

All Jamaicans Love Reggae Music



All Jamaicans love reggae music. All Frenchmen are romantic. All Brazilians can dance the samba. All Chinese can speak Chinese. All Englishmen are gentlemen. All Scotsman wear kilts and all Americans like hamburgers. You are probably familiar with such generalizations. There is some truth in such statements. For example, there may be many Englishmen who are gentlemen. However, what about those Englishmen who are soccer hooligans?

Such generalizations can also be found in a certain kind of joke. For example, some customers in a restaurant find flies in their soup. The American take the owners to court and win lots of money. The Japanese take memorial photographs standing next to the flies. The Chinese assume they are part of the meal and eat them. Finally, the British say, "We won't complain, we just will never come here again." The punch line of this joke makes the point that the British tend to be shy and don't like to make a fuss in public. Although such jokes rely on stereotypes most people would probably not find them too offensive.

What is offensive is when someone refuses to accept that their generalizations are stereotypes, but treat them as true facts about other nationalities. One simple way of stressing that there are always exceptions to the rule in the case of national stereotypes is by playing the "Who says?" game.

To play the "Who says?" game you have to have personal knowledge concerning someone from another or your own country. For example, you might know a particularly outgoing girl then you could make the following kind of statement: "Who says all Japanese girls are shy? Have you met my friend Michiko?" or, "Who says all Americans like hamburgers? My friend Mike is a vegetarian." This is very simple and effective way of stressing exceptions to a popular generalization.

You might ask why bother to challenge such statements which after all contain a certain degree of truth. The reason is that the questioning of over-generalization about anything is, or should be, one of the main purposes of education. Be careful to sometimes qualify your generalizations. Then, to be on the safe side, qualify them again. If you are lucky they might even cease being generalizations after all.

1. Why do you think Japanese believe so many stereotypes about foreigners?