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Cambridge Assessment International Education

Cambridge O Level

ENGLISH LANGUAGE **1123/12**

Paper 1 Reading **May/June 2024**

INSERT **2 hours**

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INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading passages.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.

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Read **Text A** and answer **Question 1** and **Question 2** on the question paper.

Text A: Where it all began

In this extract from a story set a long time ago in Italy, the writer has just started as a kitchen worker in a grand palace. One of his duties is to transport heavy blocks of ice from the ice house in the palace gardens to the kitchen.

1 The first time I did this, the curiosity of playing with the frozen slabs – of seeing how they slid away from me like eels, how I could ride them down the slope, or best of all shoot them at the kitchen wall from a distance and watch them shatter into jewel-like shards – enchanted me so much that, in a state of childish enthusiasm, I neglected my other duties.

2 When Ahmad, my master, found me in the courtyard, surrounded by ruined ice blocks, he showed none of the displeasure which I knew my ill-discipline warranted. 'Come with me,' he said without expression.

3 He took me to the ice house and ushered me in, apparently closing the door tight shut behind me. Inside, in pleasant contrast to the stifling heat outside, it was the temperature at which water becomes ice. Initially, though dressed in a thin shirt and short breeches, I stood congratulating myself on avoiding the task of cleaning up. After a few minutes, I began to shiver. The cold felt like a flame. A few more minutes and I was shaking from the searing cold. My confidence crumbled. Feebly, I leant against the door, which surprisingly swung open to reveal Ahmad waiting patiently outside.

4 I never again played with the ice.

5 Each night, exhausted, I crawled into the kitchen to sleep next to the huge open fireplace the cooks used to roast meats. The cooks grew used to me. I watched them as they worked: observing how they pureed fruits to intensify the flavours; how they extracted the perfumes of flowers to flavour creams and liqueurs. But when I suggested to Ahmad that we could use these techniques, he waved me away. 'We are engineers, not cooks,' he would proclaim. 'Cooking is women's business. We know the secrets of ice.'

6 Indeed, these were ancient secrets known to few, passed down within two families who supplied frozen ices to the royal court. Some of this knowledge was contained in stained leather-bound notebooks, but most was kept only in Ahmad's head, in a set of rules he had no desire to question.
'To five measures of crushed ice, add three…' he would recite.
'Why?' I would say.
'Why what?'
'Why must the ice be crushed?'
'What does it matter? Stir the mixture clockwise…'

7 I had been working for Ahmad almost two years before I dared to ask what the ices we made tasted like. 'What does the taste matter to you, child?' answered Ahmad.
'Sir, I've seen how the cooks try their dishes as they make them. I think I'll understand better how to make these ices if I know how they are meant to taste.' We were making an ice flavoured with a tempting syrup of small, sweet oranges.
'Very well,' Ahmad said casually. 'Try some.'

8 Before he could change his mind, I grabbed a spoon, scooping out a little and putting it to my lips. Ice crystals cracked and crunched against my teeth, dissolving on my tongue with a sparkling sensation. I gasped with delight, then pain, as the cold gripped my throat. I spluttered. Ahmad's lip curled with amusement.

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9 ‘Now, perhaps, you understand this is not a dish for us. We are here to entertain, boy. We are like singers, or actors, for the wealthy and the great. No one but them will ever be able to waste so much expense on something that melts to nothing.’ But, once I’d got over the initial strangeness, I found I could not forget that extraordinary flavour, nor the cold, frozen grittiness. It was as if the ice itself was enticing, daring me on. From then on, without Ahmad knowing, I tasted every ice confection we made.

10 I sometimes wondered why Ahmad shared his knowledge so readily with me, but soon realised that to him I was simply a workhorse, a creature incapable of reason. He taught me what he knew, not because he wanted to share his secrets, but because he wanted to share the labour. And so I learnt the subtle art of more complex water ices: ‘sorbetti’, in which the syrups themselves were frozen, transforming magically to mounds of glittering crystals; and ‘sherbets’, the most difficult and enchanting of all, expertly infused with fragrant cardamom, and resembling refrozen snow.

11 There were still secrets, special ingredients, described in the notebooks which Ahmad kept to himself, to ensure that I would always know less than he did. If I suggested we try a new flavour, Ahmad would say flatly, ‘It is not one of the flavours – look in the book.’ He was taunting me, of course: he knew I could not read. Nor did I need to read it to know that only four flavours were all its ancient pages permitted. Our ices had another drawback too – that shooting pain which came from biting down on them. I longed to make an ice that was smooth, soft and creamy: ‘ice cream’.

12 So began a period in which I lived a double life. By day, I followed Ahmad’s instructions dutifully. But by night I was a kind of alchemist, the kitchen my laboratory as I experimented wildly, without method or purpose, trying increasingly outlandish and ridiculous combinations of flavours and ingredients. I froze soft cheeses, vegetable juices, even soups, hoping to chance on something – some method, some key – something that could unlock the deepest, frozen secrets of ice cream.

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Read **Text B** and answer **Question 3** on the question paper.

Text B: The Authentic Travel company

When Australian Bob Hunter co-founded 'Authentic Travel' in 1989, offering smaller-group tours abroad, the menu offered was less varied than it is today. He was the company's only guide. Thailand was its only destination. Yet, the basic concept of travellers getting a genuine, real experience – as reflected in the name – proved a winner. Over the next decade, the company expanded into Southeast Asia, and in 1998 went global. Today, Hunter oversees 1 300 local guides – working in an impressive 130 countries. Despite his hectic workload, he's never stopped travelling – for work, relaxation and to continue exploring. We interviewed him to find out more:

'The first place I travelled to was the UK, after graduating from university in 1981 aged 21. I met a great friend and afterwards we backpacked around a dozen different European countries. I didn't get to travel again until I was 27, when I spent three months travelling around Southeast Asia. It was then that I started thinking about all the people back in Australia who would enjoy backpacking overseas but worried about safety so didn't have the confidence to do it all by themselves. Organising things like healthcare can also be tricky and time consuming – even for us, as professionals.

'So, I started exploring the idea of a more supported kind of backpacking, one which did not involve staying in the dingy, musty places travellers on foot might normally expect to be offered, but in hotels and guesthouses that are clean and comfortable. But the moment those guests walked outside their hotel, they'd still get to see what every other backpacker saw – a different culture – without being isolated from the local people and the realities of everyday life.

'Of course there are some pluses to travelling solo, and so the schedule allows flexibility; customers know that they can just join in with the group when they want. Yes, solo travellers do have ultimate flexibility and can change their travel plans instantly, but there are many travel activities for which you need a group of people. I first realised this when I was travelling in Borneo and discovered the only affordable way to go on a boat into the heart of the country was with a group.

'Attitudes to travel vary, but many people now realise there's so much more out there than sitting by a hotel pool. There's stuff going on outside the resort and people want to experience it. That's what Authentic Travel has always been about. I did go on a cruise once – to Antarctica. Yes, the wildlife was amazing, but cruising really only offers a taste of a destination.

'I notice more and more conventional travel companies are now trying to imitate us saying 'busy city people crave real life'. I'm not convinced those guys really mean it. They're just trying to cash in on this new trend of being a 'mindful traveller'. Some of the destinations they are proposing to visit are really basic, completely 'off grid', with no reliable water or electricity supplies. It can be impossible to get online in those places and mobile phones rarely work. I doubt many people will want to stay in these 'black-hole resorts' where the main attraction seems to be that you hand over your smartphone on arrival and do nothing for a week!

'Our future, I think, could be in developing our special interest travel experiences – the demand is there. For example, you can do a tour of railway lines in Europe. A bit extreme perhaps, but we also offer fabulous foodie trips (tasting and cooking lessons included) and, understandably, they're proving popular.'

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