

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Global Education I

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Unit: India



## Family Life in India: Arranged Marriages

*"I never spoke to the boy I married until after the wedding."*

Would you let your parents choose your husband or wife for you? How would you feel if you could not make your own choice? Sharan is 24 years old and lives in India. Her parents chose her husband for her. She saw him only once before they were married. Does she think it is okay for her parents to arrange a marriage? "Yes, I certainly do," she says. The parents arrange most marriages in India. The young people have little to do with it.

Until she was 12, Sharan played with all the neighborhood children, both boys and girls. Then she became a teenager. Teenagers must stay with their own sex. Until she was 18, Sharan had no contact with boys. She had never even gone to a party with boys present. She never had a date. All of her girlfriends grew up the same way.

When Sharan was 16, her father started looking for a husband for her. It is always the parents of the girl who must search for a mate. The parents of the boy never do the looking. Since Sharan's father was rich, Sharan's future husband had to have money too. Sharan's father gave the matter a lot of thought. He wanted to pick someone who would be just right.

Sharan's father began telling his friends he was looking for a spouse for Sharan. Soon, the names of possible husbands came in. Sharan's father considered them all. Then he chose one who he thought would make a good husband. One day, he invited the boy's father to lunch. During the meal he mentioned Sharan. He said Sharan would make a good wife for the right boy. The boy's father understood at once. He was very pleased. He thought Sharan would make a good wife for his son.

The next step was to visit an astrologer. Astrologers tell the future by studying the stars and the planets. The astrologer studied his charts to see if the marriage would be a happy one. He also told the two fathers when would be the best time to hold the wedding. Almost everyone in India talks to an astrologer first, before making any wedding plans. Wedding plans may be called off if the stars are not right.

The two men then discussed the gifts. Sharan's father would provide a house for the couple. This is very important. If the bride's father does not offer enough gifts, the wedding is often called off. Sharan's father said he would pay for Sharan's husband to go to medical school. He said he would set up a doctor's office for him when he graduated. He said he would also give him much clothes and jewelry.

Soon Sharan's father invited the boy and his family to dinner. This was the first time that Sharan saw the boy who was going to be her husband. The two young people did not speak to each other. The boy's parents asked her a few polite questions. After the dinner, the boy and his family went home. That was the only time Sharan saw her future husband until her wedding day.

How did she feel at the time? "Of course, I was very shy at that meeting," she said, "I did not dare look at Krishna, my future husband. I didn't know what to say or do. I just knew that he must be someone very good or else my parents wouldn't have picked him. As it turned out, they made a wonderful choice."

When the interviewer told Sharan that things are different in the United States, she looked surprised. "Boys and girls pick their own mates?" she asked. "That's shocking. How can they know who is best for them? No wonder there are so many divorces in the United States!"



"I just knew that he must be someone very good or else my parents wouldn't have picked him."  
Sharan, a girl from India.

"My parents don't like most of the boys I date. The things that matter to me don't matter to them. I would never trust them to pick the right husband for me." Sharon Blue, from Boston, Massachusetts.

Could your parents pick the right husband or wife for you? Take the marriage test below and find out. First read the list of qualities. By using a checkmark, indicate all the things that you think are important for your future husband or wife to be. Now go back over the list. This time look over the list of qualities the way you think your parents would. Put an X in the blanks after all the things they would choose, as if they were selecting someone for you.

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good looking                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't smoke                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Comes from a nice family   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good dancer                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Hard worker                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Comes from a rich family   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gets good grades                | <input type="checkbox"/> Likes children                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Knows how to have fun      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Same race as you                | <input type="checkbox"/> Likes pets                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Knows about current events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Same religion as you            | <input type="checkbox"/> Polite at all times                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Likes your friends         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good sense of humor             | <input type="checkbox"/> Likes music                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Keeps busy every minute    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dresses neatly                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Generous with money                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Thinks about the future    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't back away from a fight  | <input type="checkbox"/> Tells people off if they ask for it |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doesn't go along with the crowd |  |   |

Now let us take a close look at the answers. Did you choose the same thing your parents would choose? What does it mean if your list is very different from your parents' list? Could they pick a good husband or wife for you? What about Sharan? Would her list be the same as her parents' list or would it be very different?