

## Coming-of-age rituals

### 1 Seven sentences have been removed from the text. Choose from the sentences A-H the one which fits each gap. There is one extra sentence that you do not need.

Coming of age is the transition of a young person from childhood to adulthood. **1. ....**

It may be a simple legal convention or part of a ritual, as practised in many societies. In the past, and still in some societies today, such a change was associated with sexual maturity (early adolescence); in others, with religious responsibility. In Western societies in particular, modern legal conventions specify points in late adolescence or early adulthood as the focus of the transition: most commonly 16 or 21 when adolescents are generally no longer considered minors and are granted the full rights of an adult. **2. ....**

Among the most bizarre coming-of-age rites is the one celebrated by the Satere-Mawe Tribe, an indigenous tribe from the Amazon rain forest in Brazil. What a boy has to do to become a man in this tribal community is painful: withstand being stung by not one, but a swarm of bullet ants. In case you're not familiar with this exotic insect, here's an interesting fact: the bullet ant claims the number one spot on the SSPI (Schmidt Sting Pain Index), a scale created by Justin Schmidt, which rates the pain caused by different Hymenoptera stings. **3. ....**



In preparation for the initiation rite, the elders of the tribe collect the bullet ants from the jungle. The ants are drugged and placed into special gloves woven from leaves. **4. ....**

This is when the boy puts on the gloves and lets the bullet ants work their magic, for a whole 10 minutes, no less. "It's the same as having your hands on fire," says one Satere man. **5. ....**

As the pain continues to increase, the hands become paralyzed and look like stumps. But just one attempt is usually not enough to turn a Satere boy into a man. He must go through this ritual as many times as it takes for him not to cry during the process. **6. ....**

Sometimes, this can take up to 20 attempts. The practices of the Satere-Mawe are in stark contrast to the Western urban world, where initiation rites can be as simple as going to college, getting a job and moving out of your parents' home. But it is different in tribes like these, where the men of the tribe generally have little contact with the young boys, who spend most of their time with the women. **7. ....**

It sounds primitive, but perhaps it is no different from a father taking his son out fishing or camping, or just spending time with him. Excluding the unbearable pain, of course.

- A. But the real pain starts once the gloves come off and the venom starts to take effect.
- B. The age at which this transition takes place varies from society to society, as does the nature of the transition.
- C. The gloves are very big and uncomfortable.
- D. But after the initiation is complete, the boy is taken away from the women's world and introduced to that of the men.
- E. In either case, many cultures retain ceremonies to confirm coming of age, and significant benefits come with the change.
- F. As the drug wears off, the ants become increasingly agitated and need to sting.
- G. Some say the ant's sting is just as agonizing as being shot by a bullet.
- H. The day he doesn't shed a single tear is when he becomes a real man.

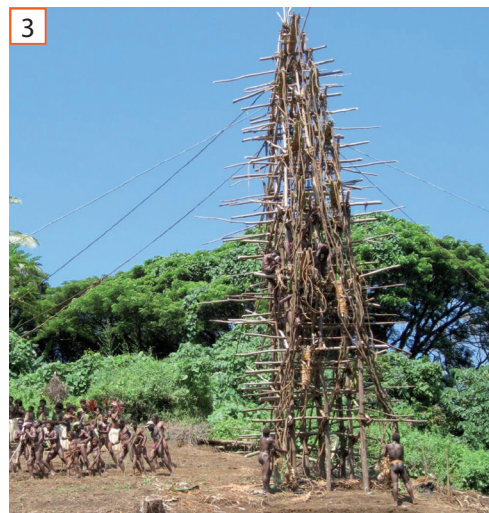


**2 Match each of these ceremonies with the right picture.**

- a. On Pentecost Island, in the South Pacific, tribe members construct a tower 60-90 feet high (20-30 meters) from the trees surrounding a **clearing**. Before the tower is built, any rocks or wood are removed from the ground and the soil is **tilled**. The structure is then used as the world's most extreme form of bungee jumping, with only two climbing plants and... faith supporting the diver.
- b. For decades, the tribes living on the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea have used the tradition of scarification to turn their boys into men. This ceremony requires the youth's back, **chest** and **buttocks** to be cut in elaborate patterns which look like the skin of a crocodile. It is believed that during this bloody process the reptilian divinity consumes his youth, leaving a man in his place.
- c. Female Mentawaians of Sumatra experience an **agonizing** practice known as teeth **chiselling**.



**agonizing:** *straziante*  
**buttocks:** *natiche*  
**to carve:** *scolpire*  
**chest:** *petto*  
**chiselling:** *cesellatura*  
**clearing:** *radura*  
**to file:** *limare*  
**to numb:** *addormentare, privare di sensibilità*  
**shaman:** *sciamano*  
**to sharpen:** *affilare*  
**strike:** *colpo*  
**tilled:** *preparato, lavorato (di terreno)*



A local **shaman** **sharpens** a blade as best he can to make the chiselling the least painful possible. The young girl is given nothing to **numb** her mouth before he takes a rock and begins the work. Through careful **strikes**, the blade **carves** the corners of the teeth, leaving behind pointed ends similar to sharks' teeth. To finish the process, her teeth are **filed** to achieve the desired shape.