece of their clothes.

TOUCH ON ANIMALS

6. Frank Butland was another famous English eccentric who lived in the 19th century. His house was full of all kinds of animals, most of them running free.

7. His monkeys lived in the sitting room and used to bite his guests. Every night the caring master gave them beer and they were very fond of a drop of sweet wine on Sundays.

8. Frank also liked to cook and eat animals. One day he decided to make elephant's trunk soup. He had to boil it for several days, but it was too

tough to eat. He ate rhinoceros, mice on buttered toast, kangaroos and a bit of lion that died in a nearby zoo. He said that the only thing he hated was flies. He never ate them.

MAD ABOUT DOGS

9. Francis Henry Egerton, the eighth Earl of Bridgewater preferred dogs to people. The dogs ate with him every day. The huge table would be laid for twelve and the dogs ran in, each with a clean, white napkin around their necks and servants would serve them off silver dishes, one servant to each dog. Boots were his other passion. He wore a new pair even day and at night he ranged them round his walls and used them as a calendar.

BEDTIME SEASON

10. When Lord North and his new American wife returned to England from their honeymoon, Lord North announced that he was going to bed. His wife was very surprised when he remained in bed for many days and was shocked to be told by a servant that Lord North always stayed in bed from October 9th until March 22nd. A large dining table was brought into Lord North's bedroom so that he could have dinner with his friends during these months. Lord North's explanation for this strange behaviour was that no Lord North had got out of bed from October to March since his ancestor had lost the American Colonies!

MAD JACK'S FOLLIES

11. John Fuller (or Mad Jack as everybody called him) became famous for his eccentricity and his follies. A folly is an architectural construction that is not what it seems to be. Mad Jack built several follies and here is a story of one of them. One day he was having dinner with the Vicar of Darlington. During the conversation (and after a few drinks) Jack boasted to the vicar that he could see the spire of Darlington church from his bedroom window. Alas, when Jack woke up the next morning, he realised that the only thing he could see out of his window was a large hill.

Mad Jack did not get discouraged by such a little thing, so he ordered to build a construction which looked like the spire of Darlington church just behind the top of the hill. Then Jack invited the Vicar of Darlington to dinner. Well, as you can guess, the vicar looked out of the window, saw "the spire of Darlington church" and Mad Jack won the bet!

SCIENTIFIC FACTS

12. Dr David Weeks, an American psychologist, has been studying eccentrics for years.

13. He says that eccentricity is not mental illness. What is more, eccentrics are healthier, happier and live longer than the rest of us!

14. According to Dr Weeks, "classic eccentrics" number only about one in 10,000 people. Most of them are men. They are often eldest or only children raised in strict families. They often have strange eating and sleeping habits and are poor conversationalists. But they are more intelligent and read much more than ordinary people.

15. Eccentrics are curious, creative and inventive. They have at least one hobby (usually five or six) and prefer to live alone. They tend to be cheerful and idealistic, full of projects to improve the world and make it a better place to live.

16. According to popular belief, eccentrics are wealthy people who can afford to be eccentrics.

17. But nowadays eccentrics are just as likely to work at ordinary jobs. Dr Weeks has met a University professor who lives in a cave, a critic who spends all his time in bed, a social worker who lives only on potatoes and nothing but potatoes, an engineer who walks everywhere backwards because it makes him feel younger...

A look at the differences in character between the British and the Americans.

This is the third part of our series on the differences between America and Britain. This month we are looking at the British and American character. Find out how Brits and Yanks react in desperate situations, and how they like to complain. There's a world of difference!

Sinking Ships: reacting

When Americans find themselves in a desperate situation, they know how to act. Americans are creatures of action, and they will take decisive steps to avoid injury or death. They won't sit around waiting for something to happen. Oh, no, they'll go out there and do something about it, and they'll ask things like, "What can we do to get out of this situation?" Or "Does anyone know howto get out of here?" Or, "Who'stheguy in charge here?" Then they'll motivate one another by saying things like, "OK, let's go!" or "Let's rock!"

For the British, on the other hand, it is undignified to react with decision in a desperate situation. Take the example of the Titanic. As the ship was slowly sinking, English gentlemen sat around the bar, slowly sipping their drinks and enjoying the music from the ship's orchestra. And as the water slowly crept up higher and higher, they ignored it, preferring to continue their light chat. For the British it is important to remain calm and in control of oneself even in life-and-death situations. They'll make \ comments such as, "I don't know what all the fuss is about." Or, "Get a grip on yourself, man." Or, "There's no need to get hysterical." Or, the all time classic, "We're British. Keep a stiff upper lip."

Cold Food: complaining

When it comes to complaining, Americans are practical and straight to the point. They'll tell you what the problem is, and expect you to sort it out immediately. At work they may say, "I didn't get that report. When are you going to get it to me?" Or, at a restaurant, "This food is cold. Heat it up, would you?" And in a bar, "Hey, how much longer am I gonna have to stand here before you serve me?" as they wave some money in the waiter's face. And if nothing happens in the next minute, they'll leave. Of course, the British are much more reserved when it comes to complain g. And they will

try their best to avoid a confrontation. In fact, they'd rather stick with an unhappy situation than cause any trouble. And if they have to say something, they'll apologise. So, in the work-related situation, they may say, "I'm awfully sorry to bother you but that report never arrived. It must be something to do with the post. I don't suppose you could send it again, could you?" And at a restaurant they may say, "I don't mean to cause any trouble, but I'm afraid this food is somewhat cold. If the chef isn't too busy, I don't suppose he could heat it up a bit, could he?" And in a bar he may say, "I'm sorry to bother you, but I was wondering, if it wasn't too much trouble, whether you could possibly serve me a drink, please?" And they'll sit there for another half hour even if nothing happens. The only exception is Yorkshire (north England), where not getting served for half-an-hour could result in the ritual sacrifice of the barman.

Unexpected Funerals: invitations

When it comes to invitations, Americans are very forward. They'll invite you to come to their house, and they'll expect you to turn up. If you don't go, they'll ask you why you didn't come, "What happened? Did you forget?" Americans have no problem telling someone to go away if that person turns up unannounced. You'll be told, quite literally, to go away. "Hey, I'm sorry," Americans will say, "but I'm right in the middle of something. Could you come back later?" Or, "Hey, buddy, this isn't a good moment. I'll see you another time. RightT And lastly, if you ask an American out, and they don't want to go, they'll simply say, "I'll take a raincheck on that", which means that they don't want to go this time, but may go on another occasion. Of course, the British are very different. When the British invite you to their house, they don't actually expect you to turn up. Of course, if you do go, they will be "delighted" to see you. "How wonderful to see you!" they'll say. Or, "I can't believe you came." Or "What a nice surprise!" At the same time, they'll be cursing you for ever believing that their invitation was

sincere.

Having to say "no" to an invitation is perhaps one of the most agonising things for a British person. They find it really painful to reject someone or potentially hurt their feelings. When trying to say no, they'll make a whole series of apologies, excuses and pathetic lies such as, "Oh, I just remembered that I had to go to my uncle's funeral. I'm awfully sorry."

Howard Hughes

I am by nature a perfectionist, and 1 seem to have trouble allowing anything to go through in a halfperfect condition. So if 1 made any mistake, it was in working too hard and in doing too much of it with my own hands." Howard Hughes (1905 - 1976)

American megastar Leonardo DiCaprio's latest film the *Aviator* is all about the legendary American eccentric Howard Hughes. Hughes was famous for being an industrialist, director, Hollywood producer, and aviator; but towards the end of his life he became a secretive, destructive man. What happened?

The Lucky Guy

Hughes was born in Texas in 1905 and was the son of a wealthy industrialist. On his father's death in 1924, Hughes inherited more than $900,000, including 75% of the family business, the Hughes Tool Company. This company had patented an oil drill that could cut through rock. The drill was leased for $30,000 per well, which proved to be very profitable.

And for Hughes, this drill would help him for the rest of his life. As Otto Friedrich writes in the book *City of Nets,* which is all about Hollywood in the 1940s, "No matter what Hughes did, no matter how much money he

wasted, the drill would always pay his bills, and would always protect him from harm."

The Movie Maker

For a while, Hughes ran the family tool-making business, but he soon became restless. In 1925 he moved to Los Angeles to become part of the motion picture industry. At the time Los Angeles was the world capital of film production. It was here that Hughes started production of the epic movie *Hell's Angels,* which was all about Royal Air Force fighter pilots in World War I.

In order to make the film, Hughes acquired the largest private air force in the world: 87 vintage planes (Spads, Fokkers and Sopwith Camels) for $560,000; then spent another $400,000 tamaintain them. He even bought a balloon to be burned in the film. Hughes personally directed the aerial combat scenes.

The Blonde Bombshell

But nothing seemed to go right. Three stunt pilots died in crashes; Hughes also crashed his plane and was pulled unconscious from the wreckage. Towards the end of production, Hughes was forced to re-shoot large parts of the film with dialogue because of the invention of talking pictures. The original female star, Greta Nissen, spoke with a thick Norwegian accent. Hughes looked for a replacement and eventually decided on a bit-part-actress with blonde hair called Harlean Carpenter, also known as Jean Harlow, the first Hollywood "Blond Bombshell".

The film cost Hughes $3.8 million, a record for the time. It was released in 1930 and was a great success; but it never recovered its costs. These days it is considered a Hollywood classic, as are two more of Hughes' films, *The Front Page* and *Scarface.*

The Aviator

Later on, Hughes moved into the world of aviation. At the time, the aviation industry was booming in southern California. In 1934 Hughes won his first speed title, flying at 385 kilometres per hour. And in 1935, he reached 563 kilometres an hour. He also set an around-the-world record three years later. At the same time, he got involved in aircraft manufacture, and started to produce planes including his XF-11.

In 1939 Hughes bought a controlling stake in Trans World Airlines (TWA), which he would manage for nearly 30 years, transforming it into a major international airline. In 1946 he was nearly killed when he crashed in Beverly Hills during a test flight of his plane the XF-11.

The Spruce Goose

One of Hughes' more ambitious projects was the "Spruce Goose". This was an enormous plane that Hughes built out of wood. It had eight engines and the capacity to carry 700 troops or a load of 60,000 kilos. It was 100 metres wide, and it weighed 800,000 kilos. It is still the largest plane ever built. The war ended before the plane was completed, but it was flown once in Long Beach Harbor on 2''' November 1947.

During the plane's maiden flight, Hughes was at the controls. The Spruce Goose achieved a top speed of 128 kph, went 20 metres off the water, and flew 1.3 km in less than a minute before making a perfect landing. The plane was then taken to a giant hangar, never to be seen again by the public during Hughes' lifetime. Hughes spent close to a million dollars a year to look after the plane. After Hughes' death, the Spruce Goose was put on exhibit in Long Beach Harbor. At the moment, it is in an aircraft museum in Oregon. Downfall

Around the early 1950s Hughes started acting strangely. Hughes spent almost all his time sitting naked in his white leather chair in the centre of the living room, an area he called the "germ free zone", watching one motion picture after another.

This unusual habit continued in Las Vegas, where Hughes moved to in

1966. But things there got even worse because of Hughes' drug habit, that included both codeine and Valium. The codeine had first been prescribed to alleviate pain from the injuries from the XF-11 plane crash years earlier; but now it was an addiction.

Death

A doctor who examined Hughes in 1973 compared his condition to prisoners he had seen in Japanese prison camps during World War II. Towards the end of his life, Hughes left Las Vegas for the Bahamas where he stayed until he moved to Mexico, reportedly to have greater access to co-deine. He finally died of heart failure on an airplane carrying him from Acapulco to a hospital in Houston in April 1976. However, no one there was sure if it really was Hughes as he hadn't been seen in public for 20 years. The FBI were called and they took fingerprints from the corpse and sent them away for analysis.

So, the great man had finally died, but his memory still lives on. These days, the Hughes Space and Communications Company (founded in 1961) is the world's largest manufacturer of commercial satellites, the designer and builder of the world's first synchronous communications satellite, Syncom, and the producer of nearly 40% of the satellites now in commercial service. And four hotels and six casinos in Las Vegas and Reno still form part of the Summa Corporation, another one of Hughes' companies

DiCaprio

The Aviator

Just recently American actor Leonardo DiCaprio has been promoting his film *The Aviator,* all about the life of the American industrialist Howard Hughes. We had a chance to talk to Leonardo about making the film, and

his 8-year obsession with getting it produced.

Mr DiCaprio, what most attracted you to the character of Howard Hughes?

He was like a tiger. He just never, never, never let up on anything he did. The guy had everything in the world, was at the forefront of all these really exciting things in our country, and he was quite the swashbuckler too. Yet still he was unable to be a happy person. For somebody like myself who's been very fortunate in life, to see that as an example is very interesting for me.

When did you first get interested in Howard Hughes?

Howard Hughes is certainly an extremely complex character to play, and very multi-dimensional. I read his biography when I was 18 years old. I initially sent the project to Michael Mann and developed it with him. There was a three-year writing process. Michael had finished the script for the film *Ali* (starring Will Smith) and wanted to try something different. It was a subject matter that he was fascinated with and so he wanted to be a part of it, which was pretty amazing.

How did you go about preparing yourself for the role?

Well, the film came about after eight years of hard work. I read thousands of pages of Hughes' biographies, and watched old newsreel footage. I also spent days with a psychiatric expert Dr. Jeffrey Schwarz to find out more about Howard Hughes' mental problems and obsessive-compulsiJe disorder (OCD), which he suffered from.

Do you think that you are similar in any way to Howard Hughes?

I don't have any OCDs (obsessive-compulsive disorders), but when I was a kid I was obsessive about things, and I tried to bring that out in the character as much as I could. Also, just like Hughes I became a bit of a

recluse myself for several years so I can relate to him on that level too.

What was it like working on this film?

We really worked hard on this film - it was eight years in the making. The best things about doing the film were the meetings we had just talking about ideas, and giving the movie time to breathe - that's like complete heaven for me."

What can you tell us about your status in the world right now?

I owe a lot to *Titanic.* That movie gave me the ability to steer the course of my own destiny. But at the end of the day, being an actor is just not that difficult. It's difficult to give certain types of performances, but most of the time you're in character for about 10 seconds, and editing makes it look complete. The toughest part is sustaining a career, and that's about choices. It's the choices you make that decide how long you will last, and the type of actor you are. You just have to be smart.

How do you choose a film?

I think that about 92% of the scripts I get are pure crap. Usually when I want to do something I know immediately, and then, I do it. I'll probably make shitty choices in the future, I'm sure. You need a *Heaven's Gate* in there once in a while. But what thrills me right now is disappearing into a role that matters, in movies that matter. I am the product of good fortune, and my main thing is that I don't want to squander these opportunities that I have.

A look at the differences in character between the British and the Americans.

This is the fourth part of our series on the differences in character between Brits and" Yanks. Find out about British and American attitudes

to honesty, class and tradition. There's a world of difference!

Happy Birthday!

Americans are generous when it comes to giving gifts. Almost any occasion is an excuse to give a present. Christmas, birthdays, weddings, graduations, the birth of a child, a new neighbour moving in, someone leaving, or the arrival of a new pet.

Americans will usually open their gifts in the presence of the giver. And on opening them, they'll say things such as, "Oh, that's great. You're so kind", or, "Oh, I so wanted that."

The Brits are different, of course. Giving gifts isn't so popular, and in certain parts of Britain, particularly in the north, it is unknown. On being presented with a gift, Brits have a natural sense of wspidon. "What's this?" they may ask, "Its not my birthday. What are you after?"

Honesty

Americans are generally straightforward when it comes to expressing themselves. If the weather is bad, they'll tell you it's bad. If theyre feeling ill, they'll let you know. And if they don't like a film, they'll be frank about it. The British, on the other hand, prefer to use something known as understatement. This consists of saying that something good or bad isn't as good or bad as it really is - they "understate" the facts. So, if the weather is really bad and it's 50° below zero, they'll tell you that "it's just a bit cold"; and if they've just had a serious surgical operation and they're feeling ill, they'll tell you they're "just a bit under the weather"; and if they see a really boring film, they'll say it "wasn't bad".

There are also extreme cases, such as the artillery officer who lost his leg in the Battle of Waterloo and who asked his sergeant if he could "kindly look for the leg"; or the English gentleman who was involved in a car accident and who lost his right hand. On being asked how he felt, he replied, "Oh, I mustn't grumble. At least I've got the use of my left hand."

Class

Americans like to think that everyone in America is equal; and that anyone can live the American dream. This is partly true. Just look at their presidents and politicians: one president was a Hollywood actor (Ronald Reagan); and the current governor of California is an ex-weightlifter (Arnold Schwa rzenegger). In theory, there's no such thing as a class system in America. Just about everyone likes to think they are middle class, and that even a plumber can have a son who's a university professor.

However, this is a myth, and Americans have their own upper classes (the Kennedys and the Vanderbilts), and lower classes (white trash, hillbillies, and marginalised groups). In Britain,`the class system is much more evident. And people are proud of the class they belong to, each group having its own accent, way of dressing, and residential zone.

Tradition

Americans like tradition, but they aren't sentimental about it. After all, they can go to Europe for things like that. They are much more practical, and admire things for their functionality. If it isn't serving any practical purpose, it doesn't deserve to exist, and it's time to pull it down.

In Britain, things are different, and for the Brits, tradition represents continuity, and it must be preserved at all costs. In the past they have fought to defend the pound, red telephone boxes, the pint, and imperial measurements (miles, feet, inches, etc). It's not practical, but it's British. And this is why judges still wear 18[1]h-century wigs, and there are Lords and Ladies. Sense of Humour

American humour is based entirely on jokes about lawyers. In American society this profession is hated, and there are literally thousands of lawyerjokes. Here's a typical one:

A funeral procession is passing byand Ws being led by a man walking

beside a lion. Behind the coffin there is a line of around 200 people. A bystander asks "Hey; whaYs going on?"

And the guy at the front says, "My lion ate my lawyer, and this is the lawyer's funeral." "Hey," saysthe bystander, "Could I borrow your, lion. I've got a lawyer I'd like to 1ave eaten."

Sorry, "says the man, pointing to the 200 people behind the coffin. 'You'll have to get to *the end of the line - those guys are waiting for the same thing."*

The British sense of humour is more sophisticated. It's based on sarcasm, irony and misunderstandings. Here's an example of this type of humour from a popular British comedy series called "Blackadder". In this scene, Blackadder, an aristocrat at the court of King George III, is talking to the prince of England. This English prince isn't very clever, unlike our current ones. Prince: Some fellow said that I had the wit and sophistication of a donkey.

Blackadder: Oh, an absurd suggestion, sir.

Prince: You're right, it is absurd.

Blackadder: Unless, of course, it was a particularly stupid donkey.