

You're Gorgeous



1 For many people, German-born supermodel Claudia Schiffer is the perfect beauty: tall and slim, blue-eyed, tanned and athletic-looking with long, blond hair. No wonder people have described her as 'The most beautiful woman in the world'.

2 But people have not always had the same ideas about beauty. Until the 1920s, suntans were for poor people, 'ladies' stayed out of the sun to keep their faces as pale as possible. Five hundred years ago, in the times of Queen Elizabeth I of England, fashionable ladies even painted their faces with lead to make them whiter – a very dangerous habit as lead is poisonous!

4 a Find words in the text that mean:

- 1 (for hair) light-coloured or yellow. *blond*
- 2 pleasant to look at.
- 3 having skin made darker by the sun.
- 4 of more than average height.
- 5 (for skin) light-coloured.
- 6 looking physically strong and good at sport.
- 7 having the good qualities of a man.
- 8 thin in an attractive way.
- 9 having a lot of courage.
- 10 with blue eyes.

3 And people in the eighteenth century would certainly not have thought much of Claudia Schiffer's hair! Ladies in those days never went out without their wigs, which were so enormous – and so dirty – that it was quite common to find mice living in them! As for the 'perfect beauties' painted by Rubens in the seventeenth century, if they wanted to be supermodels today they would have to spend months on a diet!

4 Ideas of beauty can be very different according to where you live, too. For the Paduang tribe in South-East Asia, traditionally the most important sign of beauty was a long neck. So at the age of five or six, girls received their first neck ring, and each year they added new rings. By the time they were old enough to marry, their necks were about twenty-five centimetres long!

5 And what about the ideal man? If you ask women today to name an attractive man, most mention someone like Russell Crowe, Mel Gibson or Denzel Washington: someone tall and strong, brave and 'manly'.

6 In the eighteenth century, however, 'manliness' was very different from what it is today. As well as wearing wigs, perfume and lots of make-up, a true gentleman showed his feelings by crying frequently in public. According to one story, when the British Prime Minister, Lord Spencer Percival, came to give King George IV some bad news, both men sat down and cried!

7 And even now, Russell Crowe might not find it so easy to attract women if he visited the Dinka tribe of Sudan. They have always believed in the saying that 'big is beautiful'. Traditionally, each year, men compete to win the title of 'the fattest man'. The winner is sure to find a wife quickly: for a Dinka woman, if a man is fat, it is also a sign that he is rich and powerful!