

Reading Practice

Read the text. Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- a) It is only since the invention of plastic surgery that people have been able to change their bodies to look more beautiful. _____
- b) Foot-binding was practiced in China for many years, but isn't any more. _____
- c) There is evidence that head-shaping can lead to brain problems in babies. _____
- d) A shaved head was considered to be very attractive in Elizabethan times. _____
- e) Queen Elizabeth I used lead-based make-up during her life. _____

You might think that the current popularity of cosmetic surgery suggests that altering your appearance to conform to ideals of beauty is a modern obsession. But it is not so. If you look back in history, you will see that although what is considered to be beautiful has not always been the same, human beings have often gone to extraordinary lengths to achieve a look that was thought to be beautiful at the time.

For thousands of years in China, a 10-centimeter foot was considered a sign of perfect beauty, and until the 20th century, many girls had their feet tightly bound with cloth to inhibit growth. This caused foot and leg problems later in adulthood, and often a lifetime of pain and suffering. Moreover, women with bound feet were unable to work in the fields or lead a life independent of their husbands.

For the ancient Mayans, an elongated head was thought to be attractive, and head-shaping was widely practiced on babies. The skull was molded by putting the newborn's head between two wooden boards, which were worn until the infant's soft skull had formed into a pointed shape. It is not known what effect this may have had on the brains of the Mayans, but it is certain that many young children suffered considerable discomfort.

Elizabethan women in England plucked or shaved the hair at the front of their heads to make their foreheads appear bigger, as a high forehead was considered to be a great asset. Lead-based make-up was also widely used at this time, and this caused many health problems, including kidney failure and scarring of the skin. By the end of her life, Queen Elizabeth I herself had ruined her looks with years of make-up use, and she banned all mirrors from her palace as she couldn't bear to see her own reflection.