

Coming of age

- 1 Talk about the statistics with your partner. Do you know the minimum age in your country to be able to do these things?



	UK	Spain	Brazil	Singapore	New Zealand
minimum driving age	17	18	18	18	16
minimum voting age	18	18	16	21	18
minimum age for marriage without parents' consent	18	18	18	21	18

- 2a Read the article. Which coming-of-age event does not involve a celebration?

Coming of age

There are about 1.8 billion young people in the world; a quarter of the population who are currently making the leap from childhood to adulthood. In many countries, this transition is celebrated with a ceremony or a special ritual, and the age depends on the culture and society. There is no better way to boost a young person's self-esteem than to positively focus on their personal well-being as they grow into mature young adults.

Mexico

In Mexico, as in most Latin American countries, *Quinceañera* or the *Fiesta de Quince Años* celebrates a girl's 15th birthday. The event has its origins in Aztec culture dating back some 2,500 years. At 15, boys became warriors and girls were considered the mothers of future warriors, so this was the age of maturity. Over the years, 15 has continued to represent the age of change from girl to woman as traditionally it was when girls could prepare for marriage. Now the *Quinceañera* festival marks this important birthday with a big party. The birthday girl dresses in a ball gown and tiara, and wears high heels instead of flat shoes, to symbolise her transition from girl to woman. Typically, there is a celebratory reception. During the celebration, she receives gifts from the guests, and there is a traditional meal and formal dancing. The party usually takes months to organise because it is such a big occasion for girls in Mexican society.



Canada

In North Baffin Island, on the edge of the Arctic Circle, it is an Inuit tradition for fathers to take their sons on their first hunt from the age of about 11 or 12. This is the age when boys are thought to be strong and capable enough to test their hunting skills, especially as the journey can be tough in the harsh arctic weather. In Inuit culture, this occasion marks the transition from boyhood to manhood, and the tradition still reflects the 5,000-year-old hunting culture of the region. It is important to keep ancient hunting skills alive, and these days there are also 'outcamps' set up away from the community where both young boys and girls can learn the traditional skills of survival in their society.



Japan

Every year on the second Monday in January, Japanese culture celebrates Coming of Age Day or *Seijin*

no Hi in honour of adolescents who have turned 20 years old during the previous year. This is considered the age of adulthood in Japan, and is a ritual that has existed in the country since about 714 AD, when a young prince of the time wore new robes and changed his hairstyle to mark his transition to adulthood. It has become the custom for all young adults to dress up in new clothes in the traditional style and attend a special ceremony at the city hall to recognise their new maturity, and introduce them to adulthood. Following the ceremony, the proud 20-year-olds celebrate with their family and friends and they often receive gifts.



2b Read the article again and circle the correct alternative.

- 1 *Quinceañera* is usually celebrated on a girl's 15th/16th birthday.
- 2 The rituals of the ancient *Aztec/Inuit* culture gradually developed into the *Quinceañera* celebration as we know it today.
- 3 The first hunt/journey is a cultural ritual in Inuit tradition originally for boys only.
- 4 An outcamp is a place where young people can go to learn about the traditions/history of the Inuit culture.
- 5 The age of maturity in Japan comes at the start/at the end of a person's 20th year.
- 6 *Seijin no Hi* is a cultural ritual for which new adults wear traditional/modern dress.

2c Read and complete the table.

	Mexico	Canada	Japan
What is the age of maturity?			
Why is it this age?			
How old is the tradition?			
How is the event marked?			

Speaking

3a Work with a partner and discuss the questions.

- 1 Is there a special ritual or tradition in your country to celebrate the coming of age? What is it and how is it celebrated? Is it different for boys and girls?
- 2 Have you celebrated this event yet? If so, describe the occasion. How did you feel? If not, are you looking forward to it?
- 3 Do you think it is important to mark your coming of age with an event? Why?/Why not?

PROJECT

3b You are going to work on a presentation about coming-of-age events in two different countries, including your own. If your country doesn't have a special event, choose another country. Read the questions and prepare your project research.

- 1 Work in pairs. Do some research on the Internet to find out about an interesting coming-of-age event in another country, as well as your own. Find out:
 - what the age of maturity is
 - why this age is particularly celebrated
 - how long the ritual or tradition has been part of the country's culture
 - what people do to mark the event
 - any other information you think is interesting.
- 2 Decide who will talk about each of the points above and add in any additional information to make your presentation more interesting.

3c In your pairs, use your notes to give a presentation to the rest of the class on your coming-of-age events. Your presentation should be around three minutes long. Compare and contrast the coming-of-age events in your countries with those that your classmates have chosen.