**The people of the hills**

**Vocabulary preview**

**Match the adjectives in the box with the definitions below.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| lean  thin  brawny | sinewy  graceful  slender | sallow  comely  lithe |

1. with very little fat on the body \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. thin and strong \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. pale yellow in color, unhealthy looking \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

4. smooth and beautiful in movement \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

5. attractive (old-fashioned) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

6. physically strong, with big muscles \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

7. tall and thin in an attractive way \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

8. moving and bending in a graceful way \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

9. thin and looking healthy and fit \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Write the adjectives under the appropriate heading.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| deliberate  grave  inquisitive  crafty  vacuous  speculative | suspicious  shy  listless  sullen  sinister  melancholic | searching  shrewd  opaque  hateful  vindictive  timid |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Positive | Neutral | Negative |
|  |  |  |

**Descriptions and norms**

When we describe people we normally have in mind a norm, which serves as a point of reference. For example, *tall* suggests “tall” with respect to a presumed average height, which may vary according to geographical region, age, gender, and so on. The standard may be invoked explicitly, as in *Kathy is tall for her age* or *Kathy is the tallest girl in her class*. In the first case, the speaker has in mind a normal height for girls Kathy’s age, in the second the restricted group of her class. The norm may also be implicit. In the sentence *Owen has a sad expression on his face* the speaker implicitly evokes a range of possible expressions with a norm lying somewhere between “sad” and “happy”. The choice of adjective a speaker makes may give as much information about the speaker’s norms as about the person described.

**Before you read**

**Be prepared to discuss your answers with a partner**

**Do you believe that a person’s physical appearance reflects their personality? If so, in what way? How likely is it that different observers might reach different conclusions? Choose a person in the classroom that neither of you knows. Individually, write down a few physical traits and your inferences about their personality. Compare your impressions with your partner.**

**Read the following extract from Chapter 10 of *Our Southern Highlanders*, entitled “The people of the hills.”**

|  |
| --- |
| In delineating a strange race we are prone to disregard what is common in our own experience and observe sharply what is odd. The oddities we sketch and remember and tell about. But there is little danger of misrepresenting the physical features and mental traits of the hill people, because among them there is one definite type that greatly predominates. This is not to be wondered at when we remember that fully three−fourths of our highlanders are practically of the same descent, have lived the same kind of life for generations, and have intermarried to a degree unknown in other parts of America.  Our average mountaineer is lean, inquisitive, shrewd. If that be what constitutes a Yankee, as is popularly supposed outside of New England, then this Yankee of the South is as true to type as the conventional Uncle Sam himself.  A fat mountaineer is a curiosity. The hill folk even seem to affect a slender type of comeliness. In Alice MacGowan's *Judith of the Cumberlands*, old Jepthah Turrentine says of one of his sons: “I named that boy after the finest man that ever walked God's green earth—and then the fool had to go and git fat on me! Think of me with a fat son! I allers did hold that a fat woman was bad enough, but a fat man ort p'intedly to be led out and killed!”  Spartan diet does not put on flesh. Still, it should be noted that long legs, baggy clothing, and scantiness or lack of underwear make people seem thinner than they really are. Our highlanders are conspicuously a tall race. Out of seventy−six men that I have listed just as they occurred to me, but four are below average American height and only two are fat. About two−thirds of them are brawny or sinewy fellows of great endurance. The others generally are slab−sided, stoop−shouldered, but withey. The townsfolk and the valley farmers, being better nourished and more observant of the prime laws of wholesome living, are noticeably superior in appearance but not in stamina.  Nearly all males of the back country have a grave and deliberate bearing. They travel with the long, sure−footed stride of the born woodsman, not graceful and lithe like a moccasined Indian (their coarse brogans forbid it), but shambling as if every joint had too much play. There is nothing about them to suggest the Swiss or Tyrolean mountaineers; rather they resemble the gillies of the Scotch Highlands. Generally they are lean−faced, sallow, level−browed, with rather high cheek−bones. Gray eyes predominate, sometimes vacuous, but oftener hard, searching, crafty—the feral eye of primitive man.  From infancy these people have been schooled to dissimulate and hide emotion, and ordinarily their faces are as opaque as those of veteran poker players. Many wear habitually a sullen scowl, hateful and suspicious, which in men of combative age, and often in the old women, is sinister and vindictive. The smile of comfortable assurance, the frank eye of good−fellowship, are rare indeed. Nearly all of the young people and many of the adults plant themselves before a stranger and regard him with a fixed stare, peculiarly annoying until one realizes that they have no thought of impertinence.  Many of the women are pretty in youth; but hard toil in house and field, early marriage, frequent child−bearing with shockingly poor attention, and ignorance or defiance of the plainest necessities of hygiene, soon warp and age them. At thirty or thirty−five a mountain woman is apt to have a worn and faded look, with form prematurely bent—and what wonder? Always bending over the hoe in the cornfield, or bending over the hearth as she cooks by an open fire, or bending over her baby, or bending to pick up, for the thousandth time, the wet duds that her lord flings on the floor as he enters from the woods—what wonder that she soon grows short−waisted and round−shouldered?  The voices of the highland women, low toned by habit, often are singularly sweet, being pitched in a sad, musical, minor key. With strangers, the women are wont to be shy, but speculative rather than timid, as they glance betimes with “a slow, long look of mild inquiry, or of general listlessness, or of unconscious and unaccountable melancholy.” Many, however, scrutinize a visitor calmly for minutes at a time or frankly measure him with the gipsy eye of Carmen. |

**Find the passages in the text that correspond to the following statements and decide whether the norms in the writer’s mind are explicit or implicit. If implicit, try to determine the point of reference.**

1. The average mountaineer is lean, inquisitive, shrewd.

2. Four are below average American height and two are fat.

3. The males have a grave and deliberate bearing.

4. They do not travel with a graceful and lithe stride like the Indians.

5. They have the feral eye of primitive man.

6. Many of the women are pretty in youth.

7. The women’s voices are singularly sweet.

8. Many look at the visitor with the gypsy eye of Carmen.

**Language Development**

**Condensing information with compound adjectives**

A compound adjective is an adjective composed of two words, such as *well-known, ice-cold* and *fast-paced*. Compound adjectives may be formed with past and present participles. Those formed with past participles are normally used to describe a property of a person, for example *a red-haired woman*, *a blue-eyed man*. What do you suppose is the meaning of the adjectives underlined in the passage?