

Stereotypes.

Have you ever wondered what a stereotype is, and why we have them? Do you, culturally, have certain stereotypes about certain people? Of course, all countries do. I'm sure that, in the past, I have judged people according to stereotypes I had learned, and been completely wrong about those individuals. One definition of a stereotype is an assumption about someone based on his looks, dress, job, age, and ethnicity. When I first came over to the U.S., everything was quite new to me. I had, up until then, only experienced the U.S. culture through television, and through some American friends who I had met in London. But, as they say, 'there's nothing quite like being there.' One day, while I was visiting for the first time, I walked into the lounge and saw Tom, the man I later married, and his father sitting on the sofa watching baseball on television, both wearing baseball hats. My immediate reaction was to laugh. It seemed, to my ignorant eye, that they had put their hats on out of enthusiasm for the game. To me, because baseball is very much an American game, it seemed typical or stereotypical. Well, now that I live here, I realize that nearly everybody wears baseball hats because it is so sunny. Wenatchee receives about 300 days of sun a year, and a very strong sun at that. I wear baseball hats regularly to protect my eyes and skin. Some people wear cowboy hats for the same, practical purpose, or even because they *are* cowboys. So, my immediate assumption was wrong, and I had made that assumption by judging how two people looked. It's scary how easily, and quickly we can make an assumption like that. To withhold judgment I think needs higher thinking skills and some wisdom. And I think the most important part of not living in judgment of others is to see them as absolute equals, so rather than fearing the unknown and forming ill informed judgments, we can perhaps respect and care about the individual, simply because he is our equal. Gosh, I'm getting philosophical! I have experienced a lot of assumptions from people about me because I am from England. They have assumed a lot about my knowledge, likes and dislikes, and even experiences. The U.S. is faced with a huge challenge of how to deal with a stereotype that came up ten years ago on September 11th, when the Twin Towers in New York were bombed. How do you control a stereotype that has developed through something so tragic and violent, so as not to make terrible wrong judgments? What do you think? Are we capable of withholding judgment? There is a saying here that you have to read to understand properly. It says, 'When you *ass-u-me*, you make an *ass* out of *you* and *me*.'

Grammar notes.

Related vocabulary: to withhold, stereotypical, ethnicity.

1. My boss withheld my salary for two months until his tax troubles had been resolved.
2. A man in a bowler hat, drinking tea a stereotypical view of an English man.
3. My ethnicity is English, though my blood is mixed.