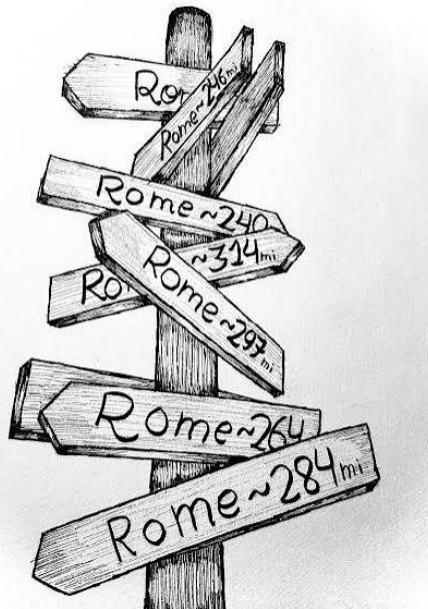


Year 12

English

Unit 4

Do all roads lead to Rome?



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Are all cultures equal?

‘All roads lead to Rome.’

The above proverb has its roots in the centralisation and road-building of the pagan Roman Empire 2,000 years ago. Then all roads did literally lead to Rome.

The origin of the idiom “All roads lead to Rome” is in the historical fact of the extensive road system of the Roman Empire. Rome was at the centre of one of the world’s greatest empires, and to be in a position to dominate it, the Romans built an elaborate system of roads stretching over their vast dominions.

The proverb now means that there are many ways of achieving the same goal.

The idiom “All roads lead to Rome” expresses the idea that several paths, methods, or approaches will all ultimately reach the same point.

It expresses that although individuals may take different approaches or journeys, they are often working toward a common end or result. The phrase highlights flexibility and universality, reassuring that there is no single “correct” way to achieve success or resolution. In a broader sense, it can also imply inevitability, meaning that regardless of the starting point or chosen course, the outcome is already somewhat assured.

The idea that ‘all roads lead to Rome’ is held by many when it comes to faith. Many believe that it doesn’t matter which religion or faith you follow, you will get to heaven in the end.

But this is not the message that Jesus taught. Jesus told us that there is only one way to heaven, through belief in Him, and there is only one path – the narrow path.

The true story of “I Dared to Call Him Father”, which you are studying this term, is the story of the wife of a high-ranking Muslim government official in Pakistan. The story describes the struggle of Bilquis Sheikh as she was drawn into the light of Christ, and the persecution that followed after rejecting the religious side of her cultural tradition. Other books telling stories of people who discovered the narrow path are ‘The God who answers by Fire’ (Year 9) and ‘Christ’s Witchdoctor’ (Year 10). If you missed reading these in earlier years, ask your teacher to access them for you from the Beacon Media website.

The idea that ‘all roads lead to Rome’ has crept into society and government.

When it comes to immigration, should a government allow endless immigration of any person from any country in the world, even from countries that have different ideologies and values to our own?

If all religions are equal, then it doesn’t matter. But are they?

Consider societies based on Judaeo-Christian values compared with those based on Sharia law for example. Consider countries where governments suppress women’s rights forcing

them to dress in black, covering themselves from head to foot so that only their eyes can be seen. Some countries still practice forced child marriages.

Are we prepared to allow these cultures to bring these practices with them and continue practicing them?

Religion is part of culture. So are food, dress, art and music. When it comes to these other aspects of culture, we should welcome and learn from people from other cultures. Who doesn't like a delicious new and exciting culinary sensation? But what about practices, often having roots in religions other than Christianity? What about practices that we would see as opposed to Biblical values?

Multiculturalism is the view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political culture.

Multiculturalism addresses cultural pluralism in modern democracies. Instead of assimilating different cultures into a unified national culture, multiculturalism promotes maintaining particular identities within the larger society. (*Britannica*)

In terms of immigration, how fair is it to force citizens of the host country to accept ALL aspects of a newcomer's culture? For example, in a Judeo-Christian culture, would a 5 am 'call to prayer' over a loud speaker from a mosque be acceptable?

Consider these cultural practices still observed today:

Foot Binding

While no longer widely practiced, foot binding still lingers in some rural pockets of China, and its scars are very much alive in older generations. This centuries-old tradition involved tightly binding the feet of young girls to change their shape, creating what was once considered a symbol of beauty and status

Bullfighting Spain

Bullfighting is often described as a dance, an art form—but it ends in blood. In this spectacle, matadors face off against bulls, taunting them, injuring them, and finally killing them in front of cheering crowds. In Spain, it's still considered a proud tradition, taught from a young age and protected as part of the culture.

Trokosi - West Africa

In parts of Ghana, Togo, and Benin, there's a deeply disturbing ritual called trokosi, where young girls are sent to live in shrines as offerings to atone for the sins of family members. These girls, some as young as seven, live in servitude for years—or even their entire lives.

Honour killing

In some cultures, a family's "honour" is considered more valuable than a person's life. Honour killings are acts of murder—often of women—committed by relatives who believe the victim has brought shame to the family. This could be for something as simple as refusing an arranged marriage or speaking to the wrong person.

While illegal in most countries, honour killings still occur in parts of the Middle East, South Asia, and even among immigrant communities in the West. The worst part? They're often not prosecuted or are even condoned by local communities. The idea that someone's life is worth less than a reputation is terrifying. And it shows how deeply rooted toxic beliefs can be.

Dog meat festivals China

The Yulin Dog Meat Festival in China is infamous for the cruelty involved—thousands of dogs are slaughtered and consumed over several days. Many of these dogs are stolen pets, kept in cages, and brutally killed.

Neck elongation Myanmar and Thailand

Among the Kayan people in Myanmar and parts of Thailand, some women wear brass neck rings from childhood that gradually push down their collarbones, giving the appearance of an elongated neck. It's seen as a symbol of beauty and cultural identity. But it's not without cost. The rings can deform the body and make it difficult to remove them later in life.

Whipping of boys (Some African tribes)

In certain rites of passage, boys are subjected to brutal whippings to prove their strength or manhood. These ceremonies are often public, with families watching—and cheering—while boys bleed. Scars are worn like badges of honour, but the psychological trauma runs deep. The idea is to toughen them up for adulthood, but it often teaches that pain equals pride. The line between tradition and abuse gets blurry very fast. There's got to be a better way to raise confident, resilient men than beating the sensitivity out of them.

<https://wiseoldowl.net/15-disturbing-traditions-still-alive-today-youll-question-humanity/>

And from the past ...

Cannibalism in Fiji

Death by 'pointing the bone' in Australian Aboriginal culture

Some argue that multiculturalism may erode the common good by prioritizing specific groups over and above the general population. Others suggest certain minority groups may require more than just recognition, such as special group rights, to maintain their distinct identities.

Questions

1. Fiji is a society of mainly two cultures: iTaukei and Indian. Because of proximity to, and influence of Australia and New Zealand, and the influence of early missionaries, Fijians have taken on aspects of Western well. In your opinion, how has Fijian culture changed and benefited from influence of other countries?
2. If you were Prime Minister, faced with many people from all around the world wanting to come and live in Fiji, what policy would you promote regarding immigration?
3. What are the positives and negatives of immigration?
4. What could a potential problem be with governments believing that “all roads lead to Rome?”

Culture Clash

Definition: a conflict arising from the interaction of people with different cultural values

Culture clash happens when people from different backgrounds bump into each other with completely different rulebooks. Sometimes it shows up as awkward silence when someone’s directness feels rude, or when a neighbourhood event accidentally ignores a tradition that matters deeply to half the people there.

You’ll find it in boardrooms, classrooms, online comment sections, anywhere expectations collide hard enough to spark confusion or actual conflict. The root cause? Rarely malice. More often it’s two groups following different scripts without realizing the other side is doing the same thing.

These clashes surface in familiar places:

Workplace tension — Your manager’s casual “how was your weekend?” feels invasive if you’re from a culture that keeps work and personal life in separate boxes.

Immigrant integration — Newcomers face pushback when host country norms around punctuality or child discipline contradict values they’ve held for generations.

Product naming disasters — A brand name that sounds smart in one language becomes offensive or ridiculous in another.

Nonverbal confusion — Eye contact means respect in some cultures, defiance in others. Routine conversations turn into distrust without anyone understanding why.

<https://lifebred.org/culture-clash/>

Questions

1. What is culture clash?
2. The author says that 'culture clash' rarely comes out of malice. What does he mean by this? How does culture clash happen?
3. Give two examples of how different cultures may see things differently.
4. 'Fiji time' is part of the Fijian culture. What culture clash problem might occur when a Fijian takes on paid employment in a country that observes strict punctuality?
5. Japanese people on holiday in Fiji expect everything 'running like clockwork', just like home. What problems might the Japanese encounter in Fiji?
6. How should the Japanese person and the Fijian respond in each of the above two situations?

Cultural Traits

What Is a Cultural Trait?

A cultural trait refers to a characteristic, belief, or behaviour that is shared by a particular group of people and is passed down through generations. These traits shape how individuals within a culture interact, think, and express themselves. Unlike biological traits, cultural traits are learned and can vary significantly between different societies. They include everything from language and religion to social norms and values.

Cultural traits are essential for understanding diversity and fostering cross-cultural communication. They help explain why people from different backgrounds may have different expectations, behaviours, and attitudes. For example, in some cultures, it's common to greet others with a handshake, while in others, a bow or kiss on the cheek is more appropriate.

Examples of Cultural Traits Around the World

Cultural traits vary widely across the globe, reflecting unique historical, geographical, and social influences. Here are some notable examples:

Japan: Punctuality is highly valued, and arriving late to an appointment is considered rude. Public transportation is often used for short distances, and personal space is respected.

Mexico: Family is central to social life, and extended family gatherings are common. Food plays a significant role in celebrations, and meals are often shared with large groups.

Germany: Direct communication is the norm, and people often express opinions openly. Work-life balance is important, and employees may take frequent breaks.

India: Hierarchy is deeply ingrained, with respect for elders and authority figures. Guest hospitality is a strong cultural value, and meals are often served with elaborate rituals.

Types of Cultural Traits

Cultural traits can be categorized into several types, each influencing different aspects of life. Here's a breakdown:

Type	Description	Example
Social Norms	Expected behaviours and practices within a society.	Wearing formal attire to a wedding in many cultures.
Values	Beliefs about what is important or desirable.	Honesty and integrity as core values in some cultures.
Language	Communication methods and expressions.	Using polite phrases like "please" and "thank you" in many societies.
Religion	Spiritual beliefs and practices.	Observing Ramadan with fasting and prayer in Muslim cultures.

Why Are Cultural Traits Important?

Understanding cultural traits is crucial for several reasons. First, it helps in cross-cultural communication, ensuring that interactions are respectful and effective. Second, it promotes global awareness, helping individuals appreciate diversity and avoid stereotypes. Finally, it aids in business and diplomacy, as recognizing cultural differences can prevent misunderstandings and foster cooperation.

For example, in business settings, being aware of cultural traits can help managers adapt leadership styles to different teams, leading to better productivity and morale.

How to Identify Cultural Traits

Identifying cultural traits involves observing and analyzing behaviours, beliefs, and practices within a society. Here's a simple guide:

Research: Study historical, geographical, and social influences on a culture.

Observe: Pay attention to daily behaviours, such as greetings, dining habits, and social interactions.

Ask Questions: Engage with locals to understand their perspectives and values.

Compare: Use cultural frameworks to analyze similarities and differences between groups.

For instance, if you're in a new country, notice how people greet each other, whether they eat with utensils or by hand, and how they express emotions in public.

Conclusion

Cultural traits are the building blocks of human societies, shaping how people live, work, and interact. By understanding these traits, we can foster greater respect, empathy, and cooperation across cultures. Whether you're traveling, working internationally, or simply learning about the world, recognizing cultural traits can enrich your experiences and deepen your understanding of diversity.

<https://completeera.com/what-is-a-cultural-trait-definitions-and-examples-from-around-the-world/>

Questions

1. Compare cultural traits of two nationalities other than Japanese and Fijian.
2. How can misunderstandings be overcome?
3. If you were going on a holiday to Germany, outline the research you should do before you go, to give you a better understanding of the culture.



Biography: Hudson Taylor

Taylor was known for his zeal for evangelism and for mimicking Chinese culture. He adopted wearing native Chinese clothing even though this was very rare among missionaries of that time. Under his leadership, the CIM was singularly non-denominational and accepted members from all Protestant groups, including individuals from the working class and single women as well as multinational recruits. Historian Ruth Tucker summarizes the theme of his life: "No other missionary in the nineteen centuries since the Apostle



Paul has had a wider vision and has carried out a more systematized plan of evangelizing a broad geographical area than Hudson Taylor."

Early Life and Call to Missions

Hudson Taylor was born in Barnsley, England, to a devout Methodist family. From a young age, Taylor exhibited a passion for the Gospel. He was raised in an environment where Christian teachings were emphasized, and his personal commitment to Christ deepened as a teenager. It was during this period that he felt a calling to become a missionary.

Though the Church of England had some missionary presence in China, the vast majority of Christian efforts were focused on coastal cities, with little outreach to the remote, rural, and inland regions. Taylor's early conviction was that China's interior—where the Gospel had not yet been proclaimed—was an unclaimed mission field that deserved attention.

The Challenge in China

China, during the mid-19th century, was a land of great complexity and intrigue. A vast empire with a rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted traditions, it was largely closed off to foreign influences, especially by the imperial Qing dynasty. Missionaries who ventured into the country often faced considerable obstacles, including resistance from the Chinese authorities, cultural misunderstandings, and, at times, real hostility.

In 1853, Taylor sailed to China, landing in Shanghai. From the beginning, he felt compelled to immerse himself deeply in Chinese culture, language, and traditions. Unlike many missionaries who clung to Western customs, Taylor adopted Chinese dress, grew his hair and plaited it in Chinese pigtail fashion, learned the language, and sought to live among the people he served. This was an unconventional and bold approach at the time, as many missionaries had assumed a more colonial, Westernized way of life that distanced them from the local people.

China Inland Mission: A Revolutionary Approach

In 1865, Hudson Taylor founded China Inland Mission (CIM), a mission organization focused on spreading the Christian message to the unreached people living in China's interior. At the time, many mission groups were concentrated on the coastal cities and other urban areas where foreign influence was easier to maintain. Taylor's vision was radically different. He recognized that China's vast interior—home to millions of people—remained largely untouched by the Gospel.

Taylor's vision for CIM was not only to plant churches and evangelize, but also to establish a fully indigenous church in China. He believed in training Chinese leaders who could eventually lead their fellow countrymen to Christ, thus ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Church in China. This strategy resulted in many Chinese Christians being raised up as leaders within the church and contributing to the growth of Christianity across China.

Personal Challenges and Perseverance

Taylor's life was marked by personal struggles and hardships. He faced financial difficulties, illness, and the sorrow of losing family members. His first wife, Maria, passed away after a long battle with illness in 1870, and several of their children also died in infancy. Yet despite these profound losses, Taylor never wavered.

In 1875, he returned to England after an extended period of missionary service in China, where he was able to raise support for the growing work of CIM. During this time, he also met and married his second wife, Jennie Faulding, who would join him in his ministry.

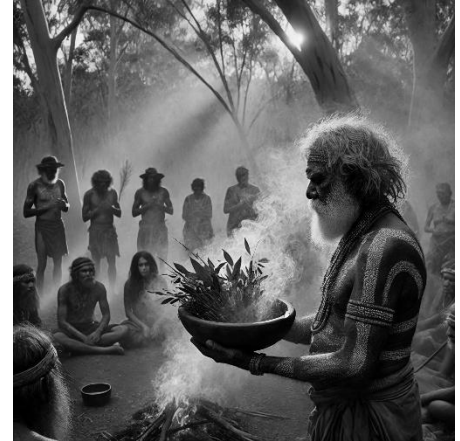
Taylor's greatest personal challenge came in 1891 when he learned of the Boxer Rebellion in China—a violent anti-foreign movement that threatened the lives of all Western missionaries in the country. Despite the dangers, Taylor continued to advocate for the importance of sharing the Gospel in the interior regions, even in the face of adversity.

Hudson Taylor Activities

1. Make a summary of the life of Hudson Taylor.
2. Explain how he overcame the cultural barrier and was more successful than previous missionaries to China

Australian Aboriginal Cultural Traditions in Contemporary Culture

The Australian Aboriginal smoking ceremony is an ancient and contemporary custom among some Aboriginal Australians that involves smouldering native plants to produce smoke. This herbal smoke is believed to have both spiritual and physical cleansing properties, as well as the ability to ward off bad spirits. In traditional, spiritual culture, smoking ceremonies have been performed following either childbirth or initiation rites involving circumcision. In contemporary culture, smoking ceremonies are sometimes held to mark the opening of a new hospital, or the opening of the Australian parliament at the beginning of the year.



A 'Welcome to Country' is an acknowledgement given by a Traditional Custodian to welcome visitors to their Country. A smoking ceremony is a separate ritual with its own purpose and process. Both can occur at the same event. (Wikipedia)

Article 1

Purpose of Australian Aboriginal Smoking Ceremonies

Smoking ceremonies have been performed by some Aboriginal Peoples for thousands of years to cleanse people and places of bad spirits and to treat sickness. These ceremonies encourage good health and wellbeing through connection to culture and the health benefits of traditional Aboriginal medicine. They are regarded as an important part of connecting people to Country and keeping them safe from the dangerous powers of the spiritual beings residing in the land and waters.

These ceremonies play several roles in some Indigenous communities. They are used to connect with ancestors and the spiritual realm, seeking protection. Socially, they are integral to community events, often marking the commencement of significant gatherings or celebrations.

Cleansing ceremonies

Cleansing ceremonies are perhaps the most widely recognised form of smoking ceremonies. They involve using smoke to purify a space, object, or person, removing bad spirits or negative energy. This practice is commonly seen at the commencement of significant events, ensuring that participants are spiritually clean and that the event is conducted in a safe and protected environment.

Significance of 'Country' in Aboriginal Cultures

Country as a living entity

In some Aboriginal cultures, 'Country' is believed to have places where ancestral beings reside. The interconnectedness of the ancestral past and the present is expressed in these places and in the ancestral affiliations with animals and plants and features in the landscape.

Ceremonies as acts of respect

Smoking ceremonies are acts of respect and care for Country. They acknowledge the land's significance and seek to maintain the balance and harmony of the natural and spiritual world.

Role of ceremonies in maintaining connection to Country

Reaffirming ties to the land

Through smoking ceremonies, some Indigenous Peoples reaffirm their ancestral ties to the land and their role as its custodians. These ceremonies are often part of rituals that mark significant life events, ensuring that these moments are grounded in the context of peoples' relationship with Country.

Cleansing and protecting the land

The act of producing smoke is seen to cleanse and protect the land, an expression of stewardship and care for the environment.

<https://www.ngarrngga.org/curriculum/understanding-smoking-ceremonies>

Article 2

Acknowledgements of 'country' have become a familiar part of the daily and weekly routines of Australian people. At the start of a school class, university lecture, work meeting, or public event, silence falls over the crowd and they are reminded that the land on which they live was stolen by British colonists. The wording might vary, but it often goes like this:

'We begin today by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.'

The sermon has become part and parcel of everyday life. There is no denying that the British parked their ships, committed atrocities, and laid dubious claims to land that did not belong to them. However, incessantly reinforcing the notion that people centuries removed from these events – families, newlyweds, immigrants – somehow do not have a right to their own property only serves to hinder the country's progress.

Australian businesses routinely employ Indigenous organisations to perform Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies at professional meetings. The event involves an Aboriginal Elder attending corporate offices to ‘officially’ welcome the company to the land. The smoking ceremonies, which can cost in the thousands, include the expulsion of bad spirits from the office space.

The audience – more often than not composed entirely of non-Aboriginal Australians and immigrants – watch on like atheists at church, bowing their heads in deference and allowing the burning sticks to wash away their ancestral guilt. It’s truly a bizarre occurrence. These ritual practices have become so *ubiquitous* that they can sometimes be heard many times in the same day, even multiple times in a single meeting. They are present on most corporate websites and are even printed onto supermarket receipts.

A plane lands at its destination: *‘We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we fly.’*

A football team is playing: *‘We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we play.’*

A CEO presents the finance update: *‘We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we sell homewares.’*

These constant reminders that non-Aboriginal Australians reside on stolen land and must pay respect to people they don’t know and will probably never meet, have become a continuous source of guilt-tripping. Respect is something that should be from the heart, not something you can conjure through political incantation. The rhetoric concerning Welcome to Country practices often claims that the protocol has been in use for tens of thousands of years, serving as a means for Aboriginal communities to offer safe passage to foreign tribes on their ancestral lands. However, there exists limited concrete evidence supporting the assertion that the tradition dates back further than a few decades, and the idea that it was universally practised is implausible.

Many Australians are in disagreement or are sceptical. Even Aboriginal communities are divided on the topic. Many leaders have come out against the events – including Indigenous Australian Senator, Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, who labelled the practice ‘divisive’. The dogmatic approach towards these cultural narratives has pervaded even the highest levels of government. The Australian Government Style Manual, the authoritative resource for government content, also widely used by private publishers, includes a chapter on correct language usage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. The advice offered by the government is a political correctness minefield that asserts phrases like ‘Indigenous Australians’ and ‘Australian Indigenous peoples’ can be discriminatory and offensive. It also includes advice like: Make sure to:

- Use empowering, strengths-based language.

- Tell positive stories.
- Emphasise ongoing connections to community, culture and country.

Aboriginal people have excelled to the highest ranks of our society in politics, sport, entertainment and academia despite the challenges they face. They do not need words of acknowledgement to legitimise them; they do not need censorship to protect them. While the majority of Australians genuinely support and respect Aboriginal people and culture, the current climate of virtue signalling has grown *untenable*, stifling free speech, and discouraging open and honest dialogue. It is imperative to move beyond symbolic gestures and take a more balanced, sensible approach to addressing historical and contemporary challenges. The country's strength has always been its ability to adapt and evolve, and by moving beyond superficial acknowledgements and politically correct language, Australia can regain common sense in its workplaces, public events and government affairs.

<https://www.spectator.com.au/2023/09/acknowledgements-of-country-smoking-ceremonies-and-australias-austerity-problem/>

Questions

1. What is an Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony?
2. What is 'welcome to Country'?
3. Compare the first article with the second article. What is the difference in tone between the two?
4. Aboriginal smoking ceremonies and 'welcome to Country' acknowledgments are now taking place outside of Aboriginal communities, providing a ceremonial opening to all kinds of Australian events. Make a list of places where the general public might experience:
 - a) a smoking ceremony
 - b) a 'welcome to Country'
5. Do you think that these Aboriginal traditions should be part of the events attended by all Australian? Give reason.
6. 'The audience – more often than not composed entirely of non-Aboriginal Australians and immigrants – watch on like atheists at church, bowing their heads in deference and allowing the burning sticks to wash away their ancestral guilt.'

Explain in your own words the meaning of this statement in the second article.

7. What does the author of the second article mean by the 'welcome to Country' ceremony being a source of continuous 'guilt-tripping' for non-Aboriginal Australian.
8. Give the dictionary meanings of all the word 'untenable' in the last paragraph.
9. Do these two ceremonies conflict with the Biblical worldview? Give reason.

Escaping Kabul

Afghan Women's Cycling team escape Afghanistan

Report by Four Corners - Australian Broadcasting Commission, June 15 2026

This is the dramatic story of a secret effort to get members of a women's cycling community out of Afghanistan.



The Afghan cyclists who fled to pursue their Olympic dreams

In August 2021, the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan's capital Kabul after 20 years of war. Any hopes of emancipation for the Afghan people were abruptly dashed, giving way to a systemic crackdown. One of the first things they did was ban women from playing any sport, putting female athletes in danger.

Women and athletes became particular targets, accused of embodying "deviant" practices. Among them was the Afghan women's cycling team. Founded in 2010 and set to compete internationally, it found itself under threat. In a society governed by a strict interpretation of Islamic law, women's cycling was once again banned, considered a source of dishonour – with transgressions punishable by death.

Afghanistan's female cycling team knew they were in immediate danger. The Taliban considered the all-female athletes—as infidels who violated the Quran, because the clothes they wore to engage in sports allowed men to see the shape of their bodies.

But with the help of a former World Champion, an Israeli-Canadian philanthropist, five young women from the national cycling team managed to escape to a town in northern Italy. Some of them are now hoping to become the first cyclists to ever represent Afghanistan at the Olympics.

One of the young women, Reihana, rode through waves of dust and dread, training her mind on the coming race instead of the nearing Taliban. Her drive to compete won out over fear. She finished the ride and went home to the house she shared with her parents, older brother, James, and little sister, Hania. She fell asleep in her room, surrounded by trophies, medals, and ribbons.

The next morning, her uncle called with a warning: The Taliban were coming.

“Take nothing—just run,” her uncle said. “If they find you, they will kill you!”

Reihana darted around her room, filling her arms with papers that identified her as an athlete. In the backyard, she set them on fire and watched her identity burn. Years of dreams and victories vanished in a plume of smoke.

Her father gathered documents while her mother packed water and snacks. They would drive four hours to Kabul, where they could stay with family and try to catch a flight out of the country. Some of their treasured possessions—bicycles, snowboards, trophies—would identify them as infidels and put their lives in danger. Reihana’s heart ached to leave her bike. Would she ever see it again? There wasn’t much time to wonder.

Taking nothing more than a backpack each, the family of five piled into the car and sped towards the airport, past trucks full of Talib soldiers streaming in. Fighters, dusty from battle, rode in pairs on motorbikes, the passengers carrying rocket-propelled grenades slung over their shoulders.

Through the car window, she scanned her city for any sign of resistance. Where were the Afghan soldiers? Where were the police? As they drove past the police station, she saw that the Afghan flag, with its stripes of black and red and green, no longer flew over the building. In its place was the black-and-white Taliban flag. It is over, she thought. It is finished.

With formal evacuation routes closing, a group of international cycling officials, diplomats and humanitarian workers began building a high-risk escape plan for the girls across Afghanistan's borders. Unable to escape from the Kabul airport, humanitarians across the globe worked together to carry out this dramatic and complex operation, which brought the cyclists from Afghanistan to Europe via Tajikistan and Albania.

A regular public passenger bus was organised to transport the girls from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif in the north. Fake passports had been arranged through Italy, (because the Taliban were no longer issuing passports). The bus accommodated ordinary people as well as the athletes, to make it look like a regular transport bus. The plan was to cross the border and escape through Tajikistan. However, when they reached Mazar-e-Sharif, the group were detained and put into a holding house, but after a few days, by bribing the officials, they were released and told that they must return to Kabul.

The bus set off with its passengers making a direct line south towards Kabul, but once they believed they were far enough away from Mazar-e-Sharif, they made a direct turn to the west and headed for Turkmenistan, which they believed they could use as a transit country, before going on to Albania then Italy. The problem was, the passports were still at Mazar-e-Sharif. Taking a large sum of money to use as a bribe, one very brave individual drove back to Mazar-e-Sharif to retrieve the passports.

The problem was, officials at Turkmenistan only gave them a certain number of hours to be in their country. It was a race against time, but the brave individual turned up with the passports just in time. The passports however presented a problem because one official recognised them as being fake. Handing over another large sum of money, and trying to appeal to whatever human kindness there might have been in the official, it was explained that if these passengers returned to Kabul they would be executed.

Miraculously the official allowed them to board a plane to Albania, and from Albania they flew to Italy. The five athlete girls were given a safe place to live – some in Canada and some in Switzerland. But they will never be able to see their families again. The girls have plans to compete in the next Olympics.

Questions

1. Who is the Taliban and when did they take over Afghanistan? (for you to research)
2. Why did the Taliban object to women cyclists?
3. How would you describe the women athletes in terms of character?
4. Why couldn't they escape the country by plane?
5. Who assisted the girls in the dramatic escape plan?
6. Outline the steps of the plan.
7. What went wrong?
8. How were the problems overcome?
9. Draw a map of their escape route. List all the countries involved in their escape.
10. Where are the girls living now and what are their plans for the future?

Persecution in Iran

Article 1

Report from Iranian Christians International

At Iranian Christians International (ICI), we regularly hear firsthand what persecution truly looks like – not from history books, but from the voices of believers who live it daily. In Iran, the Christian community is divided into two groups by the Islamic Theocratic Regime:

- Recognized: Those from historical Christian backgrounds (like Armenians and Assyrians), and
- Unrecognized: Those who are converts from Islam to Christianity-Muslim-born Iranians who leave Islam to follow Jesus.

These converts (the unrecognized group) are considered enemies of the state. The Iranian government views them not only as religious dissidents but as political threats – “Western agents,” “Israeli spies,” and “Christian Evangelical Zionists” seeking to destabilize Islam and the Islamic regime. Their “crime”? Apostasy – planting the seeds of discord among Muslims.

Every year, house church leaders and new believers are arrested, interrogated, and sentenced to long prison terms under accusations of “crimes against national security.” Some are exiled; others disappear quietly. Even family members often reject them. Meanwhile, Armenian and Assyrian Christians are permitted to exist, but only as second-class citizens. They are barred from sharing their faith in Persian (Farsi) and are forbidden from welcoming converts into their churches. Those who do risk heavy government punishment.

Kamyar’s Story

Kamyar, an Iranian Muslim convert to Christianity, is a husband and father of two. Quietly and faithfully, he pastored seven underground house churches across Iran.

Late one night at 11 p.m., his home was raided by Iranian intelligence agents. His charge? “Zionist Evangelical Christianity.” He was accused of undermining national security – a common label used to criminalize those who share the Gospel. Kamyar was immediately taken and placed in solitary confinement for 37 days. When he was finally released from isolation, he said, “I didn’t know how to relate to people anymore.” After his confinement, he was subjected to 30 terrifying interrogations, each lasting a minimum of four hours. The final outcome of the 600-page accusation was devastating: return to prison to await execution.

Through the efforts of lawyers, his sentence was reduced to 15 years in prison. When his family was finally able to secure temporary bail for a short visit, Kamyar fled escaping

through the mountains into Turkey, where he now lives in hiding with his family, seeking asylum.

Exiled Without a Trial

One of the dirtiest strategies used by the Islamists is to relentlessly pressure Christians in order to force them into self-exile. Through harassment, interrogation, financial extortion, and the constant threat of arrest, the regime makes everyday life intolerable for converts. They want Christians to flee the country quietly, forfeiting their bail and abandoning their homes, so the regime avoids international scrutiny while still crushing the underground church. It's persecution without the noise of violence, but with the same brutal outcome: displacement, fear, and broken families.

The Persecution Doesn't End at the Border

For Iranian Christians who flee to Turkey, like Kamyar, their suffering doesn't end. It simply takes a different shape. Turkey, though not as openly hostile as Iran, is still a Muslim-majority nation where converts from Islam face ongoing pressure, surveillance, and threats. Most live in legal limbo, often waiting many years for asylum in poor conditions, with limited to no access to jobs, healthcare, or education. Many are targeted by extremist groups, harassed by locals, or even monitored by Iranian agents operating across the border. They are not free to share their faith openly. And, while they may have escaped prison, they have not escaped fear. This is the reality for thousands of Iranian believers who have left everything for Christ only to find themselves vulnerable once again even outside of their birth country.

From One Oppressor to Another

In 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) transferred the refugee screening and interview process in Turkey to the Turkish Immigration Office. This change had devastating consequences for people like Kamyar. Now, every Iranian convert seeking asylum in Turkey is interviewed not by a neutral UN official, but by a Turkish government employee – often a practicing Muslim. For an ex-Muslim, this means the person deciding your future sees you as a traitor, an unclean apostate, and an infidel.

These interviews are never fair. Many times, the Muslim interviewer tells the asylum seeker, "Christians have no problem living in Iran." The process is heavily biased, often discriminatory, and for most, ends in rejection. Even worse, the interpreters present during these interviews are frequently Iranian or Afghan Muslims – some with direct ties to the Iranian regime. These individuals are often strategically placed to gather sensitive information on Christian converts and report back to Tehran.

To help protect and defend these believers, ICI has hired multiple Turkish immigration lawyers to appeal denied cases. But, despite every effort, not one appeal has succeeded. These lawyers are part of the same compromised system. As a result, many of these

believers have been stranded, stuck, or forced to live illegally under the shadow of an Islamic government, without a way forward, and unable to return home.

Our Comfort Only Comes from His Word

In the face of all this suffering, only the words of Jesus bring lasting comfort. When you see the world through an eternal lens, everything changes:

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:10-12

Let us stand with our persecuted brothers and sisters-because the only people they have is us.

It’s God’s family.

It’s you and I.

Written by Mohamad Faridi

<https://iranchristians.org/persecution-in-iran/>

Article 2

Middle East conflict

Barnabas Aid magazine July 2026

Iranian Christians face legal restrictions, close surveillance and constant weight of uncertainty. This is especially true for converts from Islam, even more than members of historic Christian communities. Farsi speaking, Muslim-background believers are treated with hostility, as apostates from Islam. They are criminalized as perceived threats to national security. Worship in Farsi has long been forbidden, and converts must meet in underground ‘house churches’ or in other discreet ways in order to avoid detection.

Many Christians are in prison where they face abuse and mistreatment. Because of ongoing war, Iranian Christians do not know what will happen from one day to the next, but they continue to demonstrate a remarkable resilient faith. House churches continue to meet; believers continue to serve those around them, demonstrating the love of Christ.

These followers of Jesus continue to risk their freedom, safety and security to share the Gospel and witness to those around them.

Questions

1. Why is the Iranian government opposed to Christians who have converted to Christianity?
2. What happens to these Christians when they are arrested?
3. How are the second group of Christians, (Armenians and Assyrians) treated?
4. Where do the Iranian Christian converts meet?
5. Briefly explain Kamyar's story.
6. Why does the Iranian government want Christian converts to flee the country?
7. What is the fate of Christian converts in Turkey?
8. How does the second article demonstrate the courage of Iranian Christian converts?



English Usage

Linking Words

Linking Sentences

An interesting piece of writing should not have too many short, disjointed sentences. It's better to use linking words to make the sentences longer.

Exercise 1

Join the following pairs of sentences using words from the list:

however, unfortunately, consequently, because, besides, also

1. The band was impossible to hear over the noise of the traffic. People wanted their money refunded.
2. I didn't go to the game. I didn't feel well.
3. Shani decided to email Leah. Leah's computer wasn't working.
4. Robert slipped over on the wet path. He broke his ankle.
5. I will give you my decision tomorrow. I will tell you the next day.
6. I stayed home because I don't like fishing. I had too much homework to do.

Linking Paragraphs

You can improve your writing by linking your paragraphs. Linking paragraphs will improve the flow of your writing.

Points to consider:

- Does the piece of writing develop logically?
- Are the sentences fluent and correct?
- Is the conclusion effective?

Exercise 2

Write a short piece entitled 'My first day at ...' (You decide whether it be a new school, a new job, a new sports or social group etc.) The structure will be 3 paragraphs: introduction, problem and resolution. Use linking words in your sentences and paragraphs. The following

is an example of how the beginning of each paragraph could start, with linking words for Paragraphs 2 and 3.

Example

Paragraph 1: Introduction

I was starting the senior school that day. I felt nervous yet excited as I packed my bag.

Paragraph 2:

Naturally my friend Sam, who is in the class below me, was sorry to see me move on to the next campus.

Paragraph 3:

Despite Sam's sadness in being separated from me, he made the best of it and we now catch up on weekends.

Now write your own versions of 'My First Day at ...'

Broaden your vocabulary

Substitute the words in bold in each sentence with a more interesting and accurate verb. You may use several words if you feel it is more effective.

Verbs

Example:

The music **reached** the audience.

The music **enveloped** the audience.

1. Tom **felt sorry** about the broken window.
2. Sara **laughed aloud** when she saw Ruth's blue hair.
3. You must **go** deep into the tunnel to find the gold.

NOUNS

1. Don't miss the **view** from the cliff top.
2. We set off on our holidays full of **excitement**.
3. He stopped the **truck** at the top of the hill.

ADJECTIVES

1. It was a **beautiful** morning when they set off for the surf.

2. Keep away from the edge of the **deep** crevasse.

3. I just love your **new** shoes.

Homonyms and Homophones

Homonyms and homophones are words that have the same sound or spelling as each other but different meanings, for example, principle/principal. They are often confused and misspelt.

Exercise 1

Choose the correct word from the pairs given.

1. aloud/allowed

I have never been _____ to shout _____ while the news is on.

2. board/bored

I was really bored while I waited to _____ the bus.

3. brake/break

David had to _____ hard to avoid the duck, but he managed to _____ his nose on the steering wheel.

4. weather/whether

I wonder _____ the _____ will be good for our picnic.

5. You/you're

If _____ going on the excursion then you need to tell _____ teacher.

6. whose/who's

_____ towel is this? _____ coming to the swimming pool?

Exercise 2

Write the follow homophones in sentences, showing the difference in meaning between the words in each pair.

affect/effect

accept/except

advice/advise

complement/compliment

council/counsel

dependant/dependent

device/devise

personal/personnel

principal/principle

stationary/stationery

Writing exercises

Imagine that you have been commissioned to write three guides for tourists to Fiji. You will be writing for three different audiences. Write an introductory paragraph for each of these guides.

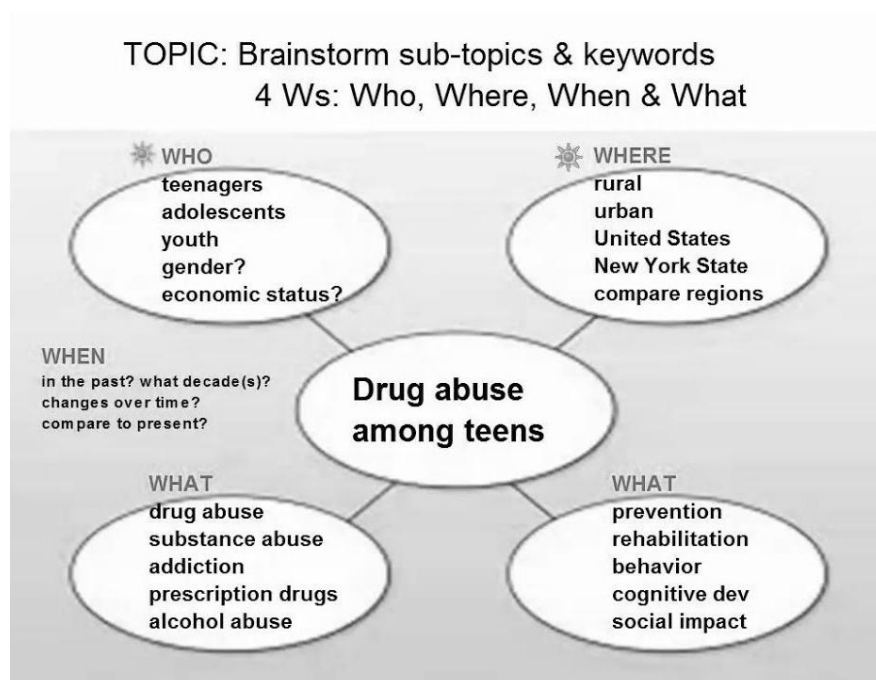
Guide A: Families

Guide B: Young Adults

Guide C: Snorkellers and divers

Brainstorming topics

A good way to start getting your ideas flowing on a topic, is to create a mind map. This is also called brainstorming. For example:



Choose three topics from the list below and brainstorm your ideas with a partner. Create a mind map. Then use your mind map to create a piece of writing.

1. Dangerous pursuits build character.
2. The only thing to fear is fear itself.
3. It is easier to make friends than enemies.
4. It takes a crisis to bring out the best in people.
5. Do I want a job or a career?

Use your imagination

Use the following idea to create a piece of writing. Use dialogue in your piece and be sure to use correct punctuation.

“Look out! You’re getting too near the edge!”

Narrative point of view

Every piece of writing is written from a particular narrative point of view. This is the voice of the writing and is not always the voice of the author.

An author can choose from three main narrative points of view:

The first person (I)

The second person (you)

The third person (he, she, or they)

First-person point of view

Writing a story in the first person can give the piece a real personality and involve the reader; however, it will necessarily be a biased point of view as the narrator can only know what he or she has seen or been told. The personality or prejudices of the first-person narrator will be evident.

Example:

I got off my bike and walked towards the house. I was hoping that my friend would be home, but nervous about his dog that was sometimes unfriendly.

Second-person point of view

This can be more difficult as the writer can seem to be standing apart from the action.

Example:

As you walk towards the house you hope that your friend is home, but nervous about his dog that is sometimes unfriendly.

Third-person point of view

This point of view can present more detail. What is lost in personal involvement with the author may be gained by knowing more about other characters and incidents.

Example:

Simon walked towards the house, hoping that his friend would be home, but nervous about his dog that was sometimes unfriendly.

Exercise 1

Identify the narrative point of view in each of these passages:

1. a) Nathan wanted to see the surf for himself. He didn't believe that it was as dangerous as the reports had suggested. He even intended to try a few waves in spite of the warnings.
- b) The warnings were there but I chose to ignore them. I was determined to show my friends that I wasn't scared of big surf. They would never know how scared I really was.

2. Rewrite these passages from the point of view suggested:

- a) Rewrite in the first person:

You enter the dungeon wearing a blindfold. What is going to happen? You feel the sweat dripping down your back and the smell of fear fills the cold atmosphere. You wish, not for the first time, that you had never entered the competition. You really should learn to say 'no'.

- b) Rewrite in the third person singular (she).

I noticed that the toddler's gaze was fixed on someone behind me. I swung around and saw the monkey rushing in my direction, obviously intent on stealing my sandwich. I quickly threw the food on the ground, picked up the child and retreated to the safety of the car.