

英 语 文 化 选 读

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英语文化选读

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Selected Readings

On

English Culture



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Section B Is This Chinese Candor or a Cultural Handicap?

By Vida Zhang Fargis

Directions: Read the following text and mark

Y (for Yes) if the statement agrees with the information given in the text;

N (for No) if the statement contradicts the information given in the text;

NG (for Not Given) if the information is not given in the text.

Pam, a good friend of mine recently came back to the Bay Area from Taiwan with her family. She told me that her daughter had a tough time in Taiwan.

"How come?" I asked.

"People are too direct. In Taiwan they tell her right in front of her face that she's fat and needs to lose weight," Pam said.

"Oh no. Don't say that..." I said, shaking head with desperation. Regrettably, I know just what she means.

"My family said this to her. My friends used this language too. People I didn't even know on the street told her she was fat. It's so terrible, rude and cruel to use such language to a nine year-old girl. Why do they do that? I hate it, hate it, hate it!" Pam said with anger and desperation.

I TOTALLY understand you Pam. I share your pain as a mother. I too struggle as someone who lives between two cultures.

In my own life I've experienced similar rudeness with my older five-year old daughter after we moved to Hong Kong from San Francisco.

Story one:

A few days in a row, my daughter came home saying the Chinese words for "big fat" (Da Pang Zi). I asked her where she learned these words.

"People on the playground said I am a Da Pang Zi," she told me.

Story two:

My babysitter told me that some people had said that my younger daughter is prettier than my older one on the playground right in front of my older daughter.

"Mom, do you think Siena (my younger daughter) is really prettier than me?" My older daughter asked me with a sad tone.

Needless to say, I am mad and angry with these oafs who choose their words so carelessly. Sometimes I do feel hopeless, trying to protect my children from this sort of Chinese bluntness in the vast world of Greater China.

"My mom said people do this out of good will. They hope you will look better. They mean nothing harmful," my friend Pam said.

As a matter of fact, these people have hurt Pam, me and our daughters with something they are not even aware of. They may not know any better, but they are abusive, nonetheless.

“It seems people there (Taiwan) have less tolerance of other people’s differences. I feel like we have a different sense of what is right and what is wrong,” Pam said.

I think that’s absolutely true. My perceptions of what is acceptable have been fundamentally altered by my time outside of Greater China. With regards to my daughter’s case it is simply ridiculous for anyone to use the word “fat”. She’s tall for her age and looks as if she’s seven when she is in fact only five. She seems big, particularly compared to most of the Chinese kids who are relatively smaller physically. Needless to say she is gorgeous in her own way, just as my younger daughter is. Each has their own unique beautiful features and comparing on relative beauty is a waste of oxygen.

I am speaking for myself and for my friend Pam. We were hurt in a manner, which is nearly impossible to describe as a mother. Accordingly, I’d like to call for a cultural moratorium on adults using derogatory language when they speak to children. It’s not only Chinese who do this of course. But we can collectively ask ourselves for a higher standard of mutual support and discretion.

I would like to see all the relevant media organs: TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, web ports, etc., in Greater China to ask for a higher standard from our civilization. The message should be:

“No one has the right to put a child down. Stop using such language!”

People like Pam and myself grew up within a culture where we hear people said things like this all the time, but somehow, we learned how to deal with it as adults. We’re familiar with it and we can filter out such put-down. We have our own immunization system to protect us from idiotic words like this. But how can you expect a young child of five or nine to protect herself from it?

(702 words)

1. Pam’s daughter had a good time in Taiwan. _____
2. From the passage we can infer that the writer has lived in different regions of China and America. _____
3. The babysitter said that the writer’s younger daughter is prettier than her older daughter. _____
4. Both Pam and the writer are Chinese descendents. _____
5. It is very impolite and even rude to tell an American that he or she is fat. _____

Part 4 Reading Comprehension Test

Passage 1

Directions: Read the following passage. Choose the best answer to each question.

The English, as a race, have the reputation of being very different from all other nationalities, including their closest neighbours, the French, Belgians and Dutch. It is claimed that living on an island separated from the rest of Europe has much to do with it. Whatever the reasons, it may be fairly stated that the Englishman has developed many attitudes and habits which distinguish him from other nationalities.

Broadly speaking, the Englishman is a quiet, shy, reserved person who is fully relaxed only among people he knows well. In the presence of strangers or foreigners he often seems inhibited, even embarrassed. You have only to witness a commuter train any morning or evening to see the truth of this. Serious-looking businessmen and women sit reading their newspapers or dozing in a corner; no one speaks. In fact, to do so would seem most unusual.

It is a well-known fact that the English have an obsession with their weather and that, given half a chance, they will talk about it at length. Some people argue that it is because English weather defies forecast and hence is a source of interest and speculation to everyone. This may be so. Certainly Englishmen cannot have much faith in the meteorological experts—the weathermen—who, after promising fine, sunny weather for the following day, are often proved wrong when an anti-cyclone over the Atlantic brings rainy weather to all districts. The man in the street seems to be as accurate—or as inaccurate—as the weathermen in his predictions. This helps to explain the seemingly odd sight of an Englishman leaving home on a bright, sunny, summer morning with a raincoat slung over his arm and an umbrella in his hand. So variable is the weather that by lunchtime it could be pouring.

The overseas visitors may be excused for showing surprise at the number of references to weather that the English make to each other in the course of a single day. Very often conventional greetings are replaced by comments on the weather. “Nice day, isn’t it?” “Beautiful!” may well be heard instead of “Good morning, how are you?” Although the foreigner may consider this exaggerated and comic, it is worthwhile pointing out that it could be used to his advantage. If he wants to start a conversation with an Englishman or woman but is at a loss to know where to begin, he could do well to mention the state of the weather. It is a safe subject which will provoke an answer from even the most reserved of Englishmen.

In many parts of the world it’s quite normal to show openly extremes of enthusiasm, emotion, passion etc., often accompanied by appropriate gestures. The Englishman is somewhat different. Of course, an Englishman feels no less deeply than any other nationality,

but he tends to display his feelings far less. This is reflected in his use of language. For example an Englishman will flatly comment in the great beauty of a young girl "Um, she's all right". The overseas visitor must not be disappointed by this apparent lack of interest and involvement; he must realize that for English, words like "all right", "no bad", and "nice" are very often used as superlatives with the sense of "first-class", "excellent", "beautiful". This special use of language is known as understatement.

(554 words)

- Which of the following would be the most probable reason for the unique character of the Englishman?
 - The geographic isolation
 - The lack of enthusiasm
 - The superiority of the language
 - The uniqueness of the weather
- According to the passage, among whom will the Englishman feel easy?
 - strangers
 - foreigners
 - nodding acquaintances
 - close friends
- Why do the English have such an interest in and speculation on the weather?
 - Because they live on an isolated island.
 - Because they are skeptical about the official weather reports.
 - Because they'd like to express their disappointment at the weather reports.
 - Because they would show their accuracy in forecasting the weather.
- Which of the following words can best convey English's comments on others?
 - extremely emotional
 - openly moderate
 - most reserved
 - most suspicious
- What's the topic of the passage?
 - the characteristics of the English
 - the changeable weather in Britain
 - English—the universal language
 - the understated English



Passage 2

Directions: Read the following passage. Choose the best answer to complete each statement.

Identities and roles refer to conceptions of the self. Am I an individual unit, autonomous, a free agent, ultimately responsible for myself? Or am I first and foremost a member of a group,

weighing choices and actions by how the group will perceive them and be affected by them? Those who see themselves as separate individuals likely come from societies anthropologists call individualist. Those for whom group allegiance is primary usually come from settings anthropologists call collectivist, or communitarian.

In collectivist settings, the following values tend to be privileged: cooperation, filial piety (respect for and deference toward elders), participation in shared progress, reputation of the group and interdependence.

In individualist settings, the following values tend to be privileged: competition, independence, individual achievement, personal growth and fulfillment and self-reliance.

When individualist and communitarian starting points influence those on either side of a conflict, escalation may result. Individualists may see no problem with “no holds barred” confrontation, while communitarian counterparts shrink from bringing dishonor or face-loss to their group by behaving in unseemly ways. Individualists may expect to make agreements with communitarians, and may feel betrayed when the latter indicate that they have to take their understandings back to a larger public or group before they can come to closure. In the end, one should remember that, as with other patterns described, most people are not purely individualist or communitarian. Rather, people tend to have individualist or communitarian starting points, depending on one’s upbringing, experience, and the context of the situation.

(249 words)

6. The last sentence in Paragraph 1 can be best paraphrased as _____.
 - A. group-centered people usually come from what anthropologists call collectivist societies
 - B. anthropologists think collectivists come from group allegiance
 - C. anthropologists think group allegiance is important for collectivist settings
 - D. a member’s choices and actions are primarily decided by a group of people
7. Collectivism-centered people advocate all of the following values except _____.
 - A. cooperation
 - B. respect for elders
 - C. independence
 - D. collective honor
8. Whether one tends to be an individualist or a collectivist depends on _____.
 - A. his or her family background
 - B. his or her experience
 - C. his or her social background
 - D. all of the above
9. The main purpose of this passage is to _____.
 - A. analyze the advantages of individualism and collectivism
 - B. analyze the disadvantages of individualism and collectivism
 - C. compare the similarities between individualism and collectivism
 - D. contrast the differences between individualism and collectivism
10. According to the passage the writer’s attitude toward collectivism is _____.
 - A. positive
 - B. neutral
 - C. negative
 - D. biased

Passage 3

Directions: Fill in each blank with the most suitable word from the passage.

In fact, in order to understand the real Chinaman and the Chinese civilisation, a man must be deep, broad and simple, for the three characteristics of the Chinese character and the Chinese civilisation are: depth, broadness and simplicity.

The American people, I may be permitted to say here, find it difficult to understand the real Chinaman and the Chinese civilisation, because the American people, as a rule, are broad, simple, but not deep. The English cannot understand the real Chinaman and Chinese civilisation because the English, as a rule, are deep, simple, but not broad. The Germans again cannot understand the real Chinaman and the Chinese civilisation because the Germans, especially the educated Germans, as a rule, are deep, broad, but not simple. The French, —well the French are the people, it seems to me, who can understand and has understood the real Chinaman and the Chinese civilisation best. The French, it is true, have not the depth of nature of the Germans nor the broadness of mind of the Americans nor the simplicity of mind of the English, —but the French, the French people have to a preeminent degree a quality of mind such as all the people I have mentioned above as a rule, have not, —a quality of mind which, above all things, is necessary in order to understand the real Chinaman and the Chinese civilisation; a quality of mind viz: *delicacy*. For, in addition to the three characteristics of the real Chinaman and Chinese civilisation which I have already mentioned, I must here add one more, and that the chief characteristic, namely delicacy; delicacy to a preeminent degree such as you will find nowhere else except perhaps among the ancient Greeks and their civilisation.

It will be seen from what I have said above that the American people if they will study the Chinese civilisation, will get depth; the English, broadness; and the Germans, simplicity; and all of them, Americans, English and Germans by the study of the Chinese civilisation, of Chinese books and literature, will get a quality of mind which, I take the liberty of saying here that it seems to me, they all of them, as a rule, have not to a preeminent degree, namely, *delicacy*. The French people finally, by the study of the Chinese civilisation, will get all, —depth, broadness, simplicity and a still finer delicacy than the delicacy which they now have. Thus the study of the Chinese civilisation, of Chinese books and literature will, I believe, be of benefit to all the people of Europe and America.

(428 words, by Ku Hung-ming, 1915)

According to the writer, it's difficult for westerners to understand Chinaman and Chinese civilisation in that they don't have the 11. _____ of Chinese except French. Besides, the Americans lack the 12. _____ of the Chinese while the English lack the 13. _____, and the German lack the 14. _____. Among the four characteristics of the Chinaman, 15. _____ is regarded as the most important one.

Passage 4

Directions: Read the following passage. Choose the best answer to each question or to complete each statement.

The Oxford Dictionary defines culture shock as *disorientation experienced when suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture or way of life*. Culture shock can be characterised by periods of frustration, adjustment, and even depression. Nearly everyone, regardless of maturity, disposition, previous experience abroad, or knowledge of the country in which they will be living, experiences some degree of culture shock when initially moving to a new country. Rather like the grieving process, there are stages that we go through.

Step 1: The Honeymoon Stage

When you first arrive in a new culture, differences are intriguing and you may feel excited, stimulated and curious. Like any new experience, there's a feeling of euphoria when you first arrive and you're in awe of the differences you see and experience. You feel excited, stimulated, enriched. During this stage, you still feel close to everything familiar back home.

Step 2: The Distress Stage

A little later, differences create an impact. Everything you're experiencing no longer feels new; in fact, it's starting to get you down. You feel confused, isolated or inadequate and realise that your familiar support systems (e.g. family and friends) are not easily accessible.

Step 3: Re-integration Stage

During this stage, you start winging about your new home. You dislike the culture, the language, the food. You reject it as inferior. You may even develop some prejudices towards the new culture. You're angry, frustrated and even feel hostile to those around you. You wonder why you made the decision to change. You start to idealise life "back home" and compare your current culture to what is familiar. Don't worry. This is absolutely normal and a healthy reaction—it means you're adjusting. You are reconnecting with what you value about yourself and your own culture.

Step 4: Autonomy Stage

This is the first stage in acceptance. Sometimes called the *emergence* stage when you start to come out of the 'fog' and finally begin to feel like yourself again. You start to accept the differences and feel like you can begin to live with them. You feel more confident and better able to cope with any problems that may arise based on your growing experience. You no longer feel isolated and instead you're able to look at the world around you and appreciate where you are.

Step 5: Independence Stage

You are yourself again! You embrace the new culture and see everything in a new, yet realistic light. Things start to become enjoyable. You feel comfortable, confident, able to make decisions based on your own preferences and values. You no longer feel alone and isolated. You understand and appreciate both the differences and similarities of both your own and the new culture. You start to feel at home.

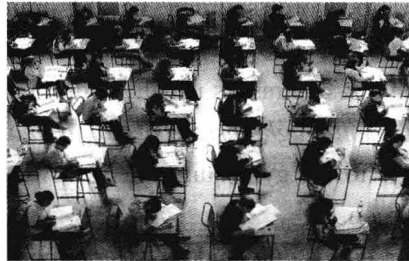
It is important to stress that culture shock is entirely normal, usually unavoidable and not a sign that you have made a mistake or that you won't manage. In fact there are very positive aspects of culture shock. The experience can be a significant learning experience, making you more aware of aspects of your own culture as well as the new culture you have entered. It will give you valuable skills that will serve you in many ways now and in the future.

(536 words, adapted from *Orientated for Success* by M. Barker, 1990)

16. According to the passage, during the culture shock period one may experience all of the following except _____.
A. disappointment B. modification C. inferiority D. depression
17. The word "intriguing" in Line 9 most probably means _____.
A. challenging B. disappointing C. saddening D. terrifying
18. During the _____ stage, you begin to adjust yourself to the new culture.
A. first B. second C. third D. fourth
19. Which of the following statements is true according to the passage?
A. At the honeymoon stage, one usually feels uneasy.
B. At the distress stage, one feels everything around is fresh and stimulating.
C. At the reintegration stage, one likes the new culture and dislikes his own.
D. At the autonomy stage, one has begun to adapt to the new life.
20. What is discussed in this passage?
A. The definition of culture shock B. The five stages of culture shock
C. The positive aspects of culture shock D. All of the above

Unit 2

Education and Examinations



Part 1 Reading Skills

Section A Guessing Unknown Words from the Context II

4. Synonym and Antonym Clues

Synonyms are different words with almost identical or similar meanings. For example, the words “shut” and “close” are synonyms. Antonyms refer to words opposite in meaning, such as “ugly” and “beautiful”, “evil” and “nice”. Synonyms and antonyms are helpful to figure out unknown words from the context. Usually there are signal words helping us identify synonyms, such as “*and*”, “*or*”, “*that is*”, sometimes even a comma. For antonyms, those signal words include “*or*” as well as “*not*”. Here are some examples:

- 1) Jennifer’s neighbors always try to avoid her because she is too loquacious, or talkative.
- 2) The little girl held fast her mother’s sleeve. She clutched her so tightly that she couldn’t leave home at once.
- 3) Recently a new kind of stationary or not mobile telephone was put on the market.

In the first sentence the word “talkative” and “loquacious” have the same meaning. In the second sentence the word “clutch” means “hold” and “fast” refers to “tightly”. In the third one, the word “stationary” is opposite to “mobile”.

5. Comparison and Contrast Clues

Comparison is the act of finding out the similarities between two or more persons or things. Comparison can easily be identified with the help of signal words such as *like, similarly, likewise* etc. For example:

- 1) Like his stubborn father, he is also very pigheaded.”
- 2) Our offers were rejected. Likewise, all their attempts were spurned too.

In the first sentence, the word “like” indicates a comparison between the father and son. We can infer that the son is also stubborn just like his father. So “pigheaded” is close in meaning to “stubborn”. In the second sentence, “likewise” is used to compare “rejected” to “spurned”. Thus, the word “spurned” has the similar meaning to “rejected”.

Contrast is just opposite to comparison in that it emphasizes the differences of two or more things or persons. A contrast is usually indicated by words such as *but, however, yet, on the other hand, while, although, instead of, rather than, contrary to, unlike* etc. For example:

- 1) Mary goes to the gym quite often. However, her roommate Erica only does exercises once in a blue moon.
- 2) He did not do his duty and he was not honest. We should censure him rather than praise him.

As we know, the word “however” is used to introduce contrasting ideas or words. So we can infer that “once in a blue moon” in the first sentence probably means “rarely”, just opposite to “often”. And “censure” in the second sentence is contrary to “praise”, meaning “criticize”.

Section B Practice

Directions: Choose the best word that is closest in meaning to the underlined word or phrase according to the context.

1. Online message boards were soon full of people both applauding and condemning Skenazy’s decision to let her son go it alone.
A. tolerating B. blaming C. polishing D. investigating
2. The successful businessman shows contrast personalities. He is sometimes gregarious, however, at other times he prefers isolation.
A. gorgeous B. purified C. independent D. sociable
3. Their ideal was to combine individual liberty with material equality, a goal that has not yet been realized and that may be as chimerical as transmutation of lead into gold.
A. unrealistic B. indispensable C. historical D. inharmonious

I had assumed that my talent-show fiasco meant that I would never have to play the piano again. But two days later, after school, my mother came out of the kitchen and saw me watching TV.

“Four clock,” she reminded me, as if it were any other day. I was stunned, as though she were asking me to go through the talent-show torture again. I planted myself more squarely in front of the TV.

“Turn off TV,” she called from the kitchen five minutes later. I didn’t budge. And then I decided, I didn’t have to do what mother said anymore. I wasn’t her slave. This wasn’t China. I had listened to her before, and look what happened she was the stupid one.

She came out of the kitchen and stood in the arched entryway of the living room. “Four clock,” she said once again, louder.

“I’m not going to play anymore,” I said nonchalantly. “Why should I? I’m not a genius.”

She stood in front of the TV. I saw that her chest was heaving up and down in an angry way.

“No!” I said, and I now felt stronger, as if my true self had finally emerged. So this was what had been inside me all along.

“No! I won’t!” I screamed. She snapped off the TV, yanked me by the arm and pulled me off the floor. She was frighteningly strong, half pulling, half carrying me towards the piano as I kicked the throw rugs under my feet. She lifted me up onto the hard bench. I was sobbing by now, looking at her bitterly. Her chest was heaving even more and her mouth was open, smiling crazily as if she were pleased that I was crying.

“You want me to be something that I’m not!” I sobbed. “I’ll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!”

“Only two kinds of daughters,” she shouted in Chinese. “Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!”

“Then I wish I weren’t your daughter, I wish you weren’t my mother,” I shouted. As I said these things I got scared. It felt like worms and toads and slimy things crawling out of my chest, but it also felt good, that this awful side of me had surfaced, at last.

“Too late to change this,” my mother said shrilly.

And I could sense her anger rising to its breaking point. I wanted see it spill over. And that’s when I remembered the babies she had lost in China, the ones we never talked about. “Then I wish I’d never been born!” I shouted. “I wish I were dead! Like them.”

It was as if I had said magic words. Alakazam!—her face went blank, her mouth closed, her arms went slack, and she backed out of the room, stunned, as if she were blowing away like a small brown leaf, thin, brittle, lifeless.

It was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her many times, each time asserting my will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn’t get straight A’s. I didn’t become class president. I didn’t get into Stanford. I dropped out of college.

Unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be, I could only be me.

And for all those years we never talked about the disaster at the recital or my terrible declarations afterward at the piano bench. Neither of us talked about it again, as if it were a betrayal that was now unspeakable. So I never found a way to ask her why she had hoped for something so large that failure was inevitable.

And even worse, I never asked her about what frightened me the most: Why had she given up hope?

For after our struggle at the piano, she never mentioned my playing again. The lessons stopped. The lid to the piano was closed shutting out the dust, my misery, and her dreams.

(1,476 words, taken from *The Two Kinds* by Amy Tan)

1. My Debut turned out to be a disaster because I was over-concerned about my appearance. _____
2. The audience pretended that they had heard nothing wrong at all and shouted "Bravo! Bravo! Well done!" to encourage me. _____
3. Waverly was sympathetic to me about my screwing up the piano play in front of the audience. _____
4. By saying "This wasn't China." I meant I didn't want to be obedient to my mother any more like what a Chinese girl would do in China. _____
5. My mother didn't force me to play the piano again after the terrible struggle. _____

Part 4 Reading Comprehension Test

Section A

Directions: Read the following passages. Choose the best answer to each question.

Passage 1

As the twentieth century began, the importance of formal education in the United States increased. The frontier had mostly disappeared and by 1910 most Americans lived in towns and cities. Industrialization and the bureaucratization of economic life combined with a new emphasis upon credentials and expertise to make schooling increasingly important for economic and social mobility. Increasingly, too, schools were viewed as the most important means of integrating immigrants into American society.

The arrival of a great wave of southern and eastern European immigrants at the turn of the century coincided with and contributed to an enormous expansion of formal schooling. By

Passage 2

Sending a child to school in England is a step which many parents do not find easy to take. In theory, at least, the problem is that there are very many choices to make. Let us try to list some of the alternatives between which parents are forced to decide. To begin with, they may ask themselves whether they would like their child to go to a single-sex school or a co-educational school. They may also consider whether he should go to a school which is connected to a particular church or religious group, or whether the school should have no such connections. Another decision is whether the school should be one of the vast majority financed by the state or one of the very small but influential minority of private schools, though this choice is, of course, only available to the small number of those who can pay. Also connected with the question of money is whether the child should go to a boarding school or live at home. Then there is the question of what the child should do at school. Should it be a school whose curriculum lays emphasis, for instance, on necessary skills, such as reading, writing and mathematics, or one which pays more attention to developing the child's personality, morally, emotionally and socially? Finally, with dissatisfaction with conventional education as great as it is in some circles in England and certainly in the USA, the question might even arise in the parents' minds as to whether the child should be compelled to go to school at all. Although in practice, some parents may not think twice about any of these choices and send their children to the only school available in the immediate neighborhood, any parent who is interested enough can insist that as many choices as possible be made open to him, and the system is theoretically supposed to provide them.

(317 words)

6. What makes the decision of English parents to send their children to school very difficult?
- A. Some parents are willing to educate their children by themselves.
 - B. There are too many options for parents to choose from.
 - C. English parents are overly indecisive.
 - D. Schools available to their children are quite limited.
7. The word "co-educational" in Line 5 most probably means _____.
A. boarding B. private C. instructional D. mixed-gender
8. The word "compelled" in Line 18 is closest in meaning to _____.
A. convicted B. evoked C. forced D. motivated
9. Which of the following statements is true?
- A. Many state schools are exclusive to students who are from rich families.
 - B. Britons are quite happy with the quality of traditional education.
 - C. Most parents would choose schools in the neighborhood for their children after careful consideration.
 - D. Most schools in England are sponsored by the State.