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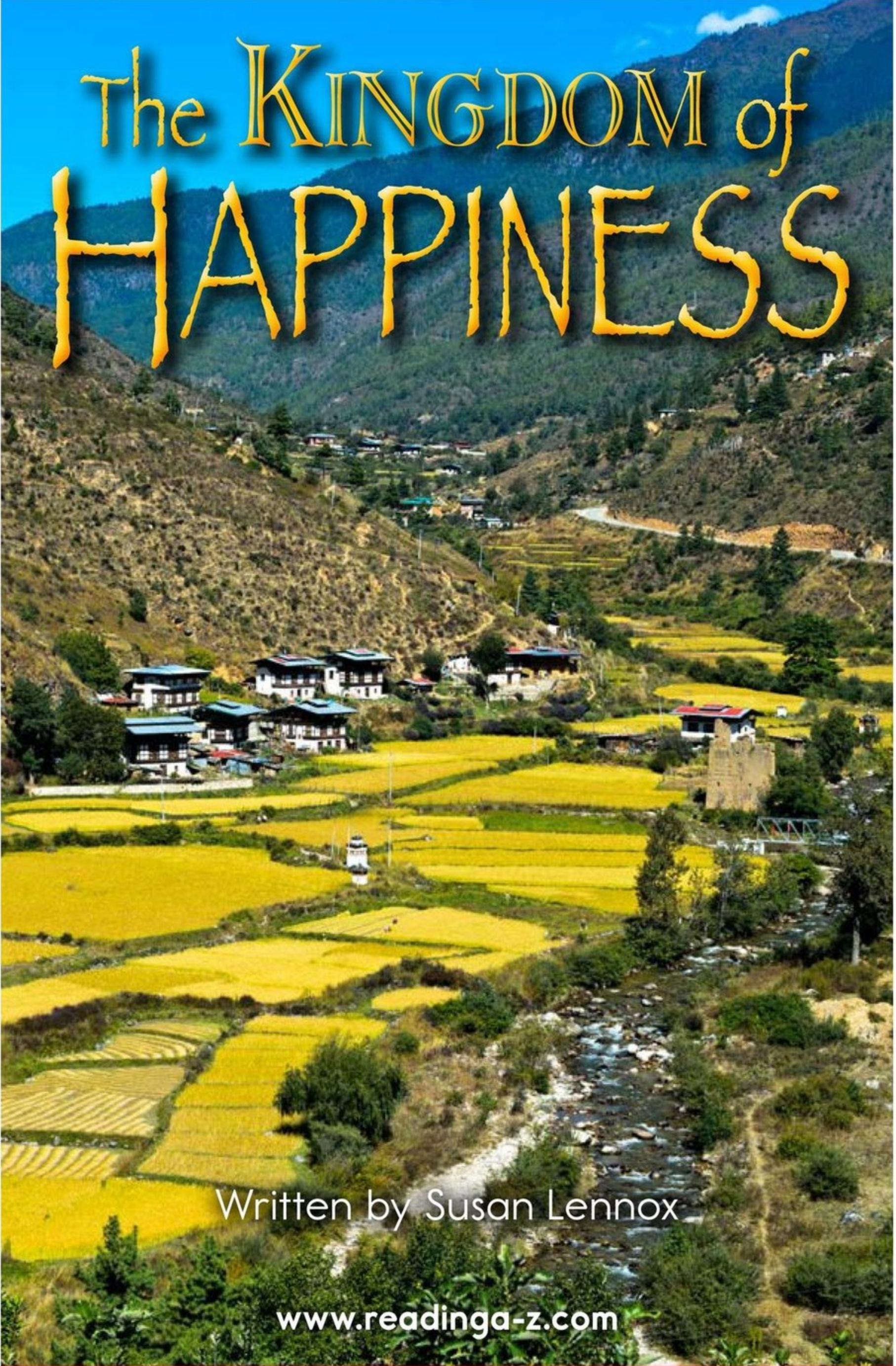
# The KINGDOM of HAPPINESS

Written by Susan Lennox

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# The KINGDOM of **HAPPINESS**



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## Focus Question

Is it important to measure happiness?

## Words to Know

analyzed

Buddhist

critical

index

prosper

remote

secluded

spiritual

surveys

thrive

tracking

traditional

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## Introduction

What exactly is happiness? Is it a moment of joy or laughter? Or is it something more? The citizens of Bhutan (boo-TAHN) think of happiness as contentment or satisfaction. The leaders of Bhutan believe happiness is more important than money. That's why this tiny mountain kingdom **surveys** its citizens every few years to see just how happy they are. The Bhutanese government uses this information to improve life in the country nicknamed "The Kingdom of Happiness."

### Four Fast Facts About Bhutan

1. Bhutan is nestled in the Himalaya Mountains between China and India. The country is about the size of Switzerland.
2. The native language is Dzongkha (ZOHNG-kah), although many citizens also speak English.
3. For centuries, Bhutan defended its borders with bows and arrows. Today, archery is the national sport.
4. Bhutan became a constitutional monarchy, or a government in which a parliament oversees the power of the king, in 2008.



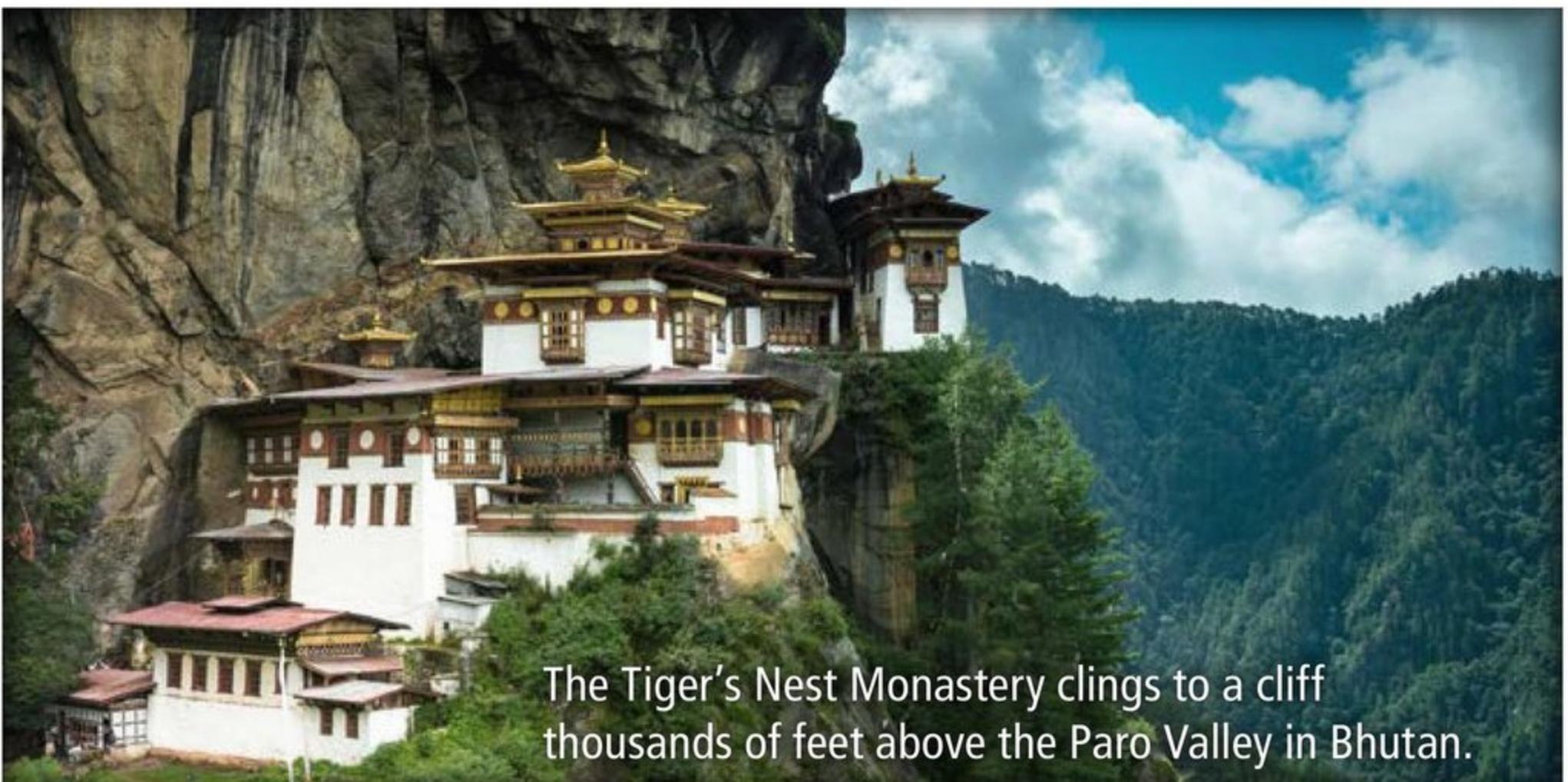


Bhutan's landscape ranges from low plains in the south to the towering Himalaya Mountains in the north.

## Growth and Happiness

Bhutan's first happiness survey was taken in 2007. However, the idea of **tracking** the nation's happiness came about long before that.

In 1972, Jigme Singye Wangchuck became king of Bhutan. He was just sixteen years old. The teenage king wanted to help his country **prosper** while remaining true to its values. He felt that the way other nations thought about prosperity was wrong for Bhutan. Most other nations use a measurement called Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to track and guide growth. GDP measures the value of all the goods and services produced in a country.



Buying and selling were not the driving force in Bhutanese culture, however. The country has many farms and villages but few factories and cities. Bhutan is also mainly a **Buddhist** nation. Buddhists believe that achieving happiness is an important step in leading a fulfilling life. For them, being happy is not about money. To achieve happiness, they believe a person must examine and improve many aspects of life: **spiritual**, physical, social, and environmental.

King Wangchuck was convinced that the country as a whole should focus on these things, too. It didn't make sense to focus only on money. The king felt that increasing the Bhutanese people's happiness, not just its wealth, was the way to grow and **thrive**.



## Four Pillars of Happiness

The Bhutanese government created the idea of Gross National Happiness (GNH) as a guide for running the country. The popular young king and his ministers discussed how they might promote happiness when making important decisions. They considered four key areas, or “pillars,” tied to the Buddhist idea of happiness.

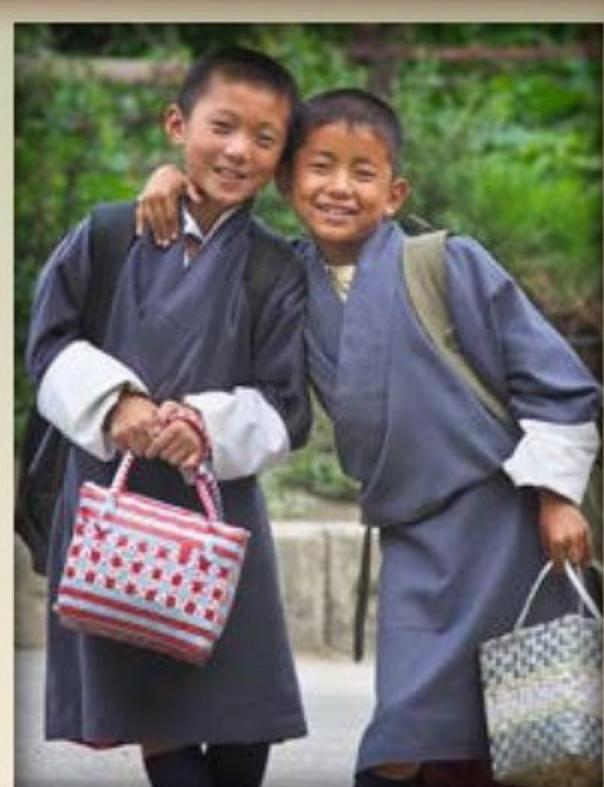
The first pillar was about how people were governed. This was important because policies and laws determine how citizens live their lives. The second pillar examined how people worked and played together, which can affect their mental state and happiness.

The third pillar was about preserving Bhutanese culture. This was **critical** for Bhutanese identity. The final pillar explored people’s relationship to their environment.

### Gross National Happiness

The measurement for Gross National Happiness is based on Bhutanese values:

1. Good governance
2. Sustainable socioeconomic development
3. Preservation and promotion of culture
4. Environmental conservation

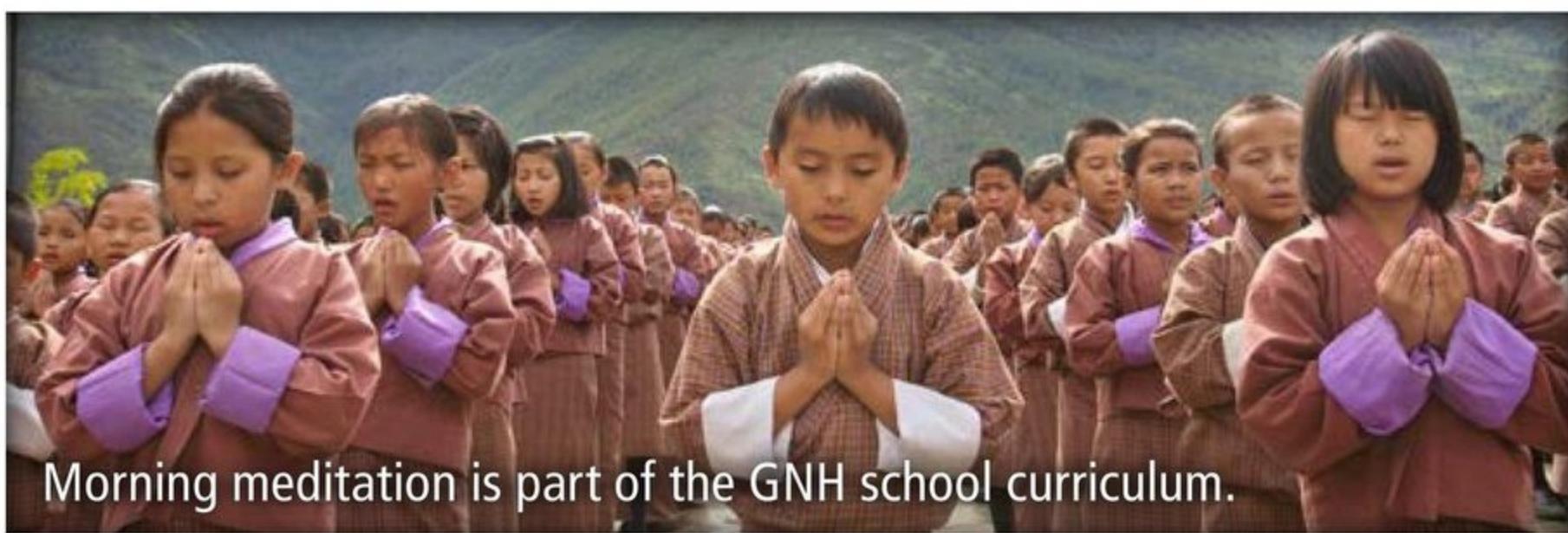


Bhutan's leaders believed these four pillars must be in balance for their citizens to achieve happiness in life.

At first, the four pillars were only simple suggestions for the Bhutanese people's happiness. Nothing was measured, no data captured. Bhutan was a **secluded** land, shielded from the modern world by the massive Himalaya Mountains. It didn't trade much with Western nations. Few visitors came to the country. Then things began to change. Bhutan suddenly became a destination for tourists who wanted to find out more about the secluded kingdom.



Giant prayer wheels can be found all over Bhutan, from bus stops to monasteries.



In 1999, the Bhutanese government allowed television and the Internet inside its borders for the first time. Bhutan's citizens began to learn more about the world outside their own country, and the world learned more about Bhutan. People were attracted to Bhutan's untouched beauty and its peaceful lifestyle.

Visitors to Bhutan found a land where time was less rushed. At school and at work, people dressed in **traditional** Bhutanese clothing. Signs along the roads encouraged citizens to connect with nature. Meditation—sitting quietly for a time with one's thoughts—was part of the daily routine. People spent time with their families. All these things contributed to the population's sense of well-being.

## Do You Know?

There are no stoplights in Bhutan. One was put up in the capital city of Thimphu, but it was removed. Citizens felt that a stoplight was just too modern. Instead, a traffic officer directs cars through the city's downtown.





A group of young monks gather around a cell phone at a monastery in Paro, Bhutan.

## Measuring Happiness

The dawn of a new century brought changes to Bhutan. Technology found its way through the mountains that had protected Bhutan from outside influences. The once-secluded kingdom found itself with one foot in the past and the other in the modern world. Now Bhutanese children watched television and played video games after meditation. Citizens in traditional dress used cell phones.

The country's leaders were concerned that the old traditions and values would be lost. If that happened, the original sense of what brought the Bhutanese people happiness might also be lost. Bhutan needed a systematic way to prevent this loss. By measuring happiness regularly, the Bhutanese government could track changes and find ways to address these concerns.

Deciding how to measure a country's happiness was a big challenge. The Bhutanese Ministry of Planning went to work. First, they created nine areas, or "domains," that were based on the four pillars of happiness. The domains were then broken down into dozens of categories. When considered together, the domains and categories give a complete happiness picture called the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index. The index is a scale that could be used to measure happiness in the kingdom. The next step was to use these categories to create many questions about people's personal satisfaction. People were asked questions such as "How much do you enjoy life?"



The questions were put into a survey for citizens. Each answer had a number value. The values of the answers were added up to get a score for each person. Survey teams traveled to **remote** mountain villages, valley farms, and main cities. The teams explained to citizens what the survey was about and how the results would be used to improve Bhutan.

In 2007, the government tested the survey in some districts. In 2010, the survey was ready to be given across the whole country. That year more than seven thousand citizens out of over seven hundred thousand provided information. The results were **analyzed** using the GNH Index. The higher the number, the greater the happiness level. The survey found that overall, certain groups were the least happy. These included women, farmers, and people who were uneducated or elderly.

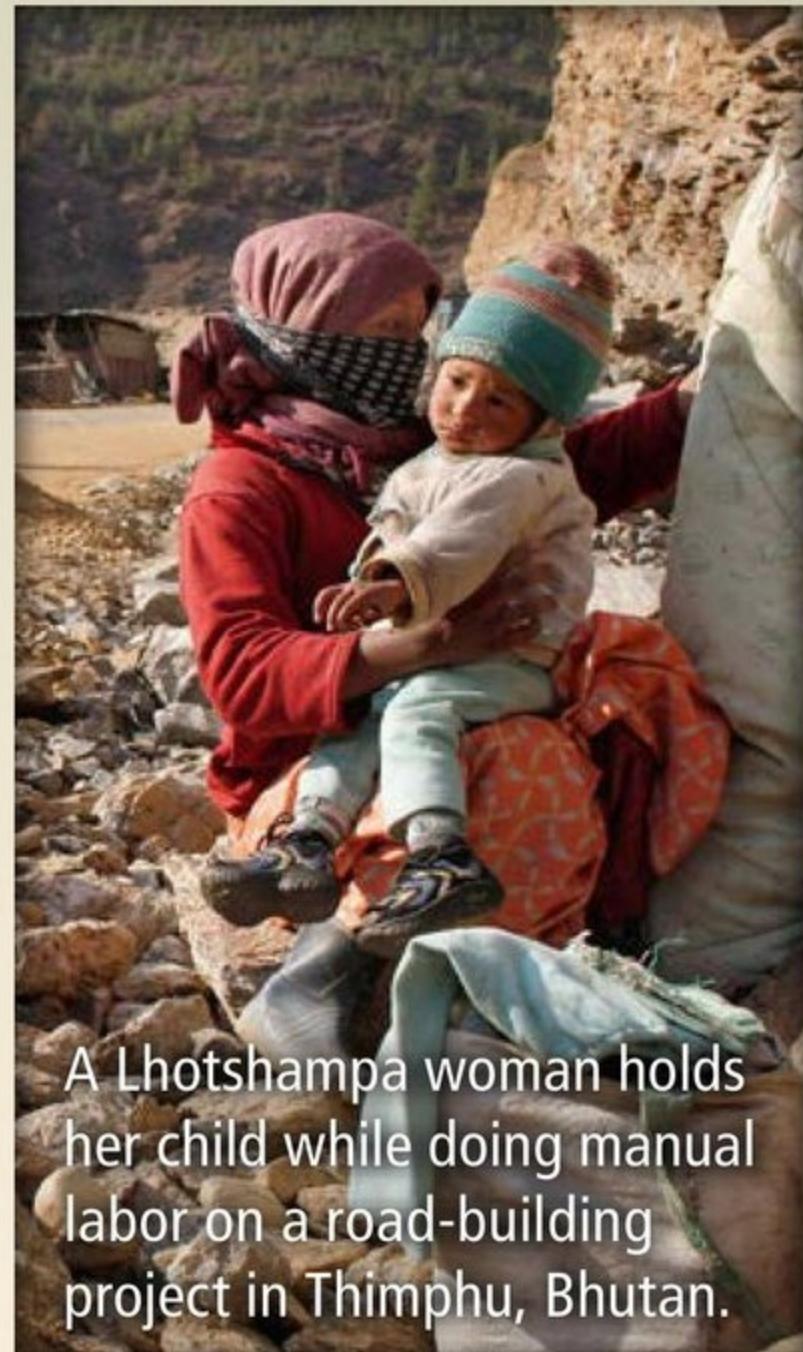
Improvements in health care and living standards followed. Then another survey was done in 2015. Those results were compared with the 2010 survey results. The government learned that Bhutan's overall level of happiness rose by 1.8 percent. More than 43 percent of the population was considered deeply happy.

## Is Everybody Happy?

One group of people in Bhutan who were not included in the survey were the Lhotshampa (loh-TSUHM-puh). They are Bhutanese citizens of Nepali descent who live in the southern part of Bhutan. Many of them came from Nepal in the nineteenth century to farm the rich land.

The Lhotshampa people practice Hinduism, which is different from Buddhism. In the mid-1980s the Bhutanese government introduced a campaign requiring all citizens to wear Bhutanese clothing, speak Dzongkha, and practice Buddhism.

During the 1990s, tens of thousands of Lhotshampa fled Bhutan. Some went to Nepal and settled in camps. By 2015, close to eighty-five thousand refugees came to the United States. Many hope to return to Bhutan someday.

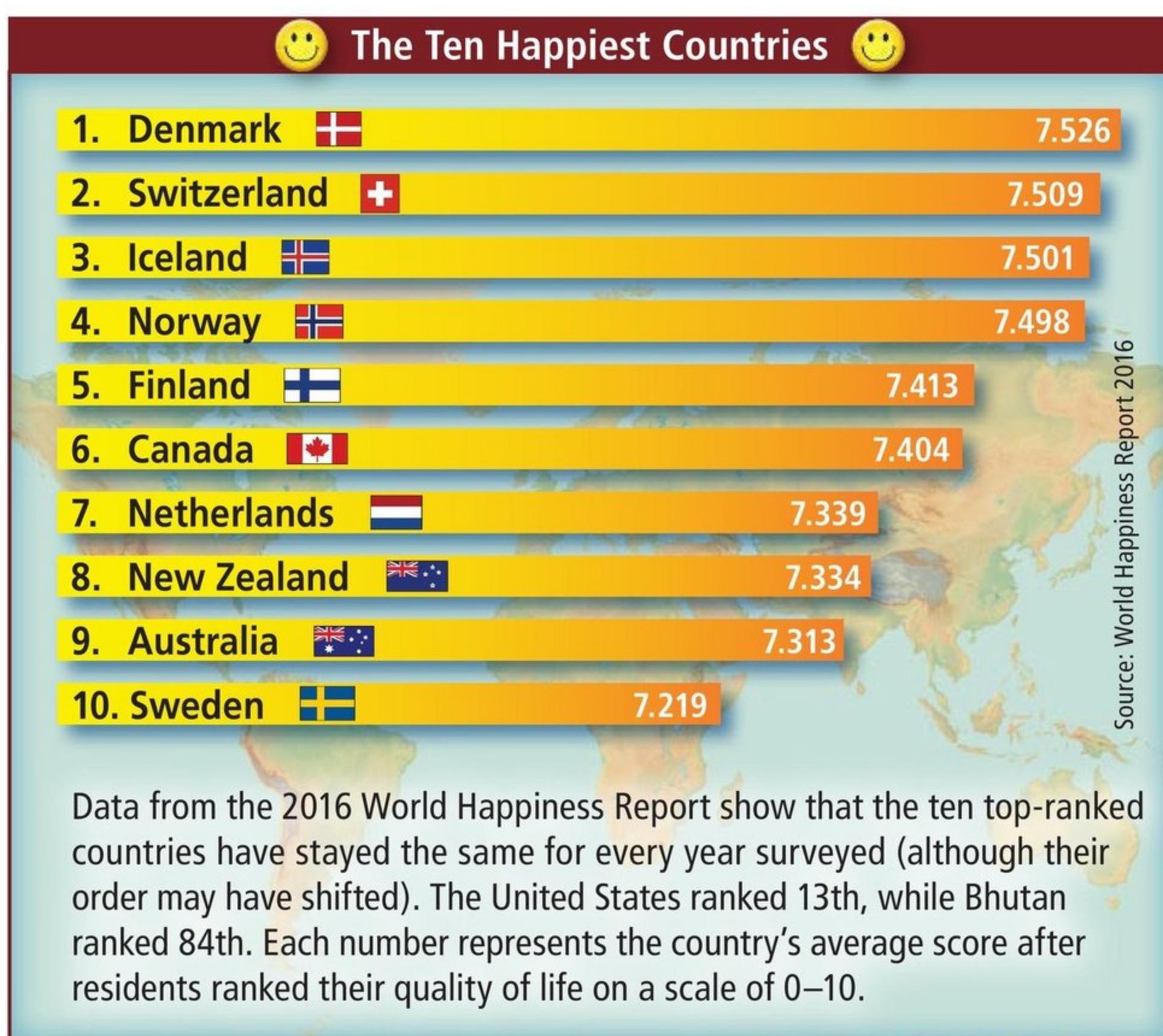


A Lhotshampa woman holds her child while doing manual labor on a road-building project in Thimphu, Bhutan.

There were other categories, though, where happiness declined: mental well-being, community strength, and cultural variety. People did less volunteer work than before. Fewer people thought that traditions were important. The Bhutanese government plans to use the information from the survey to increase happiness. They may, for example, schedule festivals that ask for communities to join in ancient traditions. The goal is to have a 100 percent deeply happy population someday.

## A World of Happy People

Other nations around the world have taken notice of Bhutan's GNH Index. Some have used it to gather information on their own citizens' happiness. In 2007, Thailand created a national happiness index similar to Bhutan's. South Korea and Great Britain also developed their own scales based on Bhutan's GNH Index. In 2009, a major United States survey company took a happiness survey of people in the United States. All these countries saw real value in trying to promote continued happiness among their citizens.





Economic growth is secondary to personal happiness in the remote kingdom of Bhutan.

In 2011, the United Nations, an organization of countries throughout the world, conducted its first study of world happiness. The United Nations published its first World Happiness Report in 2012. The report ranked countries based on factors similar to those used in Bhutan's GNH Index. That same year, it officially declared March 20 the International Day of Happiness. On that day, the Sun is lined up with Earth's equator, and day and night are equally long. This day represents King Wangchuck's belief that balance is the key to well-being and happiness.

## Glossary

<b>analyzed</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	examined closely (p. 12)
<b>Buddhist</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to Buddhism, a religion based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama in ancient India (p. 6)
<b>critical</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	very important; relating to a turning point (p. 7)
<b>index</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a number that is used as a measure of something or to indicate change in the level of something (p. 11)
<b>prosper</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to achieve financial success; to become healthy and strong (p. 5)
<b>remote</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	distant or isolated (p. 12)
<b>secluded</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	hidden away, with few people around (p. 8)
<b>spiritual</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	related to spirit, soul, or a divine being (p. 6)
<b>surveys</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	asks or questions a group of people in order to collect information for analysis (p. 4)
<b>thrive</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to grow well and be healthy (p. 6)
<b>tracking</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	watching the progress of something; following (p. 5)
<b>traditional</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to a long-established custom (p. 9)

# The Kingdom of Happiness

A Reading A-Z Level W Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,255

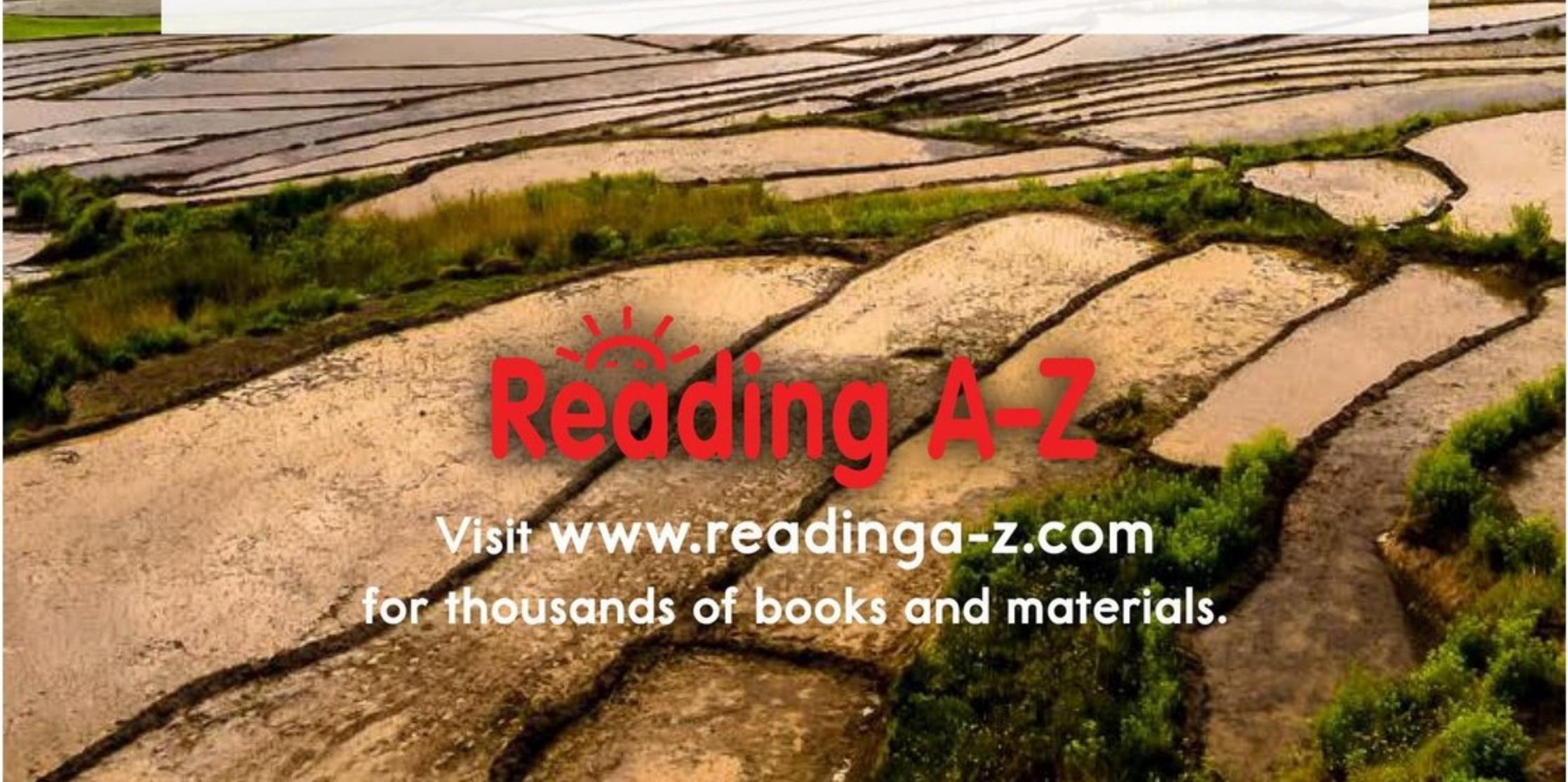
## Connections

### Writing

Choose four things in your life that make you happy, such as your health or time at home or school. In a paragraph, give examples of how each thing makes you happy.

### Social Studies

Research Bhutan and create a poster that shows your findings. Provide facts about the country, including population size, language, religion, currency, and government leaders.



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