

WHY DO PEOPLE ...?

Watch out! In Turkey, shaking the head means 'yes'. People move the head back and make a click with their tongue for 'no'.

Why do people nod and shake their head?

In most places, people nod to mean 'yes' and shake their head for 'no'. Nodding and shaking the head may come from when we were babies and our mothers were feeding us milk. Babies often nod their heads forward when they want more milk and shake their heads when they don't want more.

Why do people shake hands?

Hundreds of years ago, people shook hands when they agreed something, not as a greeting. In those days, life was more dangerous and knives were common. People probably shook hands to check the other person wasn't hiding a knife in the sleeve of their jacket. Shaking hands as a greeting only became popular two hundred years ago in Europe, and more recently in other places.

Why do people bow?

People bow as a sign of respect. When you bow, you show the back of your neck to the other person. In the past, people only bowed if they trusted the other person not to kill them. Bowing used to be common in Europe and it is still common in Asia.

Until a hundred years ago, the Chinese used to 'kowtow' to important people. A kowtow is the most respectful bow of all: it starts as a bow, then the person gets down on their knees, with their head on the floor.

In Japan, there are many types of bow. People know exactly which bow to use in different situations. Informal bows are just 15°, but the most formal bows are 45°!

Why do people do high-fives?

The high-five started in the US in the 1950s. It is a hand-clap that sports people used for celebrating. These days, it is a greeting, as well as for celebrating. The 'high' is because your hand is up. The 'five' is because there are four fingers and one thumb on your hand.

Project

Think about greetings in your country. Then write some advice for a foreign visitor about greetings customs in your country.

- How do you greet different people – old friends, new classmates, teachers, people in shops, members of the family, and so on?
- What greetings do you use in different situations? Is it the same for men and women? Does a person's age make a difference?

