



Before You Read

^ A man of the Huli tribe from Papua New Guinea preparing for an annual festival called *sing-sing*.

- A. Survey.** Complete the survey about beauty. Then explain your answers to a partner.

	Yes.	No.
1. I spend a lot of time thinking about my appearance.		
2. I think good-looking people have easier lives than other people.		
3. I think it's fine for men to wear makeup.		
4. Women are judged on their looks more than men are.		
5. If I lost my hair, I might consider wearing a wig.		
6. Too many people diet to make themselves more attractive.		

- B. Scan.** Quickly scan the reading on pages 25–27. Match the people with their attitudes toward beauty.

People

1. ____ The ancient Maya
2. ____ Most women
3. ____ People of the Huli culture
4. ____ 18th-century French people
5. ____ Most men

What is considered attractive

- a. smaller noses and chins
- b. men with painted faces
- c. cross-eyed people
- d. large shoulders and narrow waists
- e. large white wigs

WHAT IS BEAUTY?

^ A trainee geisha puts on her makeup in Kyoto, Japan.

1 **THE SEARCH FOR BEAUTY** spans centuries and continents. Paintings of Egyptians dating back over 4,000 years show both men and women painting their nails and wearing makeup. On the other side of the globe, the ancient Maya of Central America considered crossed eyes¹ beautiful, and hung little balls between children's eyes to develop this look. In 18th-century France, wealthy noblemen² wore large wigs of long white hair to make themselves attractive. In cultures throughout the world, people have gone to extreme lengths to achieve the goal of beauty.

10 Today, people continue to **devote** a lot of time and money to their appearance. According to a recent report, one out of three consumers globally say they are spending more money today on beauty and health care products than ever before. Worldwide, sales of makeup, dieting, hair- and skin-care products, as well as gym memberships and cosmetic surgery,³ generate billions of dollars every year.

15 And there is at least one good reason for the desire to be attractive: Beauty is power. Studies suggest that good-looking people make more money, get called on more often in class, and are perceived as friendlier.

¹ **Crossed eyes** are eyes that seem to look toward each other.

² **Noblemen** are men who belong to a high rank, title, or status.

³ **Cosmetic surgery** is surgery done to make someone look more attractive.



20 But what exactly *is* beauty? Trying to define it is difficult, and yet we know it when we see it—or so we think. “Beauty is health,” says one psychologist. “It’s a billboard saying ‘I’m healthy. I can pass on your genes.’” And our awareness of it may start at a very early age. In one set of studies, six-month-old
25 babies were shown a series of photographs. The faces in the pictures had been rated for attractiveness by a group of college

30 students. In the studies, the babies spent more time looking at the attractive faces than the unattractive ones.

35 The idea that even babies judge appearance makes perfect sense to many researchers. In studies done by psychologists such as Victor Johnston at New Mexico State University and David Perrett at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, men regularly showed a preference for women with certain features:



◀ Comédie Française performers await their entrance to a Molière comedy, in Paris, France.

larger eyes, clear skin, fuller lips, and a smaller nose and chin. Another study suggests that women prefer men with large shoulders and a narrow waist. According to scientists, the mind unconsciously tells men and women that these traits—the full lips, clear skin, strong shoulders—equal health and genetic well-being. In other words, it's a **fundamental** part of human nature to look for these qualities in a **mate**.

Not everyone agrees with this **notion**, however. "Our hardwiredness can be **altered** by all sorts of expectations—**predominantly** cultural," says C. Loring Brace, an anthropologist at the University of Michigan. What is considered attractive in one culture might not be in another. Look in most Western fashion magazines, for example, and the women on the pages are thin. But is this the "perfect" body type for women worldwide? Douglas Yu, a biologist from Great Britain, and Glenn Shepard, an anthropologist at the University of California at Berkeley, say no; what is considered beautiful is **subjective** and varies around the world. Yu and Shepard found in one study, for example, that native peoples in southeast Peru preferred shapes regarded as overweight in Western cultures.

Take another example: In every culture, one's hairstyle sends a clear message. In the Huli culture of Papua New Guinea, men grow their hair long as a symbol of health and strength. Teenage boys in this culture learn from a young age to style and decorate their hair—a behavior more commonly associated with the opposite **gender** in many cultures. It is also the men in this culture who are the objects of beauty. For certain festivals and celebrations, men dress up and paint their faces. The more colorful a man is, the more masculine⁴—and attractive—he is considered.

For better or worse, beauty plays a role in our lives. But it is extremely difficult to define exactly what makes one person attractive to another. Although there do seem to be certain physical traits that are considered universally appealing, it is also true that beauty does not always **conform** to a single, **uniform** standard. A person's cultural background, for example, may influence what he or she finds attractive in others. In the end, beauty really is, as the saying goes, in the eye of the beholder.

⁴ **Masculine** qualities and things are typical for men, in contrast to women.

Reading Comprehension

Multiple Choice. Choose the best answer for each question.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Gist | 1. What is this reading mainly about?
a. what people think about beauty
b. the history of beauty
c. the world's most beautiful people
d. how beauty is power |
| Detail | 2. The ancient Maya hung balls between children's eyes _____.
a. because they hoped it would improve their eyesight
b. to differentiate boys from girls
c. because they thought crossed eyes were beautiful
d. to add an attractive "third" eye |
| Vocabulary | 3. In line 17, <i>perceived</i> can be replaced with _____.
a. known
b. seen
c. treated
d. compared |
| Detail | 4. In paragraph 4 (starting line 18), the babies in the study _____.
a. were shown photos of college students
b. were entered in a beauty contest
c. were rated for their beauty
d. were able to tell attractive from unattractive faces |
| Detail | 5. What determines the beauty of a Huli man in Papua New Guinea?
a. how young he is
b. how colorful he is
c. how strong he is
d. how big his mask is |
| Inference | 6. What do you think the saying in the last sentence means?
a. Beauty is subjective and is different for different people.
b. Beauty is something that first appeals to sight.
c. Beauty is something that is held in high esteem.
d. Beauty of a person depends on their eyes. |
| Detail | 7. According to the writer, perceptions of beauty _____.
a. change over time
b. are the same for every person
c. have little influence on a person's success
d. can be easily defined |

Critical Thinking

Inferring: What do you think Brace means by "Our hardwiredness can be altered by all sorts of expectations"?

Discussion: Do you agree with the saying "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder"? Give examples to support your opinion.

Using Examples to Support Claims

Usually when a writer makes a claim, it needs to be supported. One way to do this is by providing concrete examples. These may (but not always) be introduced with a phrase such as *for example*, *for instance*, *like*, and *such as*. In the reading passage (on pages 25–27), the writer makes the claim that people continue to spend a lot of time and money on their appearance. This is supported by mentioning the increased sales of makeup, dieting, hair- and skin-care products, gym memberships, and cosmetic surgery.

Multiple Choice. Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Use of makeup in which culture is given as an example of the long history of beauty?
 - a. Egypt
 - b. the Maya
 - c. Japan
 - d. Papua New Guinea
2. Which of these is NOT given as an example of “Beauty is power”?
 - a. Attractive people make more money.
 - b. Attractive people get called on more often in class.
 - c. Attractive people are seen as friendlier.
 - d. Attractive people are perceived as more social.
3. According to the passage, which trait is an example of genetic well-being?
 - a. clear skin
 - b. strong teeth
 - c. thin lips
 - d. a full head of hair
4. The native Peruvian preference for heavier female body shapes is given as an example to illustrate what?
 - a. that it’s not necessary to spend a lot of money to be attractive
 - b. that the notion of beauty never stops changing
 - c. what is considered beautiful varies around the world
 - d. that larger women in Peru are more beautiful than thinner women in the West