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UNIT 1

A museum of Egyptology is probably the last place you'd expect to see emoji covering the walls – but Shirley Ben-Dor Evian, curator of this museum, thinks it's the perfect place for them.

Shirly Ben-Dor Evian: My goal as an Egyptologist is to show to people that something which is ancient is still relevant to their lives today.

The exhibition shows the striking similarities between the characters used in the ancient writing system of hieroglyphics and some of our present-day emoji.

Shirly: Picture writing enables us to express the correct meaning of words, and this is something that the ancient Egyptians knew and modern users of mobile communications also know. If you put it in a picture, it becomes very clear to the other person.

Hieroglyphs and emoji have a number of similarities, but there are also profound differences between the two systems. Unlike emoji, hieroglyphics were used as a complete written language in which any concept could be expressed. It took years of training to become a scribe, the only people in ancient Egypt authorized to use the complex writing system.

Emoji were invented in Japan in the late 1990s as a kind of shorthand for simple concepts and a way to articulate the spirit in which something is said. As anyone who has ever tried to write a sentence in emoji will know, they aren't designed to communicate complete ideas.

However, linguists say we currently use emoji like a very early pidgin language – that's a language that develops between two communities who have no common language. Pidgin languages rely on simple strategies to communicate more subtle meanings. For example, in a pidgin language, if there is no word for "very," we just repeat the word. And in the case of emoji, we repeat the image.

Emoji were intended to be universal, but in fact, our use of emoji internationally has already developed into separate languages, according to some experts. This London translation agency has even begun to employ emoji translators.

Jurga Zilinskiene: We need to understand that certain expressions, that we probably take it for granted, we'll think that it's absolutely normal in the European context, but then if you travel to Latin America or if you travel to the Middle East, the meaning changes.

Even commonly used symbols like the smiley face can have a double meaning. It means "simple pleasure" or "happiness" in the U.S., but it can signify distrust or disbelief in China.

How our use of emoji will evolve in the years ahead is unknown, but Shirley Ben-Dor Evian speculates that we'll be using them more.

Shirly: And if emoji at some point as a writing system will try to be a writing system complete, a full writing system like hieroglyphs – you can write poetry and literature and historical records and all that. If emoji will want to go that way – well, the best place to go look for linguistic solutions would be ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs.

UNIT 2

Ellie Farmer is only two years old, but she can already scale a 30-foot climbing wall without breaking a sweat.

Sophia Lozito: It's really cool to see someone so young just go for it, with no fear.

Jeff Snyder: Most climbers are just absolutely blown away that she's able to do the things that she does and have a really good, fun time doing it.

Coming from a family of climbers, it seemed certain Ellie would take up the sport, but she surprised even her parents.

Zak Farmer: Ellie first started climbing probably around eight months of age – probably before she could walk – which was really cool to see.

Rachel Farmer: When I was pregnant, I was climbing with her up until three days before I delivered. And we continued our training after she was born, and then as she got older, she was watching other climbers in the climbing gym, and then she started kind of playing around on the holds herself, and then by eight months she was doing her first climb.

Experts say that climbing comes naturally to children. Perhaps even more so than walking on their own two feet.

Zak: We had a crib like most parents, and we figured, "You know, oh, she'll be fine in there." By the time she was able to climb up the wall, she was still in the crib, and then we realized that she would be able to climb out of the crib. We had to do some modifications because of her advanced climbing.

The proud parents shared videos of Ellie climbing with friends and family on social media. They were amazed at what happened next.

Zak: One of those standard things, where you post a video on Facebook, from one of those "Hey Grandma! Check out my kid climbing" type things. It was really fun to share that with family, and then you wake up the next morning and, all of a sudden, the Internet has taken over and made it extremely popular – which was totally a surprise for us. A lot of people were trying to figure out how they could get climbing, how they can get more active with their kid – and it was just awesome to see.

Climbing is a perfect sport for developing muscle strength and physical endurance. It also allows children to explore the world and develop physical problem-solving skills. They can take risks and develop a sense of danger – an essential stage for any healthy, active child.

But for some people, seeing the infant Ellie climbing so high was alarming, and along with the positive response the Farmers received, there were a number of messages expressing concerns about her safety.

Zak: It is important to remember that climbing is dangerous. It is like most sports. It's one of those things that you can do, and you can get hurt. What we're doing is fairly controlled; I mean, she climbs, she always climbs with a large crash pad underneath her. Some of the mats are as thick as 16 inches of foam, and we're always just out of frame, ready to catch her if she does fall.

Rachel: I worry about Ellie more on the playground than I do on the climbing wall. On the climbing wall, we're extra eyes on her. She's got those big crash mats. They're spotting her all the time, and

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we're constantly with her. And then on the playground, she gets up on some of the stuff, and there's only woodchips beneath her. And I feel like she could get more hurt if she fell on the playground than she would in a climbing gym.

Zak: Ellie's biggest injury to date is walking on the sidewalk.

Rachel: Yes ... face plant!

Zak: So it's one of those things where it's funny to have people show so much concern for the climbing when in fact, like the sidewalks and streets all around us are literally the largest danger to her every day.

Despite the Internet attention, Ellie has a normal childhood.

Zak: Everyone around the country and world knows her as a climber, but she's definitely still a baby. She does normal kid stuff. She laughs and giggles and wrestles, reads books, plays with games.

Rachel: We just wanted to open as many doors as we can for her, and to support her in whatever passions she decides to do throughout her life.

Zak: Definitely super-proud of her.

UNIT 3

Crossing continents and oceans has never been easier, safer, or quicker than it is nowadays, so it's hard to imagine how our ancestors traveled such great distances. Today, some intrepid adventurers are returning to traditional means of transportation to experience these journeys the way people first made them.

Phil Buck: How's it looking Marcello?

In Bolivia, an American adventurer, Phil Buck, wants to prove that early South American mariners had great seafaring capabilities.

Phil: With this *Viracocha III* raft expedition, we're intending to go from Chile to Australia, and our intentions are to show the distances that these boats could have gone in the past, 2,000 to 3,000 years ago – trying to show that these boats were capable of reaching Polynesia and much farther beyond.

This is Buck's third trip on a reed raft on these waters. He's twice reached Easter Island, 5,000 kilometers away, proving, he says, that ancient South American mariners could have been the ones who discovered the isolated island. Now he wants to get all the way to Australia.

Buck was inspired by the Norwegian adventurer Thor Heyerdahl, whose travels he read about at the age of 11. Heyerdahl successfully sailed from Peru to French Polynesia in a balsa-wood raft of traditional design called the *Kon-Tiki*.

Buck became determined to lead his own expedition across the Pacific, but in a different kind of boat. He was fascinated by the reed boats built by the Aymara tribe of Lake Titicaca.

The Catari and Limachi families are the most respected reed-boat builders in the world today. They've used their ancestral skills and knowledge to build the boats for each of Buck's attempted crossings, improving upon the design each time.

The construction of the 60-foot raft is as authentic as possible. They use no metal, plastic, or nails.

Phil: The boat consists of just reeds from Lake Titicaca in Bolivia, in Peru: wood, cotton sails, and rope. Uh ... We have about 35 kilometers of rope inside this boat in the entire vessel.

The reeds are not waterproof, but surprisingly, this actually improves the stability of the boat. As the reeds expand, the ropes around them contract, making a very rigid sailing vessel.

Unlike the journeys made by sailors of the past, there will be digital technology on board the *Viracocha III*. Maritime law requires that they use GPS navigation systems, and the crew will provide daily updates on social media. Other aspects of life will be more traditional. The crew will eat quinoa, potatoes, and fish they catch at sea, and they'll live in very close quarters.

Crew member: I think it's a psychological challenge mainly because we are ten people on a very tiny space, and we'll need to get along with each other – and that's where I see, uh, the big challenge.

Ten people and a dog! Chuño is the eleventh crew member, and it will be his first voyage.

The raft is not waterproof, so there will be little time for celebrations on the Polynesian islands they visit. The waterlogged boat will need to keep moving if it is to cover the full 10,000 nautical miles and sail into Sydney Harbor in Australia after six months at sea.

UNIT 4

Is there any truth in the theory that men's and women's brains are different? Are men and women born with distinct skills and abilities? These are questions that have long fascinated scientists and the general public alike.

Some commonly held beliefs are that men are better at math and doing visual-spatial tasks like parking a car, while women are often thought to be more empathetic than men and better at multitasking.

Young woman 1: Women are more, um, sympathetic, I think ...

Young woman 2: Yeah!

Young woman 1: ... and empathetic. And men are probably more practical.

Young man: I'm pretty useless when it comes to doing more than one thing.

But are these differences real? And if so, is there a biological basis for them?

Research by the University of Pennsylvania in the U.S. seemed to have established that there were indeed differences between how male and female brains work. Researchers imaged the brains of 428 male and 521 female students.

The scans consistently showed that in male brains, there was more activity between the front and the back of each hemisphere – suggesting better perception, learning, and focus on a single task.

Female brains showed more activity *between* the two hemispheres, suggesting superior social skills, memory, and multitasking. The evidence from the study is persuasive because of the large sample size involved. However, are these ideas supported by studies that have looked at actual differences in ability?

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One study that supports at least part of this hypothesis was conducted at the University of Hertfordshire in England.

Professor Laws: What we're asking you to do is a multitasking experiment.

The participants had eight minutes to do several tasks at the same time: simple math problems, map reading, dealing with a telephone caller asking general knowledge questions, and showing the strategy they would use to search for a lost key. The results suggested that women fare better when switching rapidly between tasks – in particular, women were far better than men at planning strategy while multitasking.

Researchers at the university think the findings have significant implications.

Professor Laws: There are more similarities between men and women than there are differences, but there are differences. And sometimes those differences appear to be quite small, but I suspect that even quite small differences can pan out to create quite major differences in behavior.

The design of the experiment aimed to improve on others that have previously investigated such differences. However, for many in the field, the jury will still be out, as there is a huge body of work which has found no difference in multitasking ability between men and women.

Many people are also skeptical as to whether the differences established in the University of Pennsylvania study are real. The students who participated in the brain-imaging study were still in the late stages of puberty, a time at which hormones are highly active. This could mean the differences they found may not be lifelong.

Even if these differences are real, it's very difficult to know whether they are biologically or culturally imposed. The human brain is a learning machine that adapts to our individual circumstances throughout our lifetimes. We can't prove that physiological differences in the brain or differences in ability are not caused by differences in parenting or environment.

A case in point is mathematical ability. Women were once thought to be born with a weaker ability in math. In truth, generations of women were actively discouraged from pursuing mathematics in school at that time. Today, women are known to have just as much mathematical talent as men.

We also can't prove that biological differences are responsible for gender differences in performance. For many years, the smaller brain size of women was suggested to be significant, but tests have shown that it is not.

The brain is truly the final frontier of human biology. There is still so much we don't know about the way it works. Despite huge resources put into studying gender differences, most find no significant differences between males and females. Perhaps the real question is: Why are we so intrigued by gender differences?

UNIT 5

Movie stars, world-class soccer players, journalists. In every walk of life, female workers are fighting to get equal pay and opportunities in their careers.

It's a struggle that has been going on for decades, but the battle has not been won yet. In the U.S., for example, the average woman's salary is around 20 percent less than a man's.

However, in Iceland, lawmakers have taken the country a huge step forward in ensuring equal pay for women. Iceland is the first country in the world to introduce a law that requires employers to prove they are paying men and women the same wage for doing the same work.

Iceland was already the world leader in gender pay equality and has had a law requiring that men and women be paid equally since 1961.

However, many felt the law was not working, as women were still earning around 14 percent less than men. Every year on October 24, women in Iceland meet to demand equal pay.

Woman: My husband does always have a better salary than me, although we have like, the education is almost alike. But, just because he is a man. I don't want my girls and grandchild to be like that.

Man: But, it's important to, uh, to notice the difference between the sexes in the working force, in the working place, and to take part in the struggle for equality on the market.

Elisabet Bjornsdottir, who works in the treasury department of Iceland's biggest bank, Landsbankinn, says she's unaware of ever having experienced any discrimination against her in the workplace but understands the need for the law.

Elisabet Bjornsdottir: Well, I guess that's one of the fundamental reasons why we need this law is because it's not something that you can easily feel or see. Well, you can have maybe a feeling for it ... but it's very hard to prove.

The new law means that employees will no longer have to gather evidence to show that they are being underpaid.

Thorsteinn Viglundsson: The thought behind the equal pay standard is really reversing that responsibility: putting it to the company to prove that the company is not discriminating against its employees.

Now every employer with more than 25 staff members must prove that any wage gaps between employees of different sexes are justified by seniority, experience, education, or training, and the added value an individual brings to the job.

Other European countries are taking a similar, if less ambitious, approach to narrowing the gender pay gap.

The U.K. has ordered firms with over 250 employees to publish details of their gender pay gap with a written statement on their public-facing websites, as well as requiring them to submit the data to the government.

And Germany, which has one of the highest gender pay gaps in Europe, has introduced a law giving employees at companies that employ over 200 people the right to know what coworkers of the opposite sex are paid on average in a comparable role to their own.

Iceland hopes to eliminate the gender pay gap completely, but there is still a lot of hard work to be done. Until women have the opportunity to achieve the same level of success in their careers as men, the struggle to close the gender pay gap is likely to continue.

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UNIT 6

Not far from the glamorous art deco buildings and golden sands of Miami Beach, Florida, is the Wynwood district. Back in 2009, these buildings were abandoned warehouses at the center of an area where crime and poverty were high. Then a street art project changed everything.

Today, the Wynwood Walls are the seventh most popular tourist attraction in Miami, a city with more than its fair share of attractions. And the Wynwood area itself has become a vibrant and fashionable home to coffee shops, restaurants, and art galleries – economically transformed by the street art that colors its walls. And this is not just happening in Miami. Cities in Chile, Egypt, Russia, and elsewhere have seen the effect of street art on the prosperity of formerly run-down neighborhoods.

In Lisbon, Portugal, the Quinta do Mocho district used to be considered one of the city's most dangerous suburbs. Plagued by violence, crime, and unemployment, even taxis refused to come here. But street art has transformed the housing project and the lives of its 2,800 residents, with guided tours of the artworks here now taking place daily in the former ghetto.

Tour guide: These works of art in our neighborhood have allowed us to project ourselves into the world. People come here, they want to know us, to hear our stories, to understand our world. Before, we were like invisible territory – nobody saw us; nobody was interested in us. Today, all that has changed.

The neighborhood was built as social housing in the 1970s, with lower rents to help support those in need of more affordable homes. Quinta do Mocho is set away from the rest of the city, and the social and geographical exclusion of its residents was a major cause of the area's problems.

In 2014, the Loures municipality organized the district's first street art festival, *O Bairro i o Mundo*, and invited street artists to paint the blank walls of the apartment blocks. Since then, the event has taken place every year, and the neighborhood now boasts more than 120 murals. Around 100 Portuguese and international artists have helped turn this neighborhood into an open-air street-art gallery – the largest of its kind in Europe.

Woman: I think it's very important, both for those who come and those who live here. It's good that there is awareness on both sides that things can be different and that all of us can contribute to creating a different atmosphere.

Many of the murals raise awareness of socioeconomic issues that are relevant to the residents' lives, such as discrimination, multiculturalism, and justice.

Man: These paintings on the walls make our children ask us questions. It awakens their curiosity, creates dialogue. They try to understand the meanings that these paintings represent for our neighborhood.

The street art has contributed to the resurrection of Quinta do Mocho by attracting tourists.

Man: It's better because for a long time, everything here was abandoned, but today, everything is changing for the better.

A bus line now connects the previously isolated district with the city, and there has been a reduction in the crime rate. Both improvements are credited to the street art initiative.

The transformations of Wynwood and Quinta do Mocho are just two of many such stories worldwide. Street art is a powerful tool for people who often have no other canvas to express their thoughts and communicate their stories to the world. Sometimes controversial, and often thought-provoking, it can provide a community with a story and an identity and even reverse its economic fortunes.

UNIT 7

Gaming can be a lifeline for the severely disabled. But using a standard controller can require a dexterity that those with the most severe disabilities don't have.

SpecialEffect is a charity dedicated to finding ways to give disabled gamers access to the games they love. Their latest offering, EyeMine, allows gamers to control the game of Minecraft entirely with their eyes.

Ajay Yadav: My head is the only movement I can control, so being able to control something with your eyes is absolutely amazing. My name's Ajay Yadav, and I have spinal muscular atrophy.

Ajay was a big gamer as a child, but his condition causes his muscles to deteriorate. By his late teens, he lacked the strength to play video games.

Ajay: That was extremely disappointing because gaming used to be something which I knew I could turn to, to find some entertainment in. Rediscovering gaming has brought back a part of my life, which I lost.

It's the social side of video games that is often missed by people who stop playing them. This aspect is particularly important to disabled gamers, who often have a greater need for those social connections.

Ajay: They don't have to know about my disability, and I usually don't tell them. And I can just be myself. I don't have to worry about what people think about me.

Minecraft is a highly inclusive game that encourages collaboration and has a strong social element – making it popular with people who have disabilities and, indeed, with hundreds of millions of players globally. The producers of Minecraft actively encourage their players to modify the game, which uses open-source software, allowing the team at SpecialEffect to make some changes for the players they serve.

Mick Donegan: What it means in a nutshell is that anyone who can simply move their eyes will be able to play Minecraft.

I'm Mick Donegan. Founder and CEO of SpecialEffect.

Mick and the SpecialEffect team have helped hundreds of physically disabled people in the U.K., and thousands more worldwide, to access games by offering advice and free software. The team develops software, modifies hardware, and provides home therapy support.

This is Becky Tyler. Becky's favorite game is Minecraft, and she helped the team at SpecialEffect to develop EyeMine. She has quadriplegic cerebral palsy.

Becky Tyler: I can't sit up on my own, and I can't stand up or balance or walk. And I can't talk with my mouth.

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EyeMine combines affordable hardware and free software. An infrared eye tracker allows the user to control movement on the screen. The user stares to select an object.

Mick: They are able to play at the highest possible level. Becky, for example, is infinitely better just with her eyes than I'll ever be with a joypad.

Becky: When I play online, I am anonymous. And no one sees my disability, so I feel the same as everyone else, which is amazing.

Unlike most parents, Becky's mother Fiona sees her daughter playing games for hours in her bedroom as a *good* thing.

Fiona Tyler: I'm really just grateful that, um, she's got this technology, and I don't limit the screen time because it's the one thing she can do when there's so much that she can't.

Becky: I'm very good at eye gaze. I think it is my superpower.

UNIT 8

Host: Well, next this lunchtime ... would you prefer to have more sleep or more money? Well, if happiness is what you're after, then apparently, you're best off canceling the overtime and hitting the snooze button. A study by Oxford Economics has found that improving your sleep has the same effect as having four times as much disposable income.

The Living Well Survey, a survey of 8,250 adults conducted by Oxford Economics for the Sainsbury's supermarket company, explored what affects people's sense of well-being – how we live, as well as who we are.

People were asked about six themes – the places they live, their lifestyle choices, health, financial security, relationships, and community connections. Their answers gave them a Living Well score of between 1 and 100.

The researchers found that getting a good night's sleep had the strongest association with how we feel about our lives, no matter where people lie on the index.

The difference between feeling rested "some of the time" and being well-rested gains the typical person four points on the Living Well Scale. This improvement would exceed even the benefits of increasing your disposable income by five times.

Host: Well, I'm joined in the studio by Professor Ram Dhillon, an expert in sleeping disorders, and from Bristol, Rachel Mason from the financial services firm Sun Life. Thank you both for joining me here this lunchtime. Um, Professor Dhillon, let's start with you. You are a, uh, a sleep therapist – you see many clients. How does not getting enough sleep affect our lives?

Professor Ram Dhillon: Well, I'm not a speech, er, sorry, a sleep therapist. I'm actually an ENT surgeon with an interest in sleep disorders.

Host: OK.

Professor Dhillon: So I'm a medic. Um, well, basically, you can do an experiment on yourself and try and stay awake for a day or two. You find your brain gets frazzled, your cognitive ability goes, your memory – particularly short-term memory – starts going, and it's very, very difficult to function.

Host: And it's not just about the quantity, it's about the quality of sleep, isn't it?

Professor Dhillon: Yeah, I mean there are, sort of essentially, five stages of sleep, but for the purposes of this interview, I'd say three: light, deep, and rapid eye movement. And you need them in the same percentages, particular percentages, in order to have decent sleep. And if they're disrupted, then you get some of the consequences that I've, uh, I've already mentioned.

Host: OK. Uh, let's bring in Rachel Mason now. Uh, Rachel, you work in the finance industry. Um, do you buy this, if you, like, that instead of more cash, we really need more kip – and that's the key to happiness?

Rachel Mason: Um, actually I do, I do buy this because, um, we did a study, Sun Life did a study, called Cash Happy, which basically looked at whether the way we spend our money can make us happier. But I certainly don't think that having money makes you happier than having sleep. Um, being the mum of a little boy that didn't sleep for two years, I would quite happily have bought some more sleep if I could've. What our study found is it's actually –

Host: I mean if –

Rachel: Sorry, it's actually not the amount of money you have –

Host: Sorry, sorry Rachel. Sorry Rachel, a bit of a delay there ... Well I'm just saying it's about achieving that work–sleep balance if you like. I mean, it's interesting that sleep deprivation has such an impact on our lives. There's one insurance firm in the U.S. that's actually now paying its staff to get more sleep because it just, it improves how they function at work.

Rachel: Yes, I think work–life balance is obviously really important. Um, the study that we particularly looked at, which I've been asked to talk about today, um, looked at the way we spend our money and whether that affects our happiness. And we found that, in fact, buying material goods does not make you happier. It's things, experiences, which is things like holidays, spending time with your family, and obviously getting that work–life balance right, um, and that, actually, while having more money does make you happier to a certain extent, um, it actually plateaus. So we looked at spare cash, and when you get to, um, 800 pounds extra, like spare cash that's not earmarked for something, beyond that, your happiness doesn't improve. So I completely agree that ... with this study that shows, that you know, a big pay rise isn't gonna really affect your happiness.

Host: All right, Rachel Mason, I think that a lot of us here wouldn't agree with that at all. Thank you for joining me, and Professor Dhillon, as well. Thank you very much for joining me today.

Professor Dhillon: Thank you.

UNIT 9

Is it possible to build a thriving capital city from the ground up? That's what Brazilian President Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira tasked architect Oscar Niemeyer and urban planner Lucio Costa with in the late 1950s. The new capital, Brasília, was to be an ideal city that would bring modern life to central Brazil.

Air travel was the great passion of the age, promising a world without horizons. The city of Brasília was laid out from the air

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in the shape of an airplane, each section a zone designated for a particular type of activity. The fuselage was where the city's bureaucrats would work, while at night they would travel to the wings where their homes were situated.

The plain on which Brasília was to be built stretched as far as the eye could see. Although a 40-square-kilometer artificial lake was made, the architect's creations would provide the only vertical features in this landscape. This was a city where the buildings would be everything.

The style was to be entirely Brazil's own, with no influence from the baroque or classical European heritage that dominated other cities. And there were to be no *favelas*, or slums. The apartment complexes were intended to be home to top ministers and working-class laborers alike.

The buildings of Brasília won international recognition and praise in the world of architecture for their sculptural beauty and their modern sense of optimism. White concrete and graceful curves characterize Niemeyer's creations. Columns and water are used to create buildings that seamlessly blend with the ground from which they rise. Niemeyer's style has become synonymous with Brazil's modernist architecture and led to Brasília being designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Niemeyer was awarded the 1988 Pritzker Prize, which is widely seen as architecture's Nobel.

In 1960, the futuristic new capital was inaugurated. But would it work as a city? Some of Brasília's critics said the grand designs were simply not on a scale that suited human life – the streets were too wide, more suited to cars than pedestrians. In the city's early years, the bureaucrats complained that the streets around their offices and homes were lifeless. On weekends they would travel to São Paulo to find fun. Today's town planners tend to shy away from the type of zoning used in Brasília's airplane layout in favor of mixed-use areas.

The messiness of cities that evolve over time is missing from Brasília. There are no shops with apartments above them and children playing outside. Little has happened randomly here, and this is what many would argue brings a city its character.

But not everything in Brasília has gone according to plan, and this is breathing life into the city. The apartment complexes are intended to be home to rich and poor alike, but in reality, only the rich live there now. This has meant that ordinary life has been pushed out to the edges of the city – beyond the airplane layout, where a more "natural" city is emerging.

One important sign that Brasília is a success is that 2.5 million people now live there. The city was originally designed to hold just 500,000.

It is still too soon to tell whether, beyond its beauty, Brasília is one of the great capital cities. The world's best-loved capitals, from Cairo to London, took hundreds, or even thousands, of years to acquire their character. Brasília is not yet a hundred years old! In a century or two, we will perhaps be able to judge it more fairly.

UNIT 10

Man: It is Good Riddance Day in Times Square. Who's excited? Who's ready to get rid of some stuff?

In the 21st century, a new tradition has emerged in New York City. Every year in the days leading up to New Year's Eve, crowds gather in Times Square to celebrate "Good Riddance Day."

It's a chance to say goodbye and "good riddance" to the things that got you down in the year gone by. People line up to write down the names of events, personal problems, concepts, and issues they'd like to see less of in the coming year. The papers they write on are then thrown into a large shredder.

Good Riddance Day is a thoroughly modern celebration, but the concept has much older origins in Latin America. The organizers in New York were inspired by a festival called "Burning the *Muñeco*," seen here in Colombia. In countries from Mexico to Argentina, effigies – dolls and figures in masks – are burned to say goodbye to the old year.

The figures represent people from public spheres such as politics, entertainment, and sports who generated news and, particularly, controversy that year. At times, the burning has been misinterpreted by international figures represented in the effigies as being an act of aggression towards them, but rather, it is aimed at the type of event or controversy associated with them – a subtle but important difference!

The figures are stuffed with firecrackers and set ablaze at midnight. The fire cleans away the negative energies of the past 12 months, bringing only luck and happiness for the New Year.

A similar festival with Latin American origins takes place in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Here, a 15-meter-high marionette effigy called Old Man Gloom or *Zozobra*, "anxiety" in Spanish, is stuffed with the troubles of the city and set on fire once a year in September. The effigy is one of the world's largest functioning marionettes, and it can wave its arms and move its mouth to growl at the unwelcome approach of its fate. The character of *Zozobra* was invented by a community of artists in the early 20th century. The burning was inspired by the traditions of the Yaqui Indians of Mexico. Today, some 50,000 people attend the event each year.

All around the world, such acts of destruction have meaning. In Naples, Italy, people throw old furniture and electrical items, such as old toasters and fridges, out their windows at the stroke of midnight – in the hope that the New Year will bring worthy replacements.

On the island of Corfu in Greece, large pots are thrown from windows, as fearless spectators stand close by. Local organizers say no one has ever been seriously injured during the act, which is believed to ward off bad spirits. Spectators take pieces of the smashed pots home as good luck charms. The custom is said to have its roots in ancient Greece, when people would throw out their old clay planting pots and plant seeds in new ones to mark the coming of spring each April.

So what do the people of New York want to say goodbye to on Good Riddance Day? Personal insecurities and anxieties are popular, as well as debts and social problems. Environmental concerns are also high on people's hit lists.

Man: I just feel like a weight lifted off my shoulder. Just doing it rather than just saying, "OK I'm gonna get rid of this," but just doing something physically, to kinda express that. It just ... it just does something.

It seems that globally, the act of saying goodbye, whether by burning, breaking, or shredding, is cathartic. These symbolic acts can bring a sense of optimism and renewed energy to people for the year ahead.