**Theme 9-10. TRADITIONS, CUSTOMS AND HOLIDAYS**

**OF GREAT BRITAIN,THE USA AND CANADA**

# English Character

One of the most striking features of English life is self-discipline.

There is little noisy behaviour, and practically no loud disputing in the street. People do not rush excitedly for seats in buses or trains, but take their seats in queues at bus stop in a quiet and orderly manner.

Englishmen are naturally polite and are never tired in saying “Thank you”, “I’m sorry”, “Beg your pardon”.

English people don’t like displaying their emotions even in dangerous and tragic situations, and ordinary people seem to remain good-tempered and cheerful under difficulties.

The Englishman does not like any boasting or showing off in manners, dress or speech.

The Englishman prefers his own house to an apartment in a block of flats, because he doesn’t wish his doing to be overlooked by his neighbours. “An Englishman’s house is his castle”.

Tea is part of the prose of British life, as necessary as potatoes or bread .It is drunk with or without sugar but almost always with milk .That’s why there are so many tea-rooms or tea-shops where people go shopping and can have a rest.

When two Englishmen meet they often begin their conversation talking about the weather. They do this because they do not know each other well enough to talk about personal matters.

The people in England do not shake hands as much as we do in our country and in Europe .Men lift their hats to women but not to each other.

It’s not the custom here to say “Thank you” at the end of the meal as in our country. Here you wait until you are living to go home and then you say “Thank you for having been asked to come”.

The English people are not very sociable .You may travel by train and nobody will try to speak to you or to each other during the journey.

They are also said to be conservative, reserved and cool. They do not kiss or embrace by way of greetings so as not to allow familiarity.

## Pubs and clubs

Speaking about British way of life we can’t help mentioning pubs and clubs. Pub (public house) is a place where people meet and drink beer. Every pub has several rooms: smoking room, a lounge and a public bar and sometimes a singing room. Clubs are an unchallenged English invention and used to refer to a group of people who regularly meet together socially or take part in sports.

Britain is a nation of animal lovers .Many people keeps cats dogs and other animals at home. In Britain pets can send Christmas cards to their friends, birthday cards to “husbands, wives, boys or girls friends”.

# Traditions and customs

Englishmen have sentimental love for things and tradition because they are old. They never throw away old things, numerous ceremonies in London can serve a good example of the English tradition at its best.

One of the most impressive of them is **Changing the Guard**, which takes place at Buckingham Palace every day at 11:30 a.m, when one set of soldier’s guardening a royal building replaces another on duty. The soldiers are dressed in traditional medieval clothes.

One of the best known ceremonies in London is the ceremony of the **Keys** that takes place at 10 p.m every night at the **Tower of London** when a beefeater (the Chief Warder) closes the gates, exchanges secret passwords with a guard and gives him the keys.

The second Saturday in June is the Queen’s official birthday (the real birthdays of the present queen Elizabeth II is 21 April). On this day there takes place **Horse Guard Parade in Whitehall**, the magnificent spectacle of Trooping the Colour. Soldiers on foot and on horses parade in front of the queen, caring the flags that represent their regiments. The ceremony ends with the Queen returning to Buckingham Palace at the head of her Guards.

**The opening of Parliament** is an occasion of a very picturesque ceremony. The Queen goes to the House of Lords (according to an old tradition no King or Queen is allowed to enter the House of Commons) and reads a speech which tells what laws the Government intends to make. The members of the House of Commons listen to the Queen standing at the entrance to the House of Lords.

# National holidays and celebrations

There are only **six public holidays** a year in Great Britain that is days on which people need not go into work. They are: ***Christmas Day, Boxing Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Spring Bank Holiday and Late Summer Bank Holiday*** (days on which banks are closed). In Scotland, New Year’s Day is also a public holiday. It’s called Hogmanay there.

Besides public holidays, there are other festivals anniversaries and simply days, for example Pancake Day and Bonfire Night on which certain traditions are observed, but unless they fall on a Saturday, they are ordinary working days.

# American way of life

The United States was built by brave and freedom-loving people who came from almost every part of the world. They learned to live and work together and to be proud of being Americans. This cooperation and shared pride made the country the powerful and wealthy nation it is today.

Americans value freedom of speech, freedom of press and freedom of religion which are guaranteed by the Constitution and guarded jealously. Civil rights – equal treatment for all people, including equal opportunity in jobs – are guaranteed by laws.

Middle-class Americans stress self-improvement and economic success. They believe it is important to work hard, make a good living and follow the community’s standards of morality. They think that if they work hard they can have what they want and be what they want. This is part what they call “the American Dream”.

They also value education, and many send their children to college.

**Leisure Activity**

Many Americans have a great deal of leisure time, and they spend it in a variety of ways. They take part is sport activities, attend sporting and culturel events, watch movies and television. They enjoy trips to museums, beaches, parks playgrounds and zoos. They take weekend eat at restaurants, go on picnic and entertain friends at home.

Hobbies occupy much of the leisure time of many Americans. Large number of people enjoys raising flower or vegetable gardens or indoor plants. Other popular hobbies include stamp collecting, coin collecting and photography.

# National Celebrations

Americans share three national holidays with many countries: **Easter Sunday, Christmas Day and New Year’s Day.**

Easter is a day of religious services and the gathering of family. Many Americans follow old traditions of colouring hard-boiled eggs and giving children baskets of candy. On the next day, Easter Monday, the president of the United States holds an annual Easter egg hunt on the White House lawn for young children.

Decorating houses and yards with lights, putting up Christmas trees, giving gifts, and sending greetings cards have become traditions for many Americans on Christmas Day. Eight other holidays are uniquely American. They are proclaimed by the federal government. They are as follows:

* Martin Luther King’s day (third Monday of January).
* George Washington’s Birthday, Presidents’ Day (third Monday of February).
* Memorial Day (fourth Monday of May).
* Independence Day (July 4).
* Labour Day (first Monday in September).
* Columbus Day (Second, Monday in October).
* Veterans’ day (second Monday in November).
* Thanksgiving Day (Fourth Thursday in November).

# The junk food eaters

Americans eat a lot and they love **junk food.** Their diet is not healthy; they fry a lot and eat fat, sweet food. The average American eats three meals a day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. They don’t like to eat at home and very often go to restaurants. They can choose from many kinds of restaurants – from fancyand expensive to very cheap ones. There are a great number of ethnic restaurants – Italian food, Mexican food and Chinese food are as popular as the traditional American hamburger. An American institution is the fast-food restaurant, which is now popular all over the world.

**American Character**

They do not think if necessary to hide their emotions. They show happiness with big smiles, gestures and exaggerated statements.

They have a strong sense of private space. They don’t touch each other very much. They stand at least an arm’s length apart, and are made uncomfortable by people who stand closer.

They are very informal. People dress casually and use first names most of the time.

Many people find Americans friendly and welcoming to visitors.

**Canadian Traditions**

The local customs and traditions in Canada were brought to the country by the millions of immigrants and were part of the native culture when these people arrived. One of the traditions that Canada shares with the US is the celebration of Thanksgiving. This is a holiday in the country that is held on the first Monday in October. The early settlers were so pleased with their first harvests in the new land that they had a celebration to give thanks. This tradition continues today.

When you visit someone’s home, you always remove your footwear inside the entrance. This is so you won’t track any mud or gravel onto the clean floors of the house. On Halloween, children dress up in all kinds of costumes and go from house to house in their neighborhood receiving treats of candy. During the Christmas season, mummering is a tradition in Newfoundland. Both children and adults dress up in old mismatched clothing and cover their faces. They visit homes and put off a sort of mini-concert by singing and dancing.

Each area of the country and each ethnic group have their own tradition and custom. This makes it very difficult to determine one or several customs that are practiced in the same way all across the country. November 11 and July 1 are two days in which the Armed Forces are honored. The first long weekend of year takes place in May – on or near May 24 in honor of Queen Victoria’s Birthday. Bonfire night on November 5 is still held in some parts of the country to celebrate Guy Fawke’s Night.

In Canada, public holidays are legislated at the national, provincial and territorial levels. Many of these holidays are observed nationwide, but each province and territory does have its own holidays as well.

**Nationwide statutory holidays in Canada**

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| **Date** | **English Name** | **French Name** | **Remarks** |
| [January 1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January_1) | [New Year's Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Year%27s_Day) | *Jour de l'An* | Celebrates the first day of every year in the [Gregorian calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_calendar). |
| Friday before [Easter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter) Day | [Good Friday](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_Friday) | *Vendredi saint* | Commemorates the [crucifixion of Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion_of_Jesus).  In Quebec, employers must give either Good Friday or Easter Monday as a statutory holiday. |
| [July 1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_1) | [Canada Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada_Day) | *La fête du Canada* | Celebrates Canada's 1867 Confederation and establishment of [dominion status](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominion_status).  In [Newfoundland and Labrador](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_and_Labrador), observed as [Memorial Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorial_Day_(Newfoundland_and_Labrador)). |
| First Monday in September | [Labour Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labour_Day) | *La fête du travail* | Celebrates economic and social achievements of workers. |
| [December 25](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/December_25) | [Christmas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas) Day | *Noël* | Celebrates the [birth of Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_of_Jesus). |

**Answer the questions:**

1. What English customs do you know?
2. Can you describe English character?
3. What English public holidays can you name?
4. What do Americans value most of all?
5. What do they call “The American Dream”?
6. How do they spend their leisure time?
7. What national holidays do Americans share with other countries?
8. What uniquely American holidays do you know?
9. Can you describe American character?
10. What can you say about Canadian traditions?