

Topic 5: Culture, art and traditions

About Topic 5

The **Culture, art and traditions** topic includes human folklore, ceremonies and rituals, myths and legends, social customs, traditional languages, dress and arts, the impact of modern life on traditional lifestyles and differences in national habits.

Please remember that IELTS will not ask specifically about religion, politics or spiritual beliefs, and you should not base your answers in the Writing or Speaking tests on your personal beliefs in these areas. For example, if the Task asks whether you agree with a certain idea, you would get a low mark if you say *'Yes, because my religion agrees with it/ because my President has this policy'* or similar.

You can certainly use religious or political situations as evidence or examples to support an argument, but not as a starting point. For example, *'We should give money to charity because it benefits society, as we can see for example in countries where religious observance requires people to do this regularly.'* This is a more logical and academic way to respond.

Topic 5 example Task

*In many countries, traditional dress and costumes are considered effective ways of maintaining links with the past. How effective can traditional costumes be, in this sense?
What other ways exist to help citizens connect with a country's past?*

Explanation of the Task

This is an Ideas/Evaluate type essay.

It does not ask for your opinion about whether costumes are good or bad, but it asks for you to decide whether these costumes are effective (or not effective) ways of maintaining links with the past, and to suggest other ways of connecting to the past. You should say how effective costumes are, with examples and evidence, and then compare their effectiveness to some other possible ways of connecting to the past.

Remember that 'Ideas/Evaluate' means that you should compare things in the way that they are used in society, but not decide on your personal preference about these things.

Band 9 model essay

Most people would agree that **preserving** connections with our past is an admirable objective, especially as the world evolves so rapidly. I feel that traditional costumes are one part of doing this, but they are by no means the most important, as we shall see.

Admittedly, historic dress plays a key role in social events such as religious **rituals** or military **parades**, and these events are helpful in **transmitting social memes** such as **public duty** and **self-sacrifice**. Traditional costumes also remind us of the origins of **cultural traditions and mythologies**, for instance the historic Swiss national dress which **evokes** their **medieval** independence.

However, it must be said that costumes are an accessory in these situations, and do not appear to constitute the central message. It is the **ceremonies** themselves which convey the **cultural norms** that help to maintain **the fabric of society**. In this sense, the costumes are of secondary importance. Furthermore, it seems that there are in fact much more powerful ways in which culture is **conserved** and **handed down** between the generations. Most countries have a rich **heritage** of **legends** and **folklore** about the birth and development of their nation, some of which are mythological and some being grounded in truth (as we see in the English stories about Robin Hood or George and the Dragon, for example.) These stories are a **cultural inheritance** which embodies important symbols and concepts far more effectively than dress. Similarly, we must remember the significance of art and music in passing on our traditions, in **forms** ranging from **fine art** to **handicrafts**, and from **opera** to traditional **shanties** and **dirges**. The presence of visual or **linguistic** messages in these **media** make them more effective than costumes, which convey no language.

Overall, we must recognise and welcome the use of traditional dress in helping to maintain our cultures. However, the forms of story, art and music would appear to be the driving forces in this invaluable process.

(321 words)

Explanation of the topic vocabulary and examples in Speaking

to preserve = to protect and keep something, usually because it is valuable for some reason

The state preserves ancient buildings because they are part of our heritage.

rituals = highly traditional ceremonies which have meaning for the participants

In some countries, wedding rituals continue for several days.

parades = organised processions in public by groups of people, usually to commemorate an event

In my home town, we have a military parade each year to mark our Independence Day.

to transmit = to communicate a message, literal or symbolic

The monarchy transmit symbols of power through dress and ritual.

social memes = social habits or patterns which are transmitted between people

In Britain, punctuality is a social meme.

public duty = the willingness to serve the public or the state

Civil servants need a sense of public duty.

self-sacrifice = the willingness to suffer or die for a cause

We remember the self-sacrifice of our wartime generation each year.

cultural traditions = traditions carrying cultural importance

Hospitality is a great cultural tradition in Mediterranean countries.

mythology, myth = a classic story from the past which people know is not true but which carries meaning

There are old myths about gigantic animals in my part of the countryside.

to evoke = to bring back memories or feelings

Our national flag evokes strong emotions whenever we see it.

medieval = adjective for the Middle Ages, roughly 1050 to 1400 in European history

France has some superb medieval architecture, which I saw on my gap year.

ceremonies = a ceremony is similar to a ritual, usually involving people in authority

The government enters office with a long ceremony at the presidential palace.

cultural norms = standards expected of behaviour or ideas

In some countries, marriage between cousins is a cultural norm.

the fabric of society = the way that society is connected and maintained

drugs and crime are damaging the fabric of society.

to conserve = a synonym for 'to preserve'

Conservation of old treasures is the main role of our city museum.

to hand something down (from one generation to the next) = to pass it from parents to children and to their children etc

Cultural values have been handed down for hundreds of years, but now they are starting to

disappear.

heritage = something inherited (= received/handed down) by one generation from the previous generation

Our countryside is part of our national heritage and we should preserve it carefully.

legends = similar to myths, but sometimes containing an element of reality

Robin Hood is a British legend, although most historians agree the character is based on a real person.

folklore = old stories and myths/legends, usually transmitted verbally

African folklore is rich in stories of gods and monsters.

inheritance = a synonym for 'heritage'

Our greatest inheritance as a nation is our independence and fighting spirit.

fine art = art by famous or acclaimed painters

Florence in Italy is a key destination for lovers of fine art.

handicrafts = skills of making objects by hand, and also the objects themselves

Many indigenous people make a living by selling handicrafts to tourists.

opera = a very formal play with a musical score

La Scala is the name of a famous opera venue in Italy, which I'd like to visit.

shanties and **dirges** = very traditional songs about basic subjects

Children sometimes sing shanties at primary school.

linguistic = the adjective meaning 'about language'

Linguistic skills are essential for a tour guide in the modern economy.

media = a way of communicating

Folklore is a very effective media for transmitting our cultural heritage.

(The phrase ‘the media’ is used to mean all the newspapers, broadcasters, websites and magazines commenting on issues in a country: *The president resigned due to pressure from the media, who disliked his policies*)
