

Reading Unit 6

Body art

Decorating the human body with tattoos is not just a modern fashion trend. Like body piercing, it has a long and diverse history. In Europe, the oldest example of tattooing was found on a body dating back to 4,000 years BC, and when the Romans first came to Britain they noted that many of the native people had elaborate and sometimes frightening black or dark blue tattoos, often inspired by the theme of war. Native people in other parts of the world have traditionally used tattoos for a variety of reasons. A tattoo may indicate, for example that a girl is old enough to marry, or that a man has killed a dangerous animal and is therefore considered to be brave. Tattoos may also be a sign of religious belief, or they may express how someone feels about another person.

The word ‘tattoo’ entered the English language in the 18th century, from the Tahitian word ‘tatau’. At that time, British sailors were exploring many parts of the world. They noticed that the people of Tahiti and New Zealand in particular decorated their bodies with brightly-coloured pictures. Many of the British sailors found these tattoos exciting and had them done on their own bodies. When they came home, they showed off their new tattoos and started a new fashion. Although for some people tattooing continues to be associated with sailors and a rough way of life, for many others a tasteful tattoo is a must-have fashion item.

Not all tattoos are voluntary. In Roman times, soldiers had to have tattoos on their hands which identified them. This made it difficult for them to hide if they deserted the army. Slaves similarly had tattoos put onto their arms or forehead so that they could be identified if they escaped. In more recent times, prisoners at the German concentration camps during World War 2 had their number tattooed on their arm, to make it difficult for them to escape.

So, is a modern tattoo purely a fashion item, like a scarf or a piece of jewellery, or does it have more significance? Some people choose to have rather boring standard tattoos, which they can choose from a catalogue in the same way as you would buy ready-made clothes. The most popular for women are flowers, butterflies, hearts, and stars. For men, fierce creatures such as dragons, lions and tigers are the most popular, along with

chains. But for most people a tattoo should be something more personal and more interesting, which either expresses their own feelings, or identifies them with a group. So they may choose a heart with the name of a loved one inside, or a word or symbol which has a particular personal significance for them.

1. **Read the magazine article about body art and choose the correct words.** Lee el artículo sobre arte corporal y elige la opción correcta en cada frase.

- A. Tattoos are **a modern / an ancient** practice.
- B. Tattoos became fashionable in Britain in the 18th century because of **tourists / sailors**.
- C. In the past, slaves and soldiers **chose / were forced** to have tattoos.

2. **Read the text and decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F).** Lee el texto y decide si las frases son verdaderas (T) o falsas (F).

A. The oldest tattoo in Europe was found on the body of a Roman.	T	F
B. Traditional tattoos sometimes indicate a person's achievements.	T	F
C. British sailors in the 18th century often had tattoos done when they got home.	T	F
D. Roman slaves sometimes had tattoos put on their faces.	T	F
E. During the Second World War, prisoners in German concentration camps had numbers tattooed on their arms to stop them escaping.	T	F
F. Most people nowadays choose to have standard tattoos.	T	F
G. Men often have tattoos of strong animals.	T	F