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Cambridge Assessment
International Education

Cambridge O Level

ENGLISH LANGUAGE **1123/11**

Paper 1 Reading **October/November 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: The World's Oldest Swim

The writer Matt and his brother, Calum, have travelled to Turkey to take part in an annual 4.5 km swimming race in the Strait of the Dardanelles, popular with swimmers from all over the world and known as the 'World's Oldest Swim'.

1 We knew before we arrived that the geography of the Strait of the Dardanelles means it has become one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. This narrow strip of water flows between four seas, offering access from Asia and Europe. So it shouldn't have surprised us, when we stood at the water's edge, peering through the thin screen of trees, to see huge, slow tankers and freighters filled with cargo.

2 'Whoa!' said Calum. I agreed. This was the open heart of Turkish industry; we felt a long way from the peaceful lakes and clear rivers of the forests back home. Right then we knew that this was going to be a swim unlike any we'd attempted before.

3 The shores of the strait are scattered with the dusty ruins of ancient castles. The legendary city of Troy was long ago situated there, and Greek myths tell of Leander swimming across the strait at night to meet his lover. Romantic poet Lord Byron wanted to swim it to prove this was possible. On his second attempt, in 1810 he did. No wonder people call this the 'World's Oldest Swim'.

4 The race organisers hosted a welcome meal and information briefing for visiting swimmers in a local hotel on the evening before the race. Our new friend Ed from Ireland had become particularly animated at the mention of jellyfish, narrowly avoiding choking on his chicken and rice. He interrogated us about the minor details of our own race preparations; Calum had teased him wickedly with exaggerated accounts. Amid all of the anticipation, though, was unwelcome news: weather forecasters predicted winds nearing gale force and seas two metres high. 'If you're not used to conditions like these,' warned the organisers, 'do not swim tomorrow.'

5 Everyone laughed nervously, rationalising our joint determination to go ahead with the swim by accusing the organisers of being pessimistic. Surely their remarks were intended for the less capable swimmers among us? They weren't really talking to me.

6 On the morning of the swim, our mixed group of various nationalities assembled solemnly at the roadside and began our sea-bound march, passing amused early risers watching from their apartment balconies. We moved towards the ferry ramp in a slow herd to board the ferry and travel across the strait to the starting area on the opposite shore. It was quite a sight: hundreds of swimmers huddled on a passenger ferry, clad in nothing more than swimming suits and swim caps. The tension was palpable. Conversations were muted. There was no sign of Ed.

7 The weather out on the water was even worse than the forecast, and the ferry ride to the starting area was terrifying. The waves looked enormous, the gusting wind kicking them into a frenzied mess of white-water and foam. I'd never been in conditions like these in a boat, much less as a swimmer.

8 The day before, the water had rippled invitingly in the heat when we'd taken a boat ride across the Dardanelles and been told about the two currents that flow through the strait in opposite directions. A strong undercurrent sweeps along the shore. This would make it hard for us to exit. Our guide had explained that only the best local swimmers swam a straight line to the finish. We'd have to aim left and fight the current, making for a tall flagpole visible on the hillside, until we could cut a direct sprint for the exit ramp at the harbour.

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9 As we disembarked the ferry and queued for the start line, we wished everyone luck, then jumped down onto the sand when the horn sounded, bumping straight into a flustered Ed coming back the other way. Keen to get in the water before he could change his mind, he'd weaved his way through the chaos to the front and then forgot to step on the starter mat, so was sent back. He rejoined the queue beside us apologetically.

10 Unexpectedly, the weather suddenly calmed, and the morning sun lit up the water as we waded in with the heat on our bare backs. We paused in the middle of the rush of bodies and pulled down our goggles. A fever swept across the churned water, and I let out a cheer as swimmers dived into the shallows around us. Splashes of water erupted in all directions and then we slumped forward, went under and pulled ourselves through the swirling green, quiet, veil of bubbles.

11 When I came up, there were swimmers on all sides of me. 'We're only here once,' Ed called, disappearing recklessly into the squirming mass of swimmers. I picked out Calum's distinctive swim shorts and drew up alongside him. And we set off together into the long, bobbing channel of colourful fishing boats, kayaks and dinghies floating on the water.

12 For the next half hour, slow waves rocked us as we rose and we sank, a contented pod of swimmers. The seabed disappeared quickly, but the sun still stretched its arrows down deep underwater, catching umbrellas of clear jellyfish rising from the murk, glowing hypnotically under faint shoals of shimmering fish. Calum and I timed our strokes evenly as we cut a path through the criss-crossing wakes of other swimmers. Finally, I let my feet trail, basking in the warmth washing over me, until we floated onto the glassy waters shielded by the harbour wall around the exit ramp.

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

Text B: Volunteering to work with animals

In this online article, a conservation expert gives his opinion on animal sanctuaries – places that take care of animals – and on volunteering to work in them.

'Lots of young people want to give up their free time to help support conservation,' claims an advert online, citing 2900 searches for 'conservation volunteering' last month. This must add up to tens of thousands of hours of effort from volunteers every year, and impressive levels of fundraising and donations to make it possible. With all this money and effort, conservation should really go places. 'Surely that's a success story?' some would argue. But that donated money could do a great deal more.

In all honesty, every time someone comes up to me after a talk and says they want to help conservation, so they are (obviously) heading off to (a) an elephant orphanage, (b) a primate sanctuary or (c) work with big cats, my heart sinks. 'There's nothing more dispiriting than people who think that they are helping,' agrees conservationist Rita Ni, who manages a sanctuary which runs a captive breeding and reintroduction programme (the gold standard of working with animals), 'but they really aren't.'

That may sound unnecessarily harsh, but conservation is harsh. It's unforgiving. For me personally, saving individual animals should always come second to saving species, which in turn comes second to protecting and managing habitats – infinitely less glamorous, but undoubtedly more worthwhile. Often, some of the most successful conservation strategies actually involve exterminating invasive species. Sounds horrible? It is, and so undesirable that, unsurprisingly, no conservation organisation has ever presented that opportunity to potential volunteers.

On the other hand, a growing number of so-called 'animal sanctuaries' are realising that well-meaning, eager volunteers can help keep them in business, through exploiting people's passion for a cute animal. Even among the well-established sanctuaries, there are few which do anything to solve the root cause of the problem – the reason that injured and homeless animals end up there in the first place.

Keeping any animal in captivity is expensive – that explains where all of your donations go. But, hey, you get to take that baby elephant down for a wash, or bottle-feed that orphaned orangutan and feel good about yourself. I am of course a hypocrite – I would relish the chance to do those things. But I resist, not least because I'm aware of the environmental impact of flying to a remote sanctuary.

'Where reintroduction is a key aim,' Rita Ni explains, 'a hands-off approach from keepers and volunteers is required, with less direct contact.' This, unfortunately, it seems is the opposite of what 'sells' volunteering opportunities to young people. Of course, I wouldn't want to cast doubt on some of the fantastic projects that exist and to make it harder for organisations like Rita Ni's to raise funds.

Any responsible sanctuary will be able to answer vital questions such as: What is your long-term plan? Are your animals released into the wild wherever possible? And of course, what safety precautions do you have? Koalas may look like cute and cuddly teddy bears, but they are wild animals.

So who's at fault? I believe the responsibility lies with conservation organisations who should be educating volunteers about what to look for, rather than promoting 'cute and cuddly' experiences. Typically, organisations recruit volunteers to work for such a short time that the difference they can make is likely to be insignificant anyway.

By the way, just for the sake of comparison, here are a few other things young people searched for: 'fake tan' = 14800, 'pet chimps' = 1 000 and 'gap year' = 49500.

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