

## BEYOND THE SKY AND THE EARTH: A JOURNEY INTO BHUTAN

### JAMIE ZEPPA

#### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Jamie Zeppa is a Canadian writer and college professor. *Beyond the Sky and Earth: A Journey into Bhutan* is an autobiography that recounts her experiences on a two-year assignment as an English lecturer in the 1980s in the mountainous kingdom of Bhutan. It is a **memoir**, but it should also be classed as travel writing. It is a record of the culture and life of a Himalayan village and her initial reactions and growing attachment to this remote and unexplored part of the world.

Bhutan is a **landlocked** country in South Asia and was not exposed to western influences until the second half of the 20th century, which enabled it to retain much of its unique identity and charm. It is a country that has been named the happiest in Asia and the eighth happiest in the world.

#### SUBJECT VOCABULARY

**memoir** a form of autobiography

#### GENERAL VOCABULARY

**landlocked** without a coastline

**Paro** A valley in Bhutan that contains the country's only international airport.

#### BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 Do some research about the history and geography of Bhutan.
- 2 In groups, talk about what makes your own culture different from that of other countries. Are there many differences, or only a few? Talk about the different things that people discuss when describing a culture, such as language, clothing and practices.
- 3 Quite often the names of countries and cities have very interesting stories behind their origin. Share any that you know with the rest of your class.

#### ▼ FROM *BEYOND THE SKY AND THE EARTH: A JOURNEY INTO BHUTAN* BY JAMIE ZEPPA

When Zeppa was 24 years old she left Canada to teach in Bhutan. This memoir grew out of an essay she wrote about her early days in the country.

Mountains all around, climbing up to peaks, rolling into valleys, again and again. Bhutan is all and only mountains. I know the technical explanation for the landscape, landmass meeting landmass, the Indian subcontinent colliding into Asia thirty or forty million years ago, but I cannot imagine it. It is easier to picture a giant child gathering earth in great armfuls, piling up rock, pinching mud into ridges and sharp peaks, knuckling out little valleys and gorges, poking holes for water to fall through.

It is my first night in Thimphu, the capital, a ninety-minute drive from the airport in **Paro**. It took five different flights over four days to get there, from Toronto to Montreal to Amsterdam to New Delhi to Calcutta to Paro. I am exhausted but I cannot sleep. From my simple, pine-panelled room at the