Coming of Age

In many cultures, the transition from childhood to adulthood is an important event in a person's life. This transition is often described as *coming of age* and, traditionally, it is the moment when boys and girls are recognized as adults in society and accept certain responsibilities. Historically, this often meant getting married. But, nowadays, in many societies, this is no longer the case.

Even though a person's coming of age is perhaps not as significant in society as it used to be, many cultures still consider it a moment worth celebrating. In the US and Canada, this celebration happens when teenagers turn 16 years old. It is more often celebrated by girls, but sometimes by boys, too. This birthday is known as *sweet sixteen* and is often celebrated with a party. It can be a formal event, with expensive dresses, music, and dancing, or it can be a small celebration. It usually depends on the **tastes** of the birthday girl or boy.

Not all cultures celebrate this transition when a person turns 16. In Australia and New Zealand, people consider their 18th birthday more important because it is when they can legally vote and marry. In the Jewish community, boys and girls celebrate coming of age at 13. This event is called a *bar mitzvah* for boys and a *bat mitzvah* for girls. It is the moment when a Jewish child is welcomed into the world of adulthood.

In many Hispanic cultures, girls celebrate their coming of age at 15. A 15th birthday party, known as a *fiesta de quince años*, isn't a small event. The birthday girl, who is known as the *quinceañera*, often wears a long, **formal** dress. A crowd of friends and family are invited and bring presents. Sometimes, the birthday girl chooses to keep traditions, like dancing with her father or having friends, siblings, or cousins as *damas* and *chambelanes* to accompany her during the celebration. The *damas* often wear the same color dress, and the *chambelanes* wear matching suits. They look similar to bridesmaids and groomsmen that accompany the bride and groom in a wedding. In conclusion, though coming of age traditions and ceremonies are different around the world, they are similar in their purpose of celebrating an important moment in a young person's life.

tastes likes and dislikes
formal the opposite of casual; formal dresses are worn for important, special events

A *quinceañera* with her *chambelanes*

LIVEWORKSHEETS

A Read the article and match the paragraphs (1–4) to the main ideas below. One idea is not needed.

_____ **a.** How the age of adulthood is different in different cultures

_____ **b.** How coming of age is celebrated in the Jewish community

_____ **c.** How girls' coming of age is celebrated in Hispanic cultures

_____ **d.** What coming of age means

_____ **e.** How coming of age is celebrated in the US and Canada

C Read the article and the statements. Circle **T** for *true* or **F** for *false*.

1. According to the text, coming of age means getting married.	T	F
2. In many cultures, it is common to organize a party when a person comes of age.	T	F
3. In the US, a sweet sixteen party is always a formal event.	T	F
4. Coming of age is something only girls celebrate.	T	F
5. In Australia, coming of age is celebrated at 13.	T	F
6. In Hispanic cultures, a girl's coming of age is usually celebrated with a big party.	T	F
7. All girls dance with their fathers at their *fiesta de quince años*.	T	F

D Read the article. Complete the sentences using *as… as* and the correct adjective from the box. Use each adjective only once.

big	expensive	important	old	young

1. Coming of age today may not be _____ in the past.

2. Australian teenagers aren't _____ American teenagers when they come of age.

3. Jewish girls are _____ Jewish boys when they celebrate coming of age.

4. Coming of age parties in Hispanic cultures are often _____ in the US.

5. In the US, some sweet sixteen celebrations aren't _____ others.

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