

1 a) Look at the picture. Where do you think these people live in: *a desert? an overcrowded city? a village? up in the mountains?* How do you know? What do you think their lifestyle might be like?

b) Check these words in the Word List. Use them to describe the people in the picture.

- *fairly short* • *dark in complexion*
- *colourfully embroidered black shirts and skirts* • *thick black leggings*
- *distinctive hats* • *remarkably tough*
- *spirited* • *cheerful*

2 Read the title of the text and the first sentence in each paragraph. What is the text about?

 Listen and read to check.

3 In your own words and based on the text, answer the questions.

- 1 What is the Akha Way?
- 2 How do Akha men's roles differ from Akha women's roles?
- 3 What are the 'spirit gates'?
- 4 How has the Akha people's lifestyle changed?

The AKHA Way

High up in the mountains of southeast Asia, you can find the Akha hill tribes living in their traditional villages and farming the land much as they have done for generations.

A The history of the Akha people goes back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. They originally came from Tibet and have maintained the physical characteristics of that region, being fairly short and dark in complexion. Today, they live in small villages in the mountainous parts of China, Laos, Burma, Vietnam and northern Thailand. The

Akha people are rich in culture, history and tradition. But they are also among the world's poorest people. Akha

women remain remarkably tough, spirited and cheerful in the face of such a harsh life. Akha men are brave and strong.

B The Akha have their own way of measuring time where one week lasts 12 days; as well as their own sets of rules. Each village has its own leader or headman, and under his guidance people follow a code of behaviour known as the Akha Way. Thanks to the Akha Way, each person in these small communities knows their role in society. The men provide for their families by farming crops like rice, corn and soya beans. They are also talented craftsmen and make crossbows, baskets and musical instruments



Check these words

- *generations* • *maintain* • *mountainous parts*
- *code of behaviour* • *crossbows* • *ancestors* • *spinning*
- *weaving* • *distinctive* • *thatched roof* • *stand on stilts*
- *wooden frame* • *spiritual significance* • *honour*
- *take things a step further* • *seek fortunes*



from bamboo. The women do spinning and weaving and make their own clothes. They wear colourfully embroidered black shirts and skirts, and thick black leggings. Their headdresses are especially distinctive. As for the children, even though many of them don't attend school, they all know the names of every plant and animal in the forest. There is no written Akha language but the oral tradition is very rich. Children have to memorise the names of all their ancestors, sometimes as far back as 60 generations!

C Akha villages all look quite similar. The bamboo houses with their thatched roofs stand on stilts on the hillsides. Every village has two wooden frames that look like a doorway at its entrance and exit. These structures have spiritual significance and are called the 'spirit gates'. Artists cover the frames with carvings of both evil and smiling faces. This is to invite good spirits to enter the village and keep bad spirits out. Each summer, with great ceremony, the men build a swing in a public open space. Here the young children gather to play, but not just as a playground game – it is part of the yearly ceremony to honour dead ancestors.

D Sadly, the Akha Way is slowly disappearing from many villages. A growing number of tourists are visiting them and introducing a taste of Western culture. You can now see young Akha tribesmen sporting leather jackets and mobile phones. The women and girls only dress traditionally when there are tourists around in the hope they will buy souvenirs. Some Akha have even decided to take things a step further: they are leaving their villages to seek their fortunes in the big cities.

STUDY SKILLS

Multiple choice

Read the text quickly to get the gist. Read the questions and possible answers and find the key words. Read the text again and find the part that contains the answer to each question. Try to find words/phrases synonymous to the key words in the questions. This will help you do the task.

4 Choose the best answers according to the text. Give reasons for your answers.

- The Akha people
 - ☐ live mainly on Tibetan farms.
 - ☐ are not used to severe conditions.
 - ☐ have a short history as a tribe.
 - ☐ are some of the least wealthy in the world.
- Akha women
 - ☐ are used to dealing with hardships.
 - ☒ do not mind being poor.
 - ☐ work harder than Akha men.
 - ☐ are more courageous than Akha men.
- The most characteristic part of the Akha women's clothing is their
 - ☐ shirts.
 - ☐ skirts.
 - ☐ leggings.
 - ☒ hats.
- The Akha build spirit gates on the edges of their villages to
 - ☐ welcome visitors to the village.
 - ☐ give artists a place to work.
 - ☒ protect the village from danger.
 - ☐ provide a play area for their children.
- The writer thinks that the Akha Way
 - ☐ is having an influence on Western culture.
 - ☒ may not be around for much longer.
 - ☐ is now only noticeable in the Akha people's clothes.
 - ☐ could take a long time to spread to cities.

5 Find words in the text that mean:

- initially (para A) • skin colour (para A) **originally, complexion**
- characteristic (para B) **distinctive**
- to learn by heart (para B) **memorise**
- importance (para C) **significance**
- to come together (para C) **gather**
- to bring in (para D) • to look for (para D) **introducing**

6 Fill in: set, embroidered, attend, fairly, talented, memorise, physical, honour, keep, thatched.

- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| physical | 1 ... characteristics | 6 to ... names | memorise |
| fairly | 2 ... short | 7 to ... school | attend |
| set | 3 ... of rules | 8 ... roofs | thatched |
| talented | 4 ... craftsmen | 9 to ... spirits out | keep |
| embroidered | 5 ... shirts | 10 to ... ancestors | honour |

PRESENTATION SKILLS p. PS1

Give a presentation on the Akha people. Talk about: *where they live, appearance, character, clothes, dwelling, lifestyle, changes.*



Compare yourself with a person from the Akha tribe. Think about: appearance, clothes, family, lifestyle. Use: *and, as well, too* (similar ideas) – *but, whereas* (opposing ideas). Read your paragraph to the class.