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# Wedding Customs

Marriage is an ancient religious and legal practice celebrated around the world. Although the reasons that people marry are similar in many places, wedding customs vary from country to country.

## The Wedding Dress

5 In many countries, it is customary for the bride to wear a white dress as a symbol of **purity**. The tradition of wearing a special white dress only for the wedding ceremony started around 150 years ago. Before that, most women could not afford to buy a dress that they would only wear once. Now, bridal dresses can be bought in a variety of styles and **fabrics**, and many brides have their dress specially made. In some countries, colors other than white are worn by the bride or used as part of the wedding ceremony. In certain Asian countries and in the Middle East, red and orange are considered symbols of joy and happiness. In Asia it is not uncommon for the bride and groom to change clothes more than once as the ceremony **progresses**.



## The Wedding Veil

15 As part of many traditional wedding ceremonies, a bride wears a veil. Wearing a veil that covers the head and face is a tradition that is over 2,000 years old. Veils were originally worn as a sign of secrecy and **modesty** and could only be removed by the husband after the ceremony. Today, many brides wear a veil, but only for decoration. In some countries, a veil is placed between the bride and groom during the wedding ceremony so that they cannot see or touch each other until they are married.

## The Rings

25 In many cultures, couples exchange rings, usually made of gold or silver, during the marriage ceremony. The circular shape of the ring is symbolic of the couple's **eternal union**. In Brazil, it is traditional to have the rings **engraved**, with the bride's name on the groom's ring, and vice versa.<sup>1</sup> The wedding ring is usually worn on the third finger of the left or right hand, because it was once believed that a vein<sup>2</sup> ran directly from this finger to the heart.



## Flowers

30 Flowers play an important role in most weddings. Roses are said to be the flowers of love, and because roses usually **bloom** in June, this has become the most popular month for weddings in many countries. Ivy is also used in wedding bouquets<sup>3</sup> because in early Greek times it was thought to be a sign of everlasting love. After the wedding ceremony, it is customary in many countries for the bride to throw her bouquet into a crowd of well wishers—usually her single female friends. It is said that the person who catches the bouquet will be the next one to marry.

## Gifts

In Chinese cultures, wedding guests give gifts of money to the newlyweds in small red envelopes. Money is also an appropriate gift at Korean and Japanese weddings. Not all cultures, however, consider money an appropriate gift. In many Western countries, for example in the U.K., wedding guests give the bride and groom household items that they may need for their new home. In Russia, rather than receiving gifts, the bride and groom provide gifts to their guests instead. In Scotland, a week before the wedding ceremony, the bride's mother may invite the guests to her house and **show off** all the wedding gifts received, unwrapped, each with a card that has the giver's name on it.

With the continued internationalization of the modern world, wedding customs that originated in one part of the world are crossing national boundaries and have been incorporated into marriage ceremonies in other countries. Couples frequently use a variety of traditional customs from different cultures in creating a memorable wedding ceremony.

<sup>1</sup>**vice versa** the same, but also in reverse; the opposite is also true

<sup>2</sup>**vein** a small tube in the body that carries blood to the heart

<sup>3</sup>**bouquet** a group of flowers put together, usually to be given as a gift or to be held in a ceremony

## Reading Comprehension:

Check Your Understanding

**A** How much do you remember from the reading? Choose the best answer to complete each statement below.

- 1 The tradition of wearing a special dress only on one's wedding day is about \_\_\_\_\_ years old.  
a. 150    b. 2,000    c. 2,500
- 2 In some cultures, the bride wears a white dress as a traditional symbol of \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. modesty    b. purity    c. secrecy
- 3 In some Asian and Middle Eastern countries, which color is NOT considered to be a happy color for a wedding?  
a. red    b. orange    c. blue
- 4 According to the reading, in which country would the wedding guests give the bride and groom money?  
a. Brazil    b. the U.K.    c. China

**B** Complete the sentences with information from the reading. Write no more than three words for each answer.

- 1 In many cultures, a wedding ring is worn on the third finger because people believed this finger was connected \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2 There is a belief that the person who catches the bride's bouquet will be the next \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 It is customary to engrave the bride and groom's names on wedding rings in \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 In Scotland, the bride's mother may invite the wedding guests to her house in order to show off the \_\_\_\_\_.