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Cambridge Assessment International Education

Cambridge O Level

ENGLISH LANGUAGE **1123/12**

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 puma

Laura is backpacking in South America for three months and has volunteered to work in an animal sanctuary. The sanctuary rescues monkeys, birds and wild cats (such as pumas and jaguars) and brings them back to health.

1 I'm 24 years old, from England. I don't know that monkeys can make jokes or be depressed. I don't even know what a puma looks like.

2 We've been rumbling along in a rickety bus for five bruising hours. The bus stops. I rub the grimy window. Squinting through streaks in the condensation I see only jungle. The woman next to me reluctantly hauls her child off my lap. I scramble over other passengers, chickens and sacks of rice towards the exit.
'Seriously?' I can't keep my voice steady.
'Yes,' confirms the driver.
Then I'm standing by myself on an empty road, watching the bus lights fade.

3 A soft haze makes the thin, broken tarmac float like water. Leaves of every shade melt into looming vastness, tall trees overhang the banks. I struggle to breathe – it smells hot. The jungle hums, speaking no language I've heard before. I wave my arms wildly at mosquitos buzzing around my ears, whimpering, spinning on the spot. The jungle is everywhere.

4 As I turn, I see a monkey sitting on a signpost. I yelp and leap back. The signpost says, 'NO MONKEYS ON THE ROAD'. He just stares, challenging me. Yeah? So, what are you going to do about it? I'm not going to do anything. I'm on my own in the jungle. I think I may faint.

5 Over the jungle hum, I hear a thundering. A huge black boar suddenly catapults out of the undergrowth. She raises her head – a red sock clasped between her teeth – locking eyes with me. I'm about to run when a man bursts out after her, pulling twigs and leaves from his hair. 'Rita!' The boar spins and hurtles away with her prize.

6 'I'm the vet here,' the man explains, as if random foreigners turn up here regularly to be greeted by such creatures. I don't. I don't turn up in places like this. Backpacking was meant to give me the perspective I needed after quitting my job. I planned to return transformed: a person who makes good decisions and knows what she wants to do with her life. I'd picked up a leaflet for the sanctuary with a cheerful-looking monkey on it. It said they took volunteers. For no reason other than a desperate lack of purpose, I'm here. I don't know anything about this place, just that there are monkeys and they're supposed to look cheerful.

7 'Laura?' I turn. A woman is approaching along the road. 'I'm Mila. I'm in charge.' She talks. I follow her. 'We look after monkeys, boars, cats...'
I stop her. 'Cats?'
'Yes. We have 16 – jaguars and pumas.' I stare at her dumbly. Right. Not house cats, then. 'I have a puma you can work with.'
'A puma?'
She nods. 'But you must commit to one month, minimum.' She hesitates, staring at me hard.

8 I barely hear anything after the word 'puma'. I'm not quite sure what a puma is. I think it must be large, wild and powerful. I'm not sure if I'm the sort of person she wants.
'This puma's called Wayra.'
A puma. Me.
I find that I'm nodding, dazed. But Mila's smile when she sees me nodding is thrillingly contagious.

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9 Early next morning, Mila says, 'Let's walk Wayra,' as if she's worried I might change my mind. She's right.
'You walk pumas? Outside their cages? On ropes?' I'm trying to look unruffled. 'And that's what we're going to do now?'
'Wayra's a wild animal,' Mila explains. 'We get her out of her cage for some kind of freedom.'
I nod rapidly. What I've understood: we're working with rescued animals that can never be released again. I'd probably feel more sad about this if there wasn't one huge question pounding my brain.
I whisper it to Mila who doesn't answer at first.
'Maybe,' she finally says. 'But we each have to decide whether we think these animals are worth it.'

10 I don't know what I expected. Light dapples the cage's mud floor, but mostly it's in shade. Wayra's hard to spot: smaller than I imagined, similar in colour to the shadows. But then her long tail whips and I glimpse the only parts of her that stand out: her eyes, as green as the paddle-shaped plants surrounding us, and her nose, pink as the tip of a sunset.

11 Mila unlocks the cage, beckoning me over. When I don't move, she smiles.
A real-life Wayra has materialised in the doorway. 'Don't make any sudden movements,' Mila says clipping a rope onto Wayra's collar. I stay very, very still, transfixed by her bristling tail, the tense snake of her spine, her low growl. A pause. Then – she's away! Erupting from the cage.

12 'Come!' Mila grabs my hand. 'We go in front – to protect her.'
Protect her? Wayra turns, shooting me a look of disgust. There's tension on the rope; she's reached as far as she can get. Her growl has got louder, an engine deep in her belly. It was an illusion before – her size, thinking she wasn't big. I realise she hadn't looked small in the cage; she'd looked squashed. Now, outside, she's expanded. Princess Wayra.

13 'Go!' repeats Mila.
One moment, I'm thinking, no way. The next, we're all running. I'm running. I've never run like this.
'Is she chasing us?' I pant.
'No,' says Mila. 'She just wants to run!'
Some fear, the top layer, blows away.

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

Text B: Going at my own pace

Yesterday, I met a former colleague who asked why I hadn't been riding my bike recently. I corrected her: I had actually been riding regularly, as well as eating healthily and attending relaxation classes (both definite improvements and recommended by my personal trainer, and new friend, Ned). To which she said, 'Oh I just haven't seen you on the fitness app.'
'I don't use that fitness app anymore,' I confirmed. She looked shocked.

Though no doubt teenagers have already moved on, the fitness app she was talking about is still popular among people of my age. It records your rides and runs like a GPS device, telling you where you've been and how far you've gone. I downloaded the free version of the app to my smartphone last year and was soon paying the significant monthly subscription to 'upgrade' to the full service.

The app collects your kilometres per hour, route, distance and elevation. It also shares this information with other users via social media – whether you want it to or not. You can see who else has completed the same route, compare your workout to theirs and leave comments.

Initially I was addicted to the app, using it all the time. Whenever I went for a ride, I'd take my phone with me to upload my achievements for others to see – 'proof' that I had actually ridden. I felt unnecessarily competitive when other riders had higher ride totals each month and discouraged when they had ridden faster. Soon, the enjoyment of just riding for the sake of riding faded.

The effect wasn't all negative; often it was helpful, encouraging me to get out and ride. The app breaks popular courses into segments, recording each rider's best time on each segment. That's where the competition creeps in though: the fastest athlete on the segment is named 'Champion'. This mentality made me feel as though if I rode, I had to ride fast.

I felt overwhelming peer pressure to put everything on the app. True, I write a blog about cycling, but any stuff I don't feel like sharing, doesn't get shared. The app puts your failures into numbers. When someone made mean comments about my statistics, I'd sulk for days. Wounded.
'You're too hard on yourself,' Ned noted perceptively last time I was tempted to overtrain.

Now, I simply track my workouts with my sports watch, keeping records so I can check my history when I want to. It's great to see improvement, I agree, but I don't need to see what everyone else is doing. True, friends and colleagues have shown me some of the awesome rides and runs that they have recorded on the app – and they are really awesome, motivating even. But daily comparisons would not make me feel good about my own goals and efforts. Seeing another athlete's epic workout on the app, I'd think to myself, 'I could do that' and run faster and further than I should. (Sorry Ned.) Or worse, 'I'll never do that'. Not great for my mental health.

I don't want an app to run down my phone battery while I'm out exercising. I don't want to track an epic bike ride and not have the ability to call someone for help or look for directions. So, even though I agree that those little animated trophies you receive when you complete a challenge on the app are fun, I've removed it from my phone and now work at my own pace, asking Ned's advice when I need it.

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