

Міністерство освіти та науки України  
Полтавський державний педагогічний університет ім. В.Т.  
Короленка

Кафедра англійської філології

***Америка: соціальний аспект***

/Навчально-методичний посібник для практичних занять та  
самостійної роботи студентів спеціальності “Англійська,  
німецька мови та зарубіжна література”/

Полтава 2006

Америка: соціологічний аспект. Навчально-методичний посібник для практичних занять та самостійної роботи студентів філологічного факультету спеціальності „англійська, німецька мови та зарубіжна література”. — Полтава , 2006

### **Посібник укладено**

на кафедрі англійського мовознавства Полтавського державного педагогічного університету старшим викладачем **Щевлюковою Т. М.**

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## **Introduction**

English is rapidly becoming the global language of our shrinking world. It is spoken by about 1,5 million people and is the language of international communication in business, diplomacy, technology, sports, travel, and entertainment. Wherever you go and whatever you do, your knowledge of English will come in handy.

The main goal of the course “America: social aspect” is to introduce students to the lifestyles, attitudes, customs, and traditions, culture of Americans.

If you want to master English well you must get to know about the American ways of life, their culture, because language and culture are inseparable.

What do we really learn when we study about other cultures? First and foremost, we learn about our own! Until we are confronted by a different way of doing things, we assume that everyone does things the same way that we do, and thus our own culture – our values, attitudes, behavior – is largely hidden from our view. When we spend some time analyzing another culture, however, we begin to see our own more clearly and to understand some of the subtleties that motivate our behavior and opinion. This course will help students to become more sensitive to cultural differences and more accepting of them and will improve their understanding of American English and American people.

## **Theme 1: America is a Nation of Immigrants**

### **Plan**

1. Native Americans.
2. Unwilling Immigrants.
3. Language and Nationality.
4. Illegal Immigrants.

## **Theme 2: Attitudes, values, and lifestyles.**

### **Plan**

1. The American Character.
2. American Customs and Traditions.
3. Patriotic Symbols.
4. Individual Freedom and Self-reliance.
5. Equality of Opportunity and Competition.

## **Theme 3: American Family Life.**

### **Plan**

1. Family Structures.
2. The Emphasis on Individual Freedom.
3. Marriage and Divorce.
4. The Pole of the family.
5. Equality in the Family.
6. The Pole of the Family in Society.
7. Family Values.

## **Theme 4: Religion in American Life.**

### **Plan**

1. Freedom of Religion in the United States.
2. The Development of Protestantism.

3. A National Religion.
4. Religion and Government.
5. Are Americans Religious?

### **Theme 5: Holidays in the USA.**

#### **Plan**

1. National Celebrations.
2. Religious Celebrations.
3. Fun Days.
4. Ethnic and Regional Celebrations.

### **Theme 6: Problems in American Life.**

#### **Plan**

1. Drug Abuse.
2. Abortion.
3. Unemployment.
4. Alcoholism.

### **Theme 7: Leisure - Time Activities: Organized Sports, Recreation and Television.**

#### **Plan**

1. The Big Three of American Team Sports.
2. Other Popular Sports.
3. Recreation: A Time for Self - improvement.
4. Health and Fitness.
5. The Impact of Television.
6. Leisure for Learning, Collecting, and Creating.

### **Theme 8: American Education: the First 12 years.**

## **Plan**

1. Early Childhood Education.
2. Elementary Education.
3. High School (Secondary Education).
4. School Problems and Possible Solutions.

## **Theme 9: Higher Education in the USA.**

### **Plan**

1. Undergraduate Education: Types of Schools.
2. Graduate Education.
3. Life in an American Campus.
4. Financing Higher Education.
5. Standardized Tests and Their Uses.

### **Literature to use**

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Washington D.C., 1994.
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b) Supplementary:

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11. Crandall J.Kearny E.N., Datesman M.K. The American Way — N.Y., London, a Pearson Education Company, 1997.

### **Practical lessons.**

#### **Theme 1: Traditional American Values and Beliefs.**

##### **Plan**

##### ***1. Points for class discussions.***

1. The American Character.
2. Typical American Behaviour and Values
3. Democracy in Action
4. Material Wealth and Hard Work.

##### ***2. Questions for Discussion***

1. Americans believe strongly in self-reliance and the freedom and independence of the individual. At what age do young people become financially and emotionally independent from their parents in your

country? At what age do they leave home?

2. Can most people stand alone and solve their own problems? Should they?

How much should people depend on their families? Which is more

important to you, pleasing your family or having the freedom to do what you want? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being very independent?

3. What gives people high status in your country? How important is the social class into which a person is born? Has there ever been a system that separated the social classes in a formal way—titles of nobility, for example?

How can a person move into a higher social class? Were most of the people who have the wealth and power in your country born into a high social class?

4. Is it healthy for a young person to want to compete? Should everyone in a

country have an equal chance to succeed, or are there other factors that are

more important? Which is more important, competing or cooperating?

Which does your culture value more? Why?

5. What is the "mainstream" of a society? Who is in the mainstream of life in your country? What are these people like?

Who is excluded? What could cause someone to leave the mainstream?

### ***The American Character***



What are Americans like? What do Americans like? These are very different questions, ( answering them, this chapter will provide a sketch of the American character. "But wait," some readers say. "In this huge nation of people from everywhere, is there really a national character?" Let's tackle this third question first.

There is great diversity in the ethnic makeup of America. Nevertheless, many writers have generalized about typical American values, attitudes, and beliefs. For example, Mortimer B. Zuckerman, editor-in-chief of U.S. News & World Report, sees his country as "a unique culture of self-reliance, independence, resourcefulness, pragmatism, and novelty." He goes on to describe his fellow Americans in greater detail: "We are comfortable with change and with people who make things happen. In America, the new is better than the old; taking charge is valued over playing it safe; making money is superior to inheriting it; education and merit are favored over family ties."

The most important characteristic of the U.S.A. can be stated in one word: diversity. Most Americans take pride in the great variety found in the country's geography and population. Covering 3,700,000 square miles (9,590,000 square kilometers), the U.S. is the fourth-largest nation in the world (after Russia, China, and Canada). Within this vast nation are tall mountains and flat cornfields, deserts and tropical regions, prairies and forests, rugged coastlines and gentle, rolling hills. The climate, too, covers all extremes. In southern Florida, visitors come to swim and sunbathe in December. In northern Alaska, winter temperatures may drop to  $-75^{\circ}$  Fahrenheit ( $-54^{\circ}$  Celsius).

With roughly 275 million people, the U.S. is the third-largest nation in population after China and India. About 90% of the people now living in the U.S. were born there. Still, the U.S. has one of the

world's most varied populations in terms of national ancestry. This diversity is often highlighted and celebrated at school and community festivals. Racially, the U.S. is about 82% white, 13% black, 4% Asian and Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American (including Eskimo and Aleut). Hispanics are roughly 12% of the entire American population, making Spanish-speaking people the nation's second largest ethnic minority. Some newcomers to the U.S. may be surprised by the varieties of skin color they see, but Americans take it for granted. Racism and prejudice are still serious problems in the U.S.; however, most Americans believe in the ideals of equality and mutual respect.

Three significant population trends may change the American character to some extent. First, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that, by the year 2050, the country's population will be 394 million. Will more crowded conditions lead to closer friendships or more disputes between neighbors? Second, in recent years, the average age of Americans has been increasing from 28 in 1970 to about 35 today). This trend, often referred to as the "graying" of America, is expected to continue. By 2023, demographers say, about 18% of Americans will be 65 or older. By 2038, that figure will reach 34%. "America is a country of young men," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in the nineteenth century. Americans have often been accused of worshiping youth and undervaluing their elders. Now, the typical American is approaching middle age. Some 72,000 Americans are at least 100 years old! By 2050, there may be 800,000 centenarians. What will happen to the youth culture then? Third, the nation's ethnic and racial minority groups are growing much faster than the general population. Demographers predict that by 2050, this country's minority groups combined will make up the majority of the

population. No doubt, this change will affect attitudes, values, and customs.

Regional variations also add diversity to the American character. Travel around the country and you'll notice differences in language, diet, recreation, and even regional character. Some Americans can tell what part of the country other Americans come from just by listening to their accents. Cooking styles also vary from place to place, influenced by the different immigrant groups that have settled in that area and by the edible plants, fish, seafood, and wildlife native to each region. Recreation also varies from place to place, influenced by climate, geography, and ethnic traditions. In addition, attitudes and behavior may differ somewhat from one region of the country to another. For example, New Englanders are commonly described as serious and self-reliant, Southerners as gracious and leisurely, and Westerners as casual and friendly. Californians are said to be eager to try new fads. Midwesterners are considered more conservative than Californians and less sophisticated than New Yorkers. Of course, many residents of a particular region do not fit these generalizations.

However, modern communication and mass production tend to decrease regional and ethnic differences. From the East Coast to the West Coast, travelers find similar shopping centers, supermarkets, department and discount stores, restaurants, hotels, motels, and apartment buildings. National advertising creates national tastes in clothing styles and other consumer goods. National news media influence Americans' reactions to world events. Television, movies, and schools help to create a body of American values and traditions. Despite the nation's great diversity, some generalizations can be made about what the typical American believes in, admires, values, and wants.

## ***“Try It – You’ll Like It”***

The great American novelist and humorist Mark Twain described the typical Englishman or -woman as a "person who does things because they have been done before" and the typical American as "a person who does things because they haven't been done before." Americans love to try something new out of curiosity and a belief that newer may be better.

As a nation of immigrants, the U.S. has had a continual influx of people with a pioneering spirit, with the courage to make major changes in their lives. In the mid-nineteenth century, this spirit led American settlers to make the long, difficult, and dangerous journey westward in search of gold or free land. The desire to make a fresh start in a new place is still noticeable throughout the nation. About 42 million Americans change residences every year. Some moves are due to changing jobs or going off to college. Other people move from big cities to suburbs (or vice versa). Some move to find adventure or a more pleasant climate. The pioneering spirit of Americans is evident in the, working world, too. Employees change jobs and even careers as opportunities change.

Americans love science and technology because these fields involve new discoveries. The U.S. has embraced the age of communication with great enthusiasm. From preschoolers to senior citizens, Americans are learning to use computers—at school, at work, and at home. Robots, lasers, and other inventions of modern technology fascinate them. Americans subsidize all kinds of space exploration, from outside the Earth to inside the atom, in order to uncover the secrets of the universe.

Love of change is closely tied to faith in improvement. Americans have always been optimistic, believing in the

perfectibility of people, the basic goodness of their country, and the ability of American ingenuity to improve the quality of life. But people have come to realize that, if life can become better, it can also become worse. The dangers of air and water pollution, nuclear power, and overpopulation have become clear.

### ***Material Wealth and Hard Work***

The third reason why immigrants have traditionally come to the United States is to have a better life—that is, to raise their standard of living. For the vast majority of the immigrants who came here, it was probably the most compelling reason for leaving their homeland. Because of its incredibly abundant natural resources, the United States appeared to be a "land of plenty" where millions could come to seek their fortunes. Of course, most immigrants did not "get rich overnight," and many of them suffered terribly, but the majority of them were eventually able to improve upon their former standard of living. Even if they were not able to achieve the economic success they wanted, they could be fairly certain that their children would have the opportunity for a better life. The phrase "going from rags to riches" became a slogan for the great American Dream. Because of the vast riches of the North American continent, the dream came true for many of the immigrants. They achieved material success; they became very attached to material things. Material wealth became a value to the American people.

Placing a high value on material possessions is called materialism, but this is a word that most Americans find

offensive. To say that a person is materialistic is an insult. To an American, this means that this person values material possessions above all else. Americans do not like to be called materialistic because they feel that this unfairly accuses them of loving only material things and of having no religious values. In fact, most Americans do have other values and ideals. Nevertheless, acquiring and maintaining a large number of material possessions is of great importance to most Americans. Why is this so?

Probably the main reason is that material wealth has traditionally been a widely accepted measure of social status in the United States. Because Americans rejected the European system of hereditary aristocracy and titles of nobility, they had to find a substitute for judging social status. The quality and quantity of an individual's material possessions became an accepted measure of success and social status. Moreover, as we shall see in later chapters, the Puritan work ethic associated material success with godliness.

Americans have paid a price, however, for their material wealth: hard work. The North American continent was rich in natural resources when the first settlers arrived, but all these resources were undeveloped. Only by hard work could these natural resources be converted into material possessions, allowing a more comfortable standard of living. Hard work has been both necessary and rewarding for most Americans throughout their history. Because of this, they came to see material possessions as the natural reward for their hard work. In some ways, material possessions were seen not only as tangible evidence of people's work but also of their

abilities. In the late 1700s, James Madison, the father of the American Constitution, stated that the difference in material possessions reflected a difference in personal abilities.

## **Theme 2: The Salad Bowl: Cultural Diversity in the USA.**

### **Plan**

#### ***1. Points for Class Discussion.***

1. America is a Nation of Immigrants.
2. Melting Pot, Salad Bowl or Pizza.
3. The African - American Experience.
4. Language and Nationality.
5. The Average American.

#### ***2. Questions for Discussion***

1. This chapter describes the dominant American culture as being white, English-speaking, Protestant, and middle class. How would you describe the dominant culture of your country?
2. What ethnic groups in your country have significantly different characteristics from the dominant culture? How well are they assimilated into your society? Are there any laws that either permit or forbid discrimination? Is your country more a "melting pot," a "salad bowl," or a "mosaic"? Why?
3. What is your country's policy on immigration? Is immigration encouraged or discouraged? Does your country permit "guest" workers? Are there language classes or government programs to help new

immigrants assimilate? Do immigrants usually intermarry with natives of your country? Do they become citizens?

4. What is the official language of your country? Is there more than one official language? What other languages are spoken in your country? Do most people know more than one language? Does language separate groups in your country in any way?

5. What are the advantages to having a multicultural society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What are the disadvantages?

## **Discuss**

1. What is an immigrant? What is a refugee? Are all immigrants refugees or vice versa?

2. What is an alien in the U.S.? What is an alien in a science fiction story? What is the difference between a legal alien and an illegal alien?

3. In your opinion, what are the main reasons why people immigrate?

## ***Melting Pot or Salad Bowl***

The population of the United States includes a large variety of ethnic groups coming from many races, nationalities, and religions. The process by which these many groups have been made a part of a common cultural life with commonly shared values is called assimilation. Scholars disagree as to the extent to which assimilation has occurred in the United States. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, some have described the United States as a "melting pot" where various racial and ethnic groups have been combined into one



culture. Others are inclined to see the United States as a "salad bowl" where the various groups have remained somewhat distinct and different from one another, creating a richly diverse country.

The truth probably lies somewhere between these two views. Since 1776, an enormous amount of racial and ethnic assimilation has taken place in the United States, yet some groups continue to feel a strong sense of separateness from the culture as a whole. Many of these groups are really bicultural. That is, they consider themselves Americans, but they also wish to retain the language and the cultural traditions of their original culture.

People of Hispanic origin were on the North American continent before settlers arrived from Europe in the early 1600s. In Florida and the Southwest, there were Spanish and Latin American settlements established centuries before the thirteen colonies joined together to form the United States in the late 1700s. Because of their long history and the continued influx of newcomers into the established communities, many Hispanics, or Latinos, have taken a special pride in maintaining their cultural traditions and the use of the Spanish language.

Generally speaking, over the years whites from different national and religious backgrounds have been gradually assimilated into the larger American culture, with some exceptions. For example, American Jews are one group of whites who have traditionally retained a strong sense of separateness from the larger culture. This may be a result of the long history of persecution in the Christian countries in Europe, the weaker forms of discrimination and anti-Jewish feeling that exist in the United States, and their own strong feeling of ethnic pride. Yet along with their sense of separateness, American Jews have a strong sense of being a part of the larger

American culture in which they have achieved competitive success in almost every field.

### ***Theme 3: Education in the USA.***

#### **Plan**

##### ***1. Points for Class Discussion***

1. Elementary Education.
2. High school
3. Attending an American University
4. Control of Education.
5. The Pole of Higher Education

##### ***2. Questions for Discussion***

1. Is education compulsory in your country? If so, how long is a child required?

By law to stay in school? Are there both public and private schools in your country? What are these schools like? What kind of school did you attend?

2. Are most schools in your country coeducational? Are women and men offered equal educational opportunities? Are all fields of education open to women?

3. What is the role of the teacher in your country? Is it possible for college teachers and students to be friends? Would a student ever be invited to a professor's home in your country? How strict is discipline in elementary or high schools? How do schools punish students who misbehave?

4. Are there extracurricular activities in high schools and colleges in your country? If so, what are they? Are they considered to be part of

a student's education? Did you participate in nonacademic clubs or activities in high school in your country? Do universities place importance on these high school activities when admitting students?

5. Is it possible to raise your social class level by getting a college education in your country? Do universities charge tuition? How much money does it cost to get a college education? Are there any scholarships or student loans available for students who do not have enough money?

6. Are there enough universities in your country to educate most young people? Is it necessary to take a national examination to get into a university? Is there a lot of competition? Do universities take other personal qualities into account when admitting students, or do they only consider test scores? Does your government have a scholarship program to encourage students to study abroad?

### ***Elementary Education***

Formal academic work is divided into 12 levels called grades. One school year (from late August or early September to mid-) use) is required to complete each grade. Academic work — learning to read, write, and do arithmetic—begins when children enter first grade, at about age 6. Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade are commonly called the primary grades.

The first academic institution that a student attends is called elementary school or grammar school. In some school systems, elementary school goes through eighth grade. In others, there is a second division called junior high school or middle school. It usually includes grades 6-8, 5-8, or 7-9.

The typical school day is about 6 hours long and ends about 3:00 P.M. Classes are in session Monday through Friday. Traditional vacation periods include a 2-week winter vacation, a Week spring vacation, and a 2-month summer vacation. In addition, there are several 1-day holidays.

Academic subjects include language arts (reading, writing, spelling, and penmanship), mathematics, science, physical education (athletics and studying principles of good health), and social studies (mostly history and geography). Social studies emphasizes the multicultural nature of the U.S. by stressing the contributions of groups overlooked in the past: women, African-Americans, Hispanics, and non-Europeans. Elementary school programs also teach music and art if the school budget can cover these.

Computer studies are also commonly a part of the elementary school curriculum.

In elementary school, students are grouped into classes that stay together for the school year. In the primary grades, the class generally has the same teacher for most subjects, although art, music, and physical education are usually taught by specialists in these areas. In the upper elementary grades, students in some school systems have a different teacher for each major academic subject.

### ***Attending an American University***

Money is also increasingly a factor in a college education. All university students must pay tuition expenses in the United States.

Because tuition is much lower at public universities than at private ones, wealthy students have more choices. There are a number of financial aid programs in the form of loans and scholarships available at both public and private schools. However, the expenses of buying books and living away from home make it increasingly difficult for many students to attend even the less expensive public universities.

Ironically, it may be the middle-class family that suffers the most from the rising tuition costs. The family income may be too high to qualify for financial aid, but not high enough to afford the \$15,000 to \$35,000 per year (or more) needed for a private college education. At present, 80 percent of all college students attend public universities, where expenses are usually closer to \$10,000 a year. Many students must work during their college years to help meet even these costs. A number of students who cannot afford to go away to college attend community college programs for two years in their hometowns. These two-year programs often feed into the state university systems and offer educational opportunities to large numbers of students who ordinarily would not be able to attend a university.

Despite its costs, the percentage of Americans seeking a college education continues to grow. In 1900, less than 10 percent of college-age Americans entered college. Today, over 60 percent of Americans ages 25 to 39 have taken some college courses, and over 20 percent of all Americans have attended four years or more. There are about 15 million students attending college now, about six times more than 50 years ago, and there are roughly 3,000 different colleges and universities to choose from. Today, many parents who were not able to attend college when they were young have the satisfaction of seeing their sons and daughters attend.

Even the formerly elitist private universities have yielded a great deal to public pressure for greater equality of opportunity in education. Harvard, a private university considered by many to be one of the nation's most prestigious, provides a good example. Before World War II, the majority of Harvard students came from elite private preparatory schools. Now, the majority of them come from public high schools. As equality of opportunity came to Harvard, the competition that accompanies it also increased dramatically. Before World War II, Harvard admitted about 90 percent of those who applied. Now, Harvard admits only about 16 or 17 percent of its applicants.

### **The role old higher education**

The decentralized character of the American educational system is greatest at the higher education level. This is principally because private higher education in the United States predated public higher education. The early autonomy of the former set them apart from the mainstream publicly financed schools and established a precedent for their relative independence.

American higher education refers to study beyond the secondary school level and almost always presupposes that a student has undertaken 12 previous years of study.

The U.S. now has about 3,331 accredited colleges and universities. They offer such a great variety of requirements for admission and so many different types of programs "that foreign visitors usually have some difficulty identifying American colleges and universities with those of their own countries.

The terms "college" and "university" are often used interchangeably, although the former often is a part of the latter. An American college typically offers a blend of natural and social sciences and humanistic studies. Students, traditionally 18 to 22 years old, attend classes for approximately four years to receive, if they successfully complete all requirements, a bachelor's degree in arts or sciences. A university, on the other hand, is usually composed of an undergraduate college of arts and sciences, plus graduate schools and professional schools and facilities.

Today, about 43 percent of all college students are 25 years old or over. Many of them are taking courses to advance their careers and qualify for advanced degrees.

Higher education in the United States has evolved two unique institutions. They are the two-year junior college, or community college as it is increasingly called, and the four-year liberal arts college.

Two-year community colleges, for the most part locally controlled and predominately publicly financed, have dual roles. Community colleges offer, first, studies leading to technical and semi-professional occupations, and second, studies which prepare students for four-year degree granting institutions. As a result, they enroll students with a wide range of abilities and interests.

The liberal arts college is also a peculiarly American institution. It takes two general forms. It may be, as mentioned earlier, one of the constituent units—a school or college—of a university complex or it may be an independent organization. The university college of liberal arts often serves students in parallel undergraduate professional colleges, such as engineering or business administration, by giving them courses in the basic disciplines. It, as well as its independent counterpart, also provides pre-professional

Training of four years or less for students who proceed to the advanced professional schools, such as law and medicine. In addition, it offers a liberal education for students who do not enter either professional or graduate school.

Another characteristic of American higher education is that credit for work is transferable among universities. A student can accumulate credits at one university, transfer them to a second and ultimately receive a degree from there or a third university.

Most American university degrees are awarded on completion of a specified number of courses which earn students credits or points - The, number of credits awarded for each course relates to the number of hours of work involved. At the undergraduate level a student generally takes about five three-hour-a-week courses every semester. (Semesters usually run from September to early January and late January to late May.) Most students complete 10 courses per academic year and it usually takes them four years to complete a bachelor's degree requirement of about 40 three-hour courses or 120 credits.

The greatest number of degrees at the bachelor's level in recent years has been conferred in the fields of business and management, education and the social sciences. The traditional fields of law, medicine and theology are the leaders at the first professional level. The largest numbers of master's degrees were earned in education, business, public affairs and services, and the social sciences. More than 16,000 doctor's degrees were conferred in education, social sciences, biological sciences and engineering in 1983.

The fields in which men and women earned bachelor's degrees in 1982-83 provide an indication of the differing careers for which they have trained. Although the proportion of male and female students has remained relatively the same in many disciplines for



several years, women have registered dramatic gains in business and management, engineering, computer science and communications.

The number of women earning master's degrees and doctorate has risen sharply in recent years, to a point where women have received more master's degrees than men since 1981. Women still lag behind men in doctorates and in first professional degrees, which prepare students to practice law, medicine and other professions.

### ***Theme 4: The American Family.***

#### **Plan**

##### I. Points for Class Discussion.

1. Family structures
2. The American Youth.
3. Marriage and Divorce
4. Family size.
5. The Role of the child.
6. Childless marriages.

##### II. Questions for Discussions.

#### ***Questions for Discussion***

1. How would you describe the typical family in your country? Who lives in a household? Do several generations usually live together? How many children are there? What do you think is the ideal number of children to have? What are the roles of the family members? How much freedom do teenagers have? When can a teenager get a driver's license? Would you give your children the same amount of

freedom as you had as a teenager?

2. Which type of marriage is most common in your country? Which of the four types do you think is the best for men? for women? For the children?

Which type of marriage does your family have? Which do you think is the ideal? Why?

3. In your country, what do people have to do to get a divorce? What happens to people who divorce there? How are they treated? Do they usually remarry? If two people are unhappy, should they get a divorce? What if they have children? Under what circumstances would you get divorced?

4. Should mothers with small children work? In your country, who takes care of the children of working mothers? Are there day-care centers? Do other members of the family do the baby-sitting? What was your experience growing up? Did you have a baby sitter? Would you leave your child in a day-care center?

5. If there is true equality between the sexes, husbands should be able to choose to stay at home while their wives go to work. Do you agree? Do "househusbands" exist in your country? Can men nurture children as well as women can? Would you ever want this kind of relationship?

### ***Family Structures***

What is the typical American family like? If Americans are asked to name the members of their families, family structure becomes clear. Married American adults will name their husband or wife and their children, if they have any, as their "immediate family." If they mention their father, mother, sisters, or brothers, they will define them as separate units, usually living in separate

households. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents are considered "extended family."

The structure of the American family has undergone enormous changes since the 1950s. Traditionally, the American family has been a nuclear family, consisting of a husband, wife, and their children, living in a house or apartment. Grandparents rarely live in the same home with their married sons and daughters, and uncles and aunts almost never do.

In the 1950s, 70 percent of American households were the "classic" American family—a husband, wife, and two children. The father was the "breadwinner" (the one who earned the money to support the family), the mother was a "homemaker" (the one who took care of the children and did not work outside the home), and they had two children under the age of 18. If you say the word "family" to Americans, this is probably the picture that comes to their minds.

Yet, in reality, in the 1990s, only 8 percent of American households consist of a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and two children under 18. An additional 18 percent of households consist of two parents who are both working and one or more children under the age of 18 living at home. That means that a total of only 26 percent of households in the United States consist of two parents and their children. The remaining households consist of the following: 30 percent are married couples without children; 8 percent are single parents and their children; 11 percent are unmarried couples and others living together. And, perhaps most startling, in 25 percent of the households, there is someone living alone.

What has happened to the traditional American family, and why? Some of the explanation is demographic. In the 1950s, men who had fought in World War II had returned home, married, and

were raising their families. There was a substantial increase (or "boom") in the birth rate, producing the "baby boomers." A second demographic factor is that today young people are marrying and having children later in life. Some couples now choose not to have children at all. A third factor is that people are living longer after their children are grown, and they often end up alone. And, of course, there is a fourth factor—the high rate of divorce. But numbers alone cannot account for the dramatic changes in the family. Understanding the values at work in the family will provide some important insights.

### ***The Emphasis on Individual Freedom***

Americans view the family as a group whose primary purpose is to advance the happiness of individual members. The result is that the needs of each individual take priority in the life of the family. In contrast to that of many other cultures, the primary responsibility of the American family member is not to advance the family as a group, either socially or economically, nor is it to bring honor to the family name. This is partly because the United States is not an aristocratic society.

Family name and honor are less important than in aristocratic societies, since equality of opportunity regardless of birth is considered a basic American value. Moreover, there is less emphasis on the family as an economic unit because the American family is rarely self-supporting. Relatively few families maintain self-supporting family farms or businesses for more than one generation. A farmer's son, for example, is very likely to go on to college, leave the family farm, and take an entirely different job in a different location.

The American desire for freedom from outside control clearly extends to the family. Americans do not like to have controls placed on them by other family members. They want to make independent decisions and not be told what to do by grandparents or uncles or aunts. For example, both American men and women expect to decide what job is best for them as individuals. Indeed, young Americans are encouraged by their families to make such independent career decisions.

What would be best for the family is not considered to be as important as what would be best for the individual.

### ***Marriage and Divorce***

Marriages are not "arranged" in the United States. Young people are expected to find a husband or wife on their own; their parents do not usually help them. In fact, parents are frequently not told of marriage plans until the couple has decided to marry. This means that parents have little control, and generally not much influence, over whom their children marry. Americans believe that young people should fall in love and then decide to marry someone they can live happily with, again evidence of the importance of an individual's happiness. Of course, in reality this does not always happen, but it remains the ideal, and it shapes the views of courtship and marriage among young Americans.

Over the years, the value placed on marriage itself is determined largely by how happy the husband and wife make each other. Happiness is based primarily on companionship. The majority of American women value companionship as the most important part of marriage. Other values, such as having economic support and the opportunity to have children, although important, are seen by many as less important.

If the couple is not happy, the individuals may choose to get a divorce. A divorce is relatively easy to obtain in most parts of the United States. Most states have "no-fault" divorce. To obtain a no-fault divorce, a couple states that they can no longer live happily together, that they have "irreconcilable differences," and that it is neither partner's fault.

The divorce rate rose rapidly in the United States after the 1950s, but it had leveled off by the 1990s. Approximately one out of every two marriages now ends in divorce. Often children are involved. The great majority of adult Americans believe that unhappy couples should not stay married just because they have children at home, a significant change in attitude since the 1950s. Most people do not believe in sacrificing individual happiness for the sake of the children. They say that children actually may be better off living with one parent than with two who are constantly arguing. Divorce is now so common that it is no longer socially unacceptable, and children are not embarrassed to say that their parents are divorced. However, sociologists are still studying the long-term psychological consequences of divorce.

### ***American Youth***

What is the line to be a young person in the United States?

At 18 years of age young people in the United States can take on most of the rights and the responsibilities of adulthood. Before this occurs, however, the American teenager goes through the period of adolescence. Physiologists say that most young people experience conflict during this period of their lives. They are changing rapidly, both physically and emotionally, and they are searching for self-identity. As they are growing up and becoming more independent teenagers sometimes develop different values from those held by their parents.

American teenagers begin to be influenced by the media and teachers. During this period of their lives young people also begin to participate in social activities such as sporting events and church group projects as well as do more things in the company of members of the opposite sex and fewer things in the company of their families.

Some young people have difficulties in their relationships with their parents or problems at school which may lead to use of alcohol or drugs, the refusal to attend school or even running away from home. In extreme cases some might turn to crime. However for every teenager experiencing such problems many more are making positive important contributions to their communities, schools and society. Millions of young people are preparing for future in exciting ways. Many teenagers are studying for college entrance exams or working at part-time jobs after school and on the weekends. Others are volunteering at hospitals, helping the handicapped, exhibiting projects at science fairs or programming computers.

The typical American student spends six hours a day, five days a week, 180 days a year in school.

Schools provide American students with much more than academic education. Students learn about the world through various school-related activities. More than 80 percent of all students participate in students' activities, such as sports, students' newspapers, drama clubs, debate teams, choral groups and bands.

The favorite sport of American youth is football, basketball, baseball, wrestling, tennis, soccer, boxing, hockey, track and golf.

During their leisure time students spend much time watching television. They also listen to music on the radio and tape players. The average American teenager listens to music about three hours a

day. Without a doubt rock-and-roll music is the favorite of teenagers in the United States.

America's young people are mostly hardworking. Many have after school jobs. They work at fast-food restaurants, as a baby sit for neighbors, hold delivery jobs or work in stores.

Many youths are involved in community service organizations. Some are active in church and religious-group activities. Others belong to youth groups such as Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts.

To some observers, teens today seem spoiled compared to those of earlier times. Peer pressure, changing family conditions, mobility of families and unemployment are just a few reasons why some young people may try to escape reality by turning to alcohol or drugs. Drug use has decreased among young people in the United States within the last 10 years though alcohol abuse has increased.

Many young Americans are joining organizations to help teenagers stop drinking and driving. Thousands of teenagers have joined Students against Driving Drunk (SADD). They sign contracts in which they and their parents pledge not to drive after drinking. In some schools students have joined ant drug programs. Young people with drug problems can also call special telephone numbers to ask for help.

Aside from drug abuse another problem of America's youth is pregnancy among young women. One million teenagers become pregnant each year.

Many' community programs help cut down on the numbers of teenage pregnancies. Their programs offer health care, contraceptive counseling, sports programs, job referrals and substance abuse programs.

About one million young people can run out away from home each year. Most return after a few days or a few weeks but a few



turn to crime and become juvenile delinquents (a lawbreaker under 18).

Why are young people committing crimes? .Among the causes are poor family relationships (often the children are abused or neglected while growing up), bad neighborhood conditions, peer pressure, drug addiction.

New programs to help troubled youths are created every year. Young people can go after school and talk with peer counselors, receive academic tutoring or take part in athletic and social activities. These programs sponsor social events such as theater productions in which young people can participate.

Most American youths look forward to their future with hope and optimism. Many of them are headed towards four-year colleges and universities. More than half of all students in the U.S. plan to earn a college degree. Many others look forward to getting a job after a high school or attending a two-year junior college. Others plan on getting married. The median age for males getting married for the-first time is 26.2 years old, for females 23.8 years old. Other young people intend to join the armed forces. For some travel is the next step in gaining experience beyond high school.

American youths are concerned about problems confronting both their own communities and world around them. They say that the most important issues they have to face are: drug abuse, AIDS and environmental problems.

Young people in the United States are also concerned with global issues such as nuclear war and world hunger. They care for other people around the world, as is evident by such efforts as « The Children to Children Project» in the course of which a group of New York City children worked to raise \$250 000 to help the starving

children of Ethiopia in 1985. Also in 1985, a benefit called «Live Aid» staged two rock music concerts simultaneously in England and the United States and raised about \$50 million to bring relief to starving people in Africa.

## ***Theme 5: American Holidays: History and Customs***

### **Plan**

#### ***1. Points for Class Discussion***

1. Thanksgiving and Native Americans
2. Halloween: a Time for Scary Fun.
3. Four Patriotic Holidays.
4. The Winter Holiday Season
5. Festivals and Fairs.
6. School Ceremonies.

#### ***2. Questions for Discussion.***

1. Were the Native Americans and the European Colonists Friends or Enemies?
2. What Food are Served at a Traditional American Thanksgiving Feast.
3. Who were the Opposing Sides in the American Revolution and the Civil War?
4. What are Some Reasons why Countries have Patriotic Holidays?
5. Why is the Fourth of July an Important American Holiday? What Happened on July 4, 1776?

### **Independence Day**

Independence Day, the most important patriotic holiday in the U.S., celebrates the birth of the nation. In 1776, the 13 American colonies were in the

midst of the Revolutionary War against Great Britain. On **July 2**, the Second Continental Congress (which had representatives from all 13 colonies) passed a resolution of independence. Two days later, this body adopted the Declaration of Independence — a **document** that declared the colonies free and independent. In taking these actions, these revolutionary leaders were risking their lives, and they knew it. If the colonies had lost the war, these leaders would probably all have been executed for treason. Ben Franklin told the other members of the Continental Congress, "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately."

The Declaration of Independence was written by Thomas Jefferson, who later became the young nation's third president. The document listed the abuses that the colonists had suffered at the hands of Great Britain and its king, George III. Its most famous paragraph summed up ideals that are still held by Americans today;

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.

These words implied, among other things, that government should be the servant of the people, not the other way around.

After making a few changes on Jefferson's draft, on July 4, 1776, the members of the Continental Congress accepted the revised version. The document was quickly printed and announced to the public on July 8. The news of independence was greeted enthusiastically by most colonists. The following day, in New York City, an excited crowd pulled down a statue of King George III. Later, its lead was melted down to make bullets for the war.

On July 19, Congress ordered the Declaration of Independence written on parchment in special script. The members of the Continental Congress signed this fancy document. Today, this **original** signed copy is on display in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Among the 56 signatures, one name stands out. It is the large, fancy signature of John Hancock, president of the Second

Continental Congress. Today, his name is often used as a synonym for the word *signature*. When asked to sign a legal document, Americans are sometimes told, "Put your John Hancock right here."

Since Independence Day is a summer holiday and a day off from work for almost everyone, many families enjoy picnics or beach outings. The occasion is also commemorated by colorful and noisy **fireworks** displays, parades, and, in some communities, patriotic speeches. The flag is flown, and red, white, and blue ribbons are used for decoration at public ceremonies.

On the Fourth of July weekend of 1999, Americans heard good news. On the nation's birthday, President Bill Clinton announced the rebirth of the national bird, the bald eagle. (No, this majestic bird isn't bald. The white feathers on its head just make it look that way.) Like the nation it represents, the bald eagle has survived good times and bad. At one time, about half a million of these huge birds flew in the skies of North America. By 1963, bald eagles were close to extinction. Only 417 breeding pairs remained in the contiguous 48 states. Hunters, pesticides, power lines, and loss of habitat caused this decline. Then DDT was banned, and the Endangered Species Act led to protective measures. Today, the U.S.A. is home to about 6,000 pairs of these powerful birds, and they are being taken off the endangered species list. Americans are delighted. They laugh when they recall that Benjamin Franklin wanted the national bird to be the turkey. The high-flying bald eagle seems much more appropriate for a nation so proud of its power and independence.

## **Flag Day**

Flag Day, June 14, is the birthday of the American flag. It is a minor holiday honoring a major American symbol. On this date in 1777, the Continental Congress adopted a resolution stating that the flag of the new nation should have 13 **horizontal stripes** (7 red ones and 6 white ones) to symbolize the 13 colonies and 13 white stars on a blue background to symbolize the unity and equality of these colonies. According to George Washington, the red stripes symbolized Great

Britain and the alternating white stripes represented the separation between Great Britain and its former colonies. White was also the symbol of liberty.

Who made the first American flag? A young widow, who was a Philadelphia seamstress and flag-maker, probably did. Almost 100 years later, Betsy Ross's grandson went public with this family story; Early in 1777, George Washington and two other men came to the Philadelphia home of Betsy Ross with a design and asked her to make a flag for the new country. She followed their plan except for making the stars five-pointed instead of six-pointed. When Betsy Ross's story became known throughout the country, more than 2 million people contributed to a fund for the preservation of her home. Today, it remains a popular tourist attraction.

The American flag has been redesigned many times. Today, it still contains 13 stripes in honor of the original colonies. But now there are 50 stars (one for each state) arranged in 9 rows, alternating 6 stars in one row and 5 in the next. Because of its design, the American flag has been nicknamed the *Stars and Stripes*. It is sometimes also called *Old Glory*. In school, children memorize and often **recite** the following Pledge of **Allegiance** to the flag: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Americans recite this pledge while standing and holding the right hand over the heart to show devotion to the flag and the nation it represents.

In 1814, the American flag inspired a lawyer and amateur poet named Francis Scott Key to write "The Star Spangled Banner," the poem that was later set to music and became the national **anthem**. During the War of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States, Key was on a ship in Baltimore Harbor watching the British attack Fort McHenry. As long as Key saw the American flag flying over the fort, he knew his country had not lost the battle. He wrote, "the bombs bursting in air / gave proof through the night / that our flag was still there." (The bombs lit up the sky and allowed

him to see the flag.) When this terrible night ended and dawn finally came, to his great joy, Key saw that the Stars and Stripes still flew "o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave." Key set his poem to music, using the melody of an old British song. More than 100 years later, in 1931, Congress declared "The Star Spangled Banner" the national anthem.

The American flag is a symbol of the country—its government, its people, and its ideals. As such, most people agree that it should be handled with respect. There are many rules and customs about proper handling of the flag. It is usually displayed only between sunrise and sunset. If displayed after dark, it must be lit up. It can be flown at half-mast to honor someone who has just died. It should never touch the ground nor be stepped on. Occasionally, people who are angry about some government action or critical of American life in general show disrespect to the flag by burning it in public or stepping on it. There have been many efforts to pass laws or amend the Constitution to make it illegal to **desecrate** the flag. However, objectors to such laws say that handling the flag disrespectfully is a form of free speech and should be allowed. It is an interesting debate, which goes to the basic question of what American rights are and what they should be. On patriotic holidays, the American flag flies in front of many homes and reminds many Americans of their valuable Constitutional rights and freedoms.

From February through mid-June, Americans celebrate several holidays that are bright threads in the fabric of the nation's culture. Some are for religious expression. Some are for the expression of devotion to loved ones. Still others are primarily for fun.

### **Religious Holidays**

**Easter.** On Easter, American Christians, together with Christians around the world, celebrate the Resurrection (the coming to life again) of Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity and, according to Christian beliefs, the Son of God. Easter is always on a Sunday, but the date varies from year to year.

Symbols of rebirth, new life, and fertility are common Easter decorations. These include the Easter bunny and colored, elaborately decorated eggs. It's also traditional to wear new spring clothes on Easter, and many communities have an Easter parade. Easter has also become a very popular time for vacations, since many schools close for several days or more.

**Passover.** American Jews join Jews everywhere in celebrating this important holiday. It celebrates freedom and is based upon a story from the Old Testament of the Bible. In the story, Jews who were once slaves in Egypt were led to freedom by a great Jewish hero, Moses. Most Jews celebrate Passover for eight days, but for Reform Jews and Israeli Jews it's a seven-day holiday. The date of Passover is determined by the Jewish calendar, but it always begins between March 27 and April 24, and is often the same week as Easter. The holiday begins with a special feast called a *seder*, at which the story of the escape from Egypt is retold. During the holiday, observant Jews eat no bread or other products made with yeast. Instead, they eat flat bread called *matzos*.

**Saint Patrick's Day.** On March 17, Americans of Irish descent—who number about 37 million!—honor their patron saint, who brought Christianity to a pagan nation. The holiday is celebrated by church services, parades, banquets, and "the wearing of the green," a color in the flag of Ireland, a country commonly called *The Emerald Isle*.

### **Holidays to Express Love**

**Valentine's Day,** On February 14, Americans send or give greeting cards called *valentines*. The holiday is primarily about romantic love, but many people also send valentines to their children and parents. In elementary school, children commonly exchange valentines with friends and teachers. Most valentines are decorated with a red heart. Many also show a picture of Cupid (the young son of the Roman goddess, Venus) with his bow and arrow. According to the myth, if Cupid's arrow hits a person in the heart, that person falls in love. This holiday originated in Europe in the 1400s, but today it is

more popular in the United States than anywhere else. Traditional Valentine's Day gifts are flowers or a heart-shaped box of chocolate candy.

**Mother's Day.** The purpose of this holiday is to honor one's mother and give her a day of rest. It is celebrated on the second Sunday in May. On this day, mothers and grandmothers receive greeting cards, gifts, and flowers. Also, moms may be served breakfast in bed and taken out for dinner to give them a day off from cooking.

**Father's Day.** Father's Day customs are similar to those of Mother's Day. Dad gets cards, gifts, and a day of rest. This holiday is celebrated on the third Sunday in June.

### **Holidays Just for Fun**

**Groundhog Day.** According to legend, February 2 is the date that the groundhog (a small, furry animal) wakes up from hibernation (a long winter's sleep). People who live in colder parts of the United States eagerly await this moment because, tradition says, the groundhog is a weather forecaster. If he sticks his head out of his hole on a sunny day and sees his shadow, he'll be frightened and run back in to hibernate a little longer. That means six more weeks of winter weather. On the other hand, if he emerges on a cloudy day and stays out, there will be an early spring.

**April Fools' Day.** When the French first adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1564, some people still used the old calendar and celebrated New Year's Day on April 1. These people were called *April fools*. Today on April 1, Americans celebrate this holiday by playing innocent tricks on family members, friends, coworkers, and classmates. This holiday is especially popular with kids, and the tricks and jokes are done in a fun-loving spirit.

## **Questions and Tasks for Individual Work .**

### **I. Women in America.**



- 1) The Legal Status of Women.
- 2) Women at Work.
- 3) Women in Politics.
- 4) Feminist Movement.

## **II. Cultural life in the United States.**

- 1) Theatre and Cinema.
- 2) Music.
- 3) TV
- 4) American Food.
- 5) Shops and Shopping.

## **III. Mass Media**

- 1) Newspapers.
- 2) News Agencies.
- 3) Magazines.
- 4) Books.
- 5) Radio.

## **IV. Housing.**

- 1) The Need for Housing.
- 2) Households.
- 3) Housing Standards.
- 4) The Choice of Housing.
- 5) Home Financing.

**Credit test and examination questions.**

1. Speak on the Topic Immigrants.
2. Native Americans.
3. The National Symbols of America.
4. The Average American.
5. The Melting Pot, the Salad Bowl, and the Pizza.
6. What is the “American Dream”.
7. The American Character.
8. Typical American Behavior and Values.
9. American Family Life.
10. Marriage and Divorce.
11. The Role of the Child.
12. Organization and Structure of Education.
13. American Schoolings.
14. Secondary Educations.
15. Public and Private Schools
16. Colleges and Universities.
17. Major American Religions.
18. Religion and Government.
19. Are Americans Religious?
20. The Main Problems of the American Society.
21. Sports in America.
22. The Impact of Television.
23. Entertainment for Every Taste.
24. National Holidays in the USA
25. Religious Celebrations.
26. Fun Days.
27. Shops and Drink.
28. Food and Drink.
29. Mass Media.
30. Music.