

101 American Customs

Understanding American Language and Culture through Common Practices



As American as Apple Pie



The Backyard Barbecue



Family Gathering at Thanksgiving



Square Dancing

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55 Kiss It and Make It Better



When a child suffers a wound or a scratch, it is common practice to say: "Let Mommie kiss it and make it better." Of course, the parental benefit of kissing a child's injury to "make it go away" has no medical benefit. It is purely a loving gesture to soothe and comfort, to make both parent and child feel better.

A: Ouch!

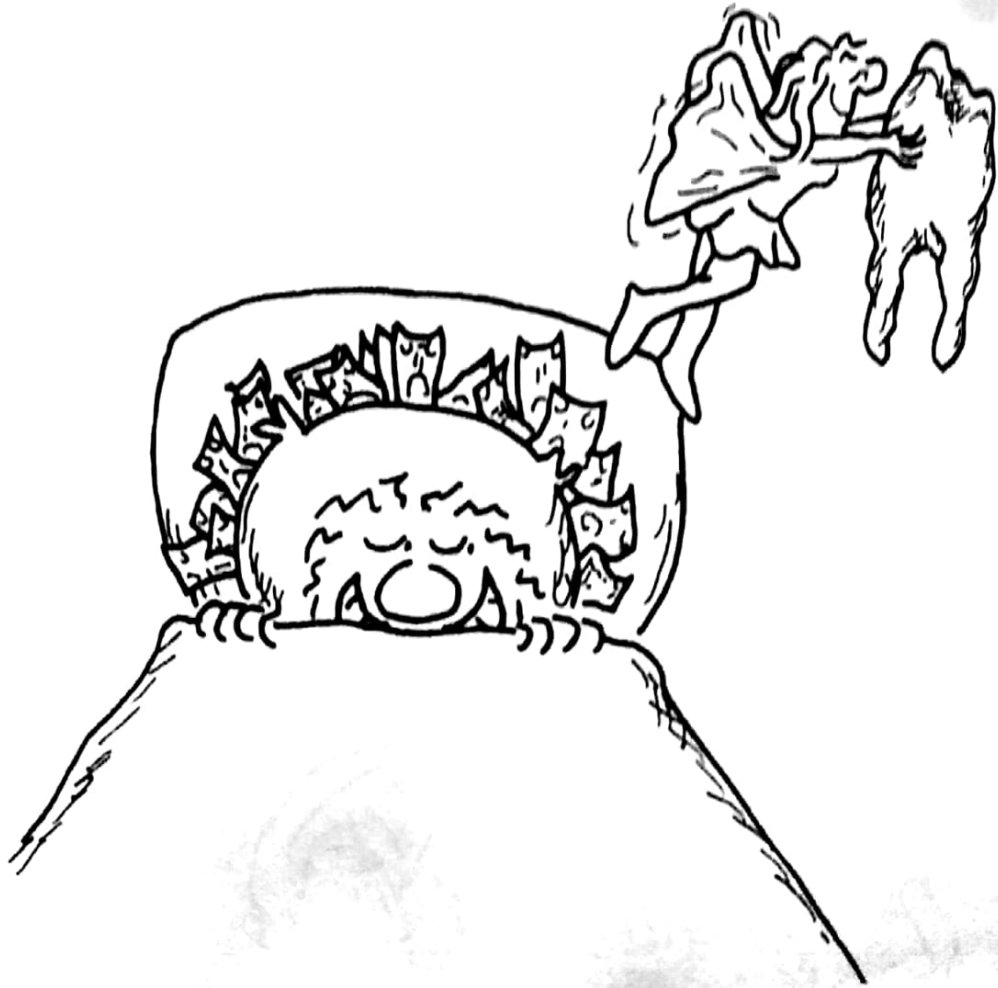
B: What happened?

A: I accidentally pricked my finger with the needle while I was sewing on this button.

B: Here, let Mom kiss it and make it better.

A: Gee, Mom. It's OK. Save the kiss for something more serious. This is only a scratch.

57 The Tooth Fairy



The American children's ritual of hiding a lost tooth under a pillow stems from an old German tradition of placing a lost tooth in a mouse or rat hole so that when a new tooth grew in, it would possess the strong dental qualities of a rodent's tooth. In America the "tooth rat" was replaced by the "tooth fairy," who would compensate the child with money for surrendering a tooth to her.

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- A: Hey, Mom! Look! My tooth came out!
B: Don't worry, you're fine. We'll put it under your pillow so the tooth fairy can find it. You'll sure be happy in the morning when you find all the money she leaves for you.
A: Hurray! Then we can go to the store and buy something really nice.

58 Sibling Rivalry



Sibling rivalry, arising from competition for parental love and from a natural resentment toward one's rival, is common in American culture. It is an expected rivalry, especially in small families. Parental efforts to stress the importance of sharing one's toys with a brother or sister often fall on deaf ears and cannot overcome a child's innate desire to hold on to what is "his" or "hers" and resentment of any intrusion on his or her property.

Mrs. Jones sure has had her hands full! Between keeping up with the housework and settling arguments between the kids, she was fast coming to the end of her rope. When Mr. Jones offered to get a babysitter and take her on an extended weekend getaway, she could scarcely contain her joy.

59 The Weekly Allowance



The modern weekly allowance or "pin money" is a set sum of money that parents give to their children either for entertainment expenses (movies, etc.) or in return for the completion of domestic chores (sweeping, cutting the lawn, taking out the garbage, etc.). This allowance often serves as an early model of money management.

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- A: I've finally saved enough to get that video game I wanted so badly.
B: Super! I know it costs a small fortune. How did you manage to get your hands on the money?
A: Well, for one thing, I offered to do more work around the house, so my folks upped my weekly allowance. I added to that by doing some yard work for the neighbors. All in all, it was a lot of work, but boy, was it ever worth it!

60 Bedtime Stories



It is a widespread practice for parents to read heavily illustrated stories to their children at bedtime. In doing so, not only do they maintain a practice that was a family tradition before the advent of TV and radio, but they also provide the stimulation so necessary for children's intellectual growth. The practice of one-on-one reading is now more prevalent than ever in America and is strongly endorsed by early childhood educators.

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- A: Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess who lived in a far-off land.
- B: Wait, Mom. Isn't that the story you were reading to me last night?
- A: Yes, but you had fallen asleep before I got to the end. Don't you want to know what happened to the princess?
- A: Yes, I do, but maybe you could skip the middle part and jump to the end of the story so I'll find out how the story ends before I fall asleep again.

64 Garage Sales



Garage sales, or lawn or yard sales, are as big a part of American culture as apple pie and popcorn. Periodically, people clean out excess clothing, furniture, appliances, etc. from their homes and display the goods for sale to passersby, either on their front lawns or in their garages. The goods are always sold at greatly reduced prices, since getting rid of unwanted goods is more important than realizing even a modest profit from the sales.

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- A: Louise, what are you planning to do with that old lamp and coffee table?
- B: I hope that I can get a little something for them at the garage sale I'm planning for this Saturday.
- A: Hey, I've got some things I'd like to get rid of, too. How about we do it together at my place since my garage is bigger?
- B: No problem. I'll have my husband clear out the rest of the stuff from the attic while we're at it.