

# Culture notes

## Unit 1 The ties that bind

### 1.1

**Jane Austen** (1775–1817) was a British novelist, well-known for her romantic fiction. She achieved recognition for the accurate and humorous portrayal of the English middle classes of her time and her works belong in the English literary canon. Her most popular novels are *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*. Two of her books, namely *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, were published after her death. Interestingly, ***Northanger Abbey***, a parody of Gothic fiction, was Austen's first novel ready for publication, but the bookseller who the author had sold the novel to decided not to publish it.

### 1.2

**Mark Twain** is the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910), an American writer and humorist, famous for his wit and use of satire. Before embarking on a literary career, he had done stints as a typesetter, a river boat pilot, a miner and a journalist, from which he often drew inspiration for his writing. He is best known as the author of ***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*** (1876) and its sequel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Both of the books are renowned for the authentic depiction of the culture and the language of mid-nineteenth century America, and as such are considered to be outstanding works of American literature.

**Sheila Heti** (b. 1976) is a contemporary Canadian writer. She is the author of a collection of short stories, *The Middle Stories*, the novella *Ticknor* and the book based on her interviews with friends ***How Should a Person Be?*** (2010), which was included on the *New York Times* 100 Notable Books of 2012 list. She is also known for creating Trampoline Hall, a lecture series, held monthly in Toronto and New York, at which people may speak on any subjects except for those that they are professionally expert at.

**Khaled Hosseini** (b. 1965) is an American novelist and a medical doctor of Afghan origin. After the enormous success of his debut book ***The Kite Runner*** (2003) he gave up his career in medicine to pursue full-time writing. The other books by Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* also became bestsellers.

**Louisa May Alcott** (1832–1888) was an American novelist and a poet, a feminist and a supporter of the abolition of slavery. Her debut novel, *Hospital Sketches*, was well received, but it was ***Little Women*** (1868) that won her fame. This semi-autobiographical novel based on Alcott's childhood experiences was followed by *Good Wives* and two other books, *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*, which together make up the 'March Family Saga'. Many of her books have been adapted for film and television.

**William Shakespeare** (1564–1616) was an English playwright and poet, one of the greatest writers in English ever, often called the 'Bard'. His best known plays include: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. ***Hamlet*** (1603) is one of his four famous

tragedies. Set in the Kingdom of Denmark, it tells the story of Prince Hamlet's revenge on his uncle Claudius.

**Meg Wolitzer** (b. 1959) is an American writer. As of 2020, she has published fourteen books, the best known of which are *The Wife*, *The Ten-Year Nap*, *The Uncoupling* and ***The Interestings*** (2013). She has also taught creative writing at various American universities.

### 1.7

**A Member of Parliament** (MP) is a person elected to a parliament as the representative of the voters from a particular area, called a constituency in the UK. In English, the term is mainly used in reference to the 650 members of the House of Commons, the lower house of the British Parliament. In order to stand as an MP in an election, a candidate must be over eighteen years old, a British citizen or citizen of a Commonwealth country or the Republic of Ireland. MPs are elected by the first-past-the-post system, which means that it is the person with the highest number of votes that wins the election.

## Unit 2 Learning for life

### 2.1

**Google Docs** is a free-access web-based word processor provided by Google as part of its Google Drive applications. The software allows users to create and edit documents online as well as to store them in a format compatible with most word processors. Files can be accessed from any computer with an Internet connection, which enables multiple users all over the world to collaborate in real time.

### 2.2

**Wikipedia**® is the largest Internet encyclopedia, run by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation. It was launched in English in 2001 by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger. As of 2020, it had 310 language versions, with English Wikipedia still being the most comprehensive. Taken together, all the Wikipedia versions contain more than forty million articles and are by far the most popular reference source.

**Bonn** is a German city, located on the River Rhine in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia. It has a population of over 310,000 people. Bonn was founded by the Romans in the first century BCE and as such is one of the oldest German cities. Between 1949 and 1990 it was the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany and the seat of the German government. After the reunified city of Berlin was made the capital of all Germany in 1990, Bonn became the second official seat of the German government. It is also known as the birthplace of Ludwig van Beethoven.

**The Erasmus programme** is a European Union student exchange programme launched by the European Commission in 1987. Named after the Dutch philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam, it is also a backronym that stands for *European Community action scheme for the mobility of university students*. The programme allows students to study at a chosen Erasmus university across the thirty-three European countries participating in the project. The universities do not charge any tuition fees and students

may be offered special grants to cover their living costs. An Erasmus period of study abroad, which lasts between three months and a whole academic year, is recognised by students' home universities and counts directly towards their studies. In 2014 the Erasmus programme was replaced by Erasmus+, which combines all the EU's schemes for education, training, youth and sport.

**Adelaide** is a city in Australia and the capital of the state of South Australia. It is located on the south coast of the continent, about 600 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. Founded in 1836, the city was named after the wife of King William IV, Adelaide of Saxe-Meiningen. With an estimated population of over 1.3 million people, Adelaide is the fifth largest Australian city, but surprisingly it has a reputation for being quiet and ranks among the world's best cities to live in. It is also known for its cultural events.

## 2.5

**Salsa** is a Latin-American social dance, with roots in Cuban dances, especially the son, the cha-cha-cha and mambo. The blend of influences is reflected in the name 'salsa', which translates into 'mixture'. Salsa developed in the mid-1970s in New York City together with the music it is danced to, also called salsa. The dance became popular in some Caribbean and Latin American countries too, mainly Cuba, Colombia and Puerto Rico, where it evolved into several distinct forms.

## 2.7

**The BBC**, or the British Broadcasting Corporation, is the national British radio and television company, the oldest and one of the largest broadcasters in the world. It operates under the Royal Charter and Agreement, which define its mission as informing, educating and entertaining the public. The BBC is mainly funded by a television licence fee paid by all British households and institutions receiving television programmes. It provides a wide range of radio, television and online services not only in the UK but also worldwide. Outside the UK it is well-known for the BBC World Service, which broadcasts radio and TV news in twenty-eight languages, as well as its commercial subsidiary BBC Worldwide Ltd, responsible for several international channels such as BBC World, BBC Knowledge and BBC Entertainment.

## Focus Review 2

**Bremen** is a city in the north-west of Germany, with over half a million inhabitants. It is the capital of Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, the smallest of the German states. Bremen lies on the River Weser, sixty kilometres from Bremerhaven, where the river flows into the North Sea. The two cities form the Ports of Bremen, one of the world's busiest commercial ports. Bremen is a strong economic centre and it is considered a working-class city.

**John Lennon** (1940–1980) was an English musician, singer and songwriter, one of the founder members of The Beatles, arguably the most famous English band in the history of pop music. After the band separated in 1970, he pursued a solo career, during which he released two highly-acclaimed albums, viz. *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* and *Imagine*. *Give Peace a Chance* from the first record and the title song from the second became not only big hits but also anthems of anti-war movements. Lennon's last album *Double Fantasy*, which he recorded with his wife Yoko Ono, was brought out in 1980.

**The Grand Canyon** is an immense steep-sided valley carved by the Colorado River in the arid land of the Colorado Plateau. Located in north-western Arizona, in the US, the canyon stretches for 446 kilometres, with its width varying from 160 metres at its narrowest to twenty-nine kilometres at its widest. Its walls are up to 1,800 metres high and display nearly forty layers of rock, providing valuable insight into Earth's geologic past. The canyon is the central feature of the stunning Grand Canyon National Park and one of the most popular natural attractions in the world, visited by five million people every year.

**The Amazon River** is the largest river in South America, and the second longest river in the world, after the Nile. The Amazon basin is also the world's largest drainage basin. The Amazon contains nearly 1,100 tributaries and covers a vast area of Brazil and Peru, parts of Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia as well as some small parts of Venezuela. During the wet season, it can be forty-eight kilometres wide. Its Atlantic estuary is 240 kilometres across and it is sometimes called the 'River Sea'.

**NGO** is an acronym for **non-governmental organisation**, i.e. an organisation that is not run by the government. NGOs are often grassroots movements and are involved in all sorts of activities, ranging from humanitarian help, through environmental protection, to political issues. NGOs operate on a non-profit basis and can be founded by the state, businesses or private people.

**Botswana** is a landlocked African country, neighbouring the Republic of South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. With approximately two million inhabitants, it has one of the lowest population densities in the world. One in ten people lives in the capital city, Gaborone. As much as seventy percent of Botswana's territory lies within the Kalahari Desert. The country is a former British protectorate which gained independence in 1966. It is one of the fifty-two member states of the Commonwealth of Nations, an organisation of former British Empire territories. Botswana is praised for its fast economic development and the improvement in the standard of living. Its economy relies mainly on diamond mining and tourism.

**The Kalahari Desert** is a large semi-desert in southern Africa. It covers an area of 900,000 square kilometres, stretching mostly across Botswana as well as Namibia and the Republic of South Africa. It is part of the Kalahari Basin, which also includes the Okavango River Delta. The Kalahari Desert receives too much rain to be considered a real desert and it owes its name to its expansive sand dunes. It is inhabited by a number of endemic animals that have adapted to the extreme conditions, but it is also home to many migratory species which find their grazing grounds there after adequate rainfall.

**The Okavango Delta** is an inland delta located in Botswana, formed by the seasonal flooding of the River Okavango. Almost half of the area is covered with permanent swamps. Between June and August the delta increases in size threefold, which attracts large-scale migrations of animals, turning it into one of Africa's richest wildlife areas. Thanks to its spectacular nature, it has been chosen as one of the Seven Natural Wonders of Africa and included on the UNESCO World Heritage List.