

BEAUTY IS ONLY SKIN DEEP

Have America's and Britain's popular cultures defined beauty?



YOUR PROJECT

- 1 Participate in Oprah Winfrey's talk show about the impact of beauty.
- OR
- 2 Write your own definition of beauty and how it has evolved for *Teen Vogue*.

Au menu de cette unité :

DÉCOUVERTES CULTURELLES

- 🔍 L'impact du colonialisme sur les critères de beauté
- 🔍 L'auteure nigériane Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

- 🔍 La discrimination envers les roux en Angleterre (Dickens...)
- 🔍 Les prémisses de l'inclusion à Hollywood (*Crazy Rich Asians*) et dans le milieu de la mode

OUTILS LINGUISTIQUES

- 🔍 Les comparatifs et les superlatifs
- 🔍 La place des adjectifs dans la phrase
- 🔍 Les adjectifs composés

① Beauty, an Ever-evolving Concept

How is the concept of beauty evolving in the English-speaking world?

1

Beauty: before and now



A. Compare the picture of the beauty contest on the left (1940) and the cover of Vogue (2018). What has changed?

B. Now, read the quote below. Does it reflect what the Vogue cover shows? Justify.



New Frontiers, UK Vogue, May 2018 © Craig Mc Dean /
Vogue © The Condé Nast Publication Ltd.

HELP!

Nouns

- bathing suit
- beauty pageant /'pædʒənt/
- complexion: teint
- diversity
- ethnicity
- model
- scarf: écharpe

Adjectives

- attractive
- fair ≠ dark
- fit ≠ curvy
- tall

Toxic: néfaste

- unrealistic
- smiling

Verbs & expressions

- be empowered /ɪm'paʊəd/
- magnify
- photoshop = airbrush
- take pride in one's appearance

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I want to see more people that look like the women and the men I come across in the street. It's detrimental to young women to not see someone who looks like them because the reality is, we're all different.



Tess Holiday, plus-size model

2 An Empire of Beauty

To what extent did the British Empire export its ideal of beauty?

1 The effects of colonialism on beauty

Africans no longer live solely¹ in Africa, Australia hasn't been controlled by the Aboriginals for a long time and the United States are no longer defined by the Native Americans. The main reason for the countries mentioned ⁵ is colonialism, which started in the fifteenth century. Africans have been taken from their own life to be enslaved in North America, the British decided to take over Australia to make it a big prison and the Native Americans suffered the Trail of Tears and many still ¹⁰ ongoing events. This shows how dangerous greed² can be and how disastrous colonialism has been for these native inhabitants and indigenous people. Ever since colonialism was the trend and some Western Europeans decided to dominate countries that weren't theirs, much ¹⁵ has changed, including the beauty standards. Because the wealthy white European people became the people in power who owned the riches – that were never theirs to begin with – of the world, they also put a stamp³ on the beauty standard. Being black was like being a ²⁰ slave – a caged person at the bottom of the society who had no chance of ever having success in life – and therefore being looked down upon, whereas being white was considered elite and beautiful resulting in having many chances in life. The white owned a so-called social ²⁵ capital because of their skin tone and therefore had the chance to convert it into economic capital, educational capital or any other form of social capital [...] The fact that the beauty standard, as well as a professional look, has been white(like) results in Afros being relaxed⁴ – ³⁰ which is extremely harmful for the hair – and skins being bleached with creams that have dangerous side effects. [...] Since the movements have started to empower coloured women we see more beauty being celebrated. Whether ³⁵ it's black, brown or white, we are all beautiful and this is something that should be celebrated and not be forgotten. [...] Also, remember that Shakespeare



Advertisement for Artra Skin Tone Cream, 1966

wrote this in 1605: "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind; and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind" (A Midsummer Night's Dream).

1 only • 2 cupidité • 3 estampiller • 4 lissage chimique

Laura de Jager,

6 December 2016

A. Skim through the text and find the countries and the indigenous people mentioned.

B. Read the text:

- Why were the wealthy Europeans able to put a mark on the ideal of beauty?
- How long has this been going on?

C. Now, focus on the picture and describe it. Is it a good illustration of the text? Justify your answer.

2 “Americanah”

- A. Read the text. What happened to Ifemelu? Why?
How does her boyfriend react?

Ifemelu, originally from Nigeria, is living in the United States. She has a white American boyfriend, Curt.

He reached out to stroke her hair, as though doing so might make him like it.
She pushed him away. "Ouch. Careful. I have a bit of a relaxer burn."
"What?"
5 "It's not too bad. I used to get it all the time in Nigeria. Look at this." She showed him a keloid¹ behind her ear, a small enraged swelling of skin, which she got after Aunty Uju straightened her hair with a hot comb² in secondary school. "Pull back your ear," Aunty Uju often said, and Ifemelu would hold her ear, tense and unbreathing, 10 terrified that the red-hot comb fresh from the stove would burn her but also excited by the prospect of straight, swingy hair. And one day it burnt her, as she moved slightly and the hot metal singed the skin behind her ear.
"Oh, my God," Curt said, his eyes wide. He insisted on gently looking 15 at her scalp to see how much she had been hurt. "Oh my God."

- B. Go further. How does this relate to the text p. 220?

His horror made her more concerned than she would ordinarily have been. She had never felt so close to him as she did then, sitting still on the bed, her face sunk in his shirt, the scent of fabric softener in her nose, while he gently parted her newly 20 straightened hair.

"Why do you have to do this?" Your hair was gorgeous braided. And when you took out the braids the last time and just kind of let it be? It was even more gorgeous, so full and cool."

"My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a 25 backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky³."

1 big scar • 2 peigne • 3 (here) hair with tight curls

Americanah,
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2013



3 Interview with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



- A. Listen to **MP3 n°121** and take notes.
B. Recap in your own words how she feels about beauty, what makes someone beautiful and what is dangerous about beauty.

Your TURN! 4 Analyse the painting

Write the panel that explains the artist's intention for the exhibition called "Beauty and Colonialism". Focus on the double standards of beauty for women of colour vs. Caucasian women. (Hints: who is supposed to look fairer and who is supposed to look darker? Whose hair needs to be straightened, and whose hair should be curly?)



Iain Smith, British artist, 2016

HELP!

Nouns

- globalised beauty
- social pressure
- white dominated society
- standard
- make up: maquillage

- hair straightener: fer à lisser

Adjectives

- genuine ≠ artificial
- harmful

Verb & expressions

- be whitewashed
- make changes to one's appearance
- curl ≠ straighten one's hair
- have one's hair straightened

Gingerism, a Case Study

How have the British treated redheads?

1 Appearances and stereotypes

- A. Read this quote by a literature expert: "The writer with the most disdain for red hair is probably Charles Dickens". Now, read the text. Do you agree with the quote? Why (not)?
B. What conclusions can we make about how English people saw redheads at the time?

HELP!

Adjectives

- amiable
- antagonistic
- engaging
- villainous /'vɪlənəs/

Verbs & expressions

- vilify
- be prejudiced against sb
- take a stand for / against

2 Ginger pride

- A. Look at the picture. Comment on it orally (place, signs, slogans, people...).
B. Read the text and sum up the redhead situation in your own words.

RED is the colour of fire and passion – which is clearly why it suits us Scots. Along with the stereotypes of kilts and haggis¹, we're renowned for our red hair, including everything from strawberry blonde² through bright ginger³ and intense auburn⁴. More than 20 million people in the UK and Republic of Ireland have genes that produce red hair. Scotland has the highest percentage of redheads, closely followed by Ireland. There are approximately 650,000 redheads in Scotland, which is about one eighth of the country's population. The nation's capital Edinburgh was even chosen as the venue for the first-ever Ginger Pride march.

¹ traditional Scottish meal • ² light red hair • ³ orangey red hair • ⁴ dark red hair

When the pony-chaise stopped at the door, and my eyes were intent upon the house, I saw a cadaverous¹ face appear at a small window on the ground floor (in a little round tower that formed one side of the house), and quickly disappear. The low arched door then opened, and the face came out. It was quite as cadaverous as it had looked in the window, though in the grain of it there was that tinge of red which is sometimes to be observed in the skins of red-haired people. It belonged to a red-haired person – a youth of fifteen, as I take it now, but looking much older – whose hair was cropped² as close as the closest stubble; who had hardly any eyebrows, and no eyelashes, and eyes of a red-brown, so unsheltered and unshaded, that I remember wondering how he went to sleep. He was high-shouldered and bony; dressed in decent black, with a white wisp of a neckcloth; buttoned up to the throat; and had a long, lank, skeleton hand, which particularly attracted my attention, as he stood at the pony's head, rubbing his chin with it, and looking up at us in the chaise.

¹ cadavélique • ² cut very short

David Copperfield,
Charles Dickens, 1850



3 Redhead Bullying

- A. Read the text and say how gingers are treated.
Is their situation different in the USA and in the UK?
- B. What advice does actress Amanda Barron give to overcome redhead bullying?
- C. Have your say. Is it easy for someone to accept themselves the way they are?

As a Black woman who grew up in predominantly Black communities in the United States, I was actually surprised to learn about modern-day bullying of people with red hair. Because there are advertisements for red hair-dye on television, I thought that red hair was almost generally seen as attractive and admirable. Red hair only occurs in 1-2% of the world population, but others are "faking it" by dyeing their hair red. But despite the use of red hair-dye, red-head bullying is a global issue.

- 5 10-year-old Helena Farrell of the United Kingdom committed suicide in 2013, in part, due to being bullied over her red hair. Her father, Enda Farrell, called for a law to make hair color discrimination illegal. My British friend explained to me that bullying people based on body 15 weight, race or ethnicity are generally considered wrong in the UK, but bullying people with red or ginger hair is socially accepted. If that is true, such a law makes a great deal of sense because it will spark¹ social change. Besides verbal teasing², people with red hair may also 20 face physical assaults. [...] But for most red heads, it seems, the primary struggle does not consist of physical assault, it is rather, a struggle for self-acceptance. I spoke to red-haired actress Amanda Barron who has been featured in television series such as Royal Pains and 25 movies such as *Homo Faber* about her experiences with red-head / ginger bullying. [...]

Steps to Overcoming Redhead / Ginger Bullying

Step 1: Go Where You Are Validated

- A turning point for Amanda occurred when she emigrated 30 from the UK to the US to be a nanny and found many people who loved red hair. She was not called "ginger" anymore, she was called a "redhead" and she preferred that. But even if you are in the US already or you can't make the trip from the UK, you can try to surround



- 35 yourself with affirming ideas and images surrounding red-hair. There are redhead festivals in numerous countries. [...] All of us are constantly being brainwashed³ into believing that there is only one way to be beautiful. Turn off the 40 agents of brainwashing. Yes, turn off the mainstream television shows and don't pick up mainstream magazines that passively bully you by excluding your type of beauty. Choose more affirming media. If it does not exist, create it. Support laws and organizations that promote change 45 with respect to your concerns. Further, switch social circles if necessary. [...] Step 2: Make the decision to love yourself and embrace your difference – period⁴! Amanda went from being a self-conscious and shy kid and 50 teenager that put her red hair back to becoming a global actress who seeks to be in front of everyone's eyes. She had to make a decision to embrace her difference. She had to make the conscious decision not to conform by purchasing blond-hair-dye. Are you courageous enough to do the same?

¹ begin • ² make fun of someone • ³ made to believe something
• ⁴ point final

Ama Karikari-Yawson,
30 October 2014

4 Fight the prejudices against gingers!

You are part of the Ginger Pride group. Write a positive description of a red-headed character to submit to your school's literary magazine.

4 Beauty: The Secret to Happiness?

Why do people go to such lengths to change their appearance?

1 "Uglies"

A. Read the text and describe how Tally sees the "Pretties".

In Tally's society, "uglies" live in Uglyville until they undergo intensive surgery to become "pretties" and live in Prettytown. In this scene Tally sneaks into Prettytown even though she's not pretty yet.

Tally had memorized the map, but if she made one wrong turn, she was toast¹. Without her interface ring, she was invisible to vehicles. They'd just run her down like she was nothing. Of course, Tally was nothing here.

Worse, she was ugly. But she hoped Peris wouldn't see it that way. Wouldn't see her that way.

Tally had no idea what would happen if she got caught. [...] Crossing the river was serious business.

It was too late to worry now, though. What could they do to her, anyway? In three months she'd be a pretty herself. [...] A pretty couple wandered down the path. Tally froze, but they were clueless, too busy staring into each other's

B. What positive connotations does being pretty have?

eyes to see her crouching in the darkness. Even when she and Peris used to spy on them from the shadows, giggling at all the stupid things the pretties said and did, they couldn't resist staring. There was something magic in their large and perfect eyes, something that made you want to pay attention to whatever they said, to protect them from any danger, to make them happy. They were so... pretty. The two disappeared around the next bend, and Tally shook her head to clear the mushy² thoughts away. She wasn't here to gawk³. She was an infiltrator, a sneak⁴, an ugly. And she had a mission.

1 to be in deep trouble • 2 excessively sentimental •

3 stare at something • 4 a person who acts in a furtive way

Uglies,
Scott Westerfield, 2005



2 Why do celebrities look the same?

A. Look at the two photos and read the title of the activity. Do you think they are similar? Make hypotheses about why they might look the same.

B. Read the text and check your hypotheses.

C. Have your say. What do you think about the lack of diversity in Hollywood?



Ever find yourself a little confused while watching television? Ever catch yourself enjoying a performance by your favourite actor only to find it was someone else? You pick up a fashion magazine to soothe your confused mind and – oh, look who's on the cover, it's that Bosworth girl. But no! It's Kate Hudson! Are you really so old that you can't tell your celebrities apart? Or are all celebrities actually beginning to look alike? Happily, the latter is more likely. Let's see, there's Hudson who looks like Miller who looks like Bosworth who looks like Paris Hilton who looks like Lohan who looks like Mischa Barton who looks like Keira Knightley. Then there are the Olsen twins who look like Nicole Richie who looks like Jennifer Aniston, and so on.

15 This has long been a phenomenon among older actresses due to use of the same plastic surgeon. For the Bosworths / Hudsons of this world, the cause is different, if somewhat similar. Namely, most of them are using the same four stylists, each of whom dresses their "girls" up in a very similar way. Also, to blame are celebrity publicists for being so image-obsessed that they only allow their clients to have a certain look.

Hadley Freeman, *The Guardian*, 2006

3 The Halo effect

- A.** Read the article. What is the main topic?
- B. Pairwork.** Use the article to explain how we would describe Cruella De Vil and Beyoncé's personalities based on their appearances.
- C.** Think of other examples from Disney movies where the villain is stereotypically ugly and the hero / heroine is attractive.
- D.** Can you think of examples where this does not apply?
- E. Go further.** What effect does this have on how we treat others?

The Halo effect is the idea that people tend to believe that people who are physically attractive have other positive qualities such as intelligence, kindness¹, and honesty. The opposite is true for those who are viewed as unattractive in the eye of society. [...] Hollywood and other forms of media have ingrained² the idea that good people have beautiful faces. Think about most of the Disney movies from your childhood. It was easy to spot the villain and heroes just from how they looked. The good characters would be physically attractive, and the villains would be represented with dark colors and less appealing characteristics. These messages have been shown to you repeatedly since childhood and taught us to associate beauty with benevolence. You specifically look for attractive features, such as facial symmetry (normally indicating good genes), and then group people into categories (e.g. attractive, unattractive) based on these judgments. [...] Life however, is not always like the movies.

1 niceness • **2** establish a belief

Samantha Ladd, [REDACTED], 2017



HELP!

Nouns

- self-confidence
- advancement = promotion
- favour = benefit

Adjectives

- unattainable
- disingenuous: fourbe

Verbs & expressions

- trick = deceive
- get ahead (in life)
- play on one's insecurities

YOUR TURN! 4 Write a petition

Write a petition on change.org to demand that characters in children's movies not be so stereotypical.