YEAR 7 · PRACTICE PAPER 1

Reading Magazine

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HOW TO USE THIS MAGAZINE

Use this magazine with the question paper “Reading Year 7 — Practice Paper 1”. Each part of the question paper tells you which text to read and the page it is on. Read the text first, then answer its questions. You may look back at the magazine as often as you like.

PrepNest

The night shift

The alarm went off at 2.45 am. For a moment Mei didn't know where she was. Then she remembered: she was thirteen today, and she had asked for the strangest birthday present any of her friends had ever heard of.

"You're sure?" Dad whispered from the doorway. He was already in his white apron, and the hallway light made a halo of his messy hair. "You can go back to sleep. No one would blame you."

"I'm sure," she said, although her body was begging her to stay under the doona.

For as long as she could remember, Dad had left for the bakery while the rest of the street was asleep. She knew him as a man who napped on the couch in the afternoons, who smelled faintly of yeast, and who missed every school assembly that started before lunch. She had always wanted to know what he actually did in those dark hours. Now she was going to find out.

The bakery was a cave of warmth after the cold street. Two ovens ticked as they heated. Flour dusted every surface like a light fall of snow, and the radio murmured an old song Mei half recognised.

Dad handed her an apron that reached her ankles. "Rule one," he said. "Everything happens in order. You can't rush bread."

For the next three hours she weighed flour on the big steel scales, watched the mixer fold the dough over and over like a slow wave, and learned to shape rolls by cupping her hand and turning the dough against the bench until it pulled itself tight. Her first ones were lumpy and lopsided. Dad baked them anyway.

At half past five the first trays came out, and the smell was so good it was almost a sound. By six, Mrs Kowalski from the flats next door was knocking on the glass, as she did every morning, to buy a loaf of rye before her shift at the hospital. Then came the tradies, the nurses, the bus drivers — all the people who were awake while Mei usually slept.

"They're my people," Dad said, sliding a warm roll into her hand. "Someone has to feed the ones who start early."

Mei looked at the line of tired faces brightening as they reached the counter, and something clicked into place. All those missed assemblies had not been because Dad didn't care. He had been here, making sure a nurse could eat before a twelve-hour shift.

At seven he drove her home to get ready for school. She fell asleep in the car with flour still in her hair.

That afternoon there was a small paper bag on the kitchen bench. Inside was one lumpy, lopsided roll, and a note in Dad's blocky capitals: YOUR FIRST BATCH. NOT BAD FOR A BEGINNER.

PrepNest

Why do we yawn?

Everybody does it. Babies do it before they are even born. Dogs, cats, snakes and fish do it too. Yet for such a common action, the yawn is surprisingly mysterious. Scientists still disagree about why we yawn at all.

The oxygen idea

For a long time, the most popular explanation was that we yawn to take in extra oxygen when our blood is running low. It sounds sensible, but it does not hold up. In one well-known experiment in the 1980s, volunteers breathed air with extra oxygen, and then air with extra carbon dioxide. They yawned just as often either way.

The cooling idea

A newer theory is that yawning cools the brain. When we yawn, we stretch our jaw wide and pull in a big gulp of air, which may carry heat away from the blood flowing to the head. Some studies have found that people yawn more when the air around them is cooler than their body, and less on very hot days, when a gulp of air would not cool them down. Supporters of this theory say a cooler brain is a more alert brain, which could explain why we yawn when we are bored or sleepy: the body may be trying to wake us up.

Catching a yawn

Then there is the strangest thing about yawning: it is contagious. Seeing someone yawn, hearing a yawn, even reading about yawning can set you off. (Are you yawning yet?) Contagious yawning seems to be linked to empathy, our ability to understand other people's feelings. People are more likely to catch a yawn from a family member or friend than from a stranger, and children usually do not start catching yawns until they are about four or five years old.

So why do we yawn? The honest answer is that nobody knows for certain. The yawn may do more than one job. For now it remains one of the everyday mysteries of the human body — and if you have yawned while reading this, you have just helped prove how powerful it is.

PrepNest

Balloons belong on the ground

Opinion — Tariq Hassan

It is a moment that looks magical in photographs: hundreds of bright balloons drifting up into a blue sky at a wedding, a sports final or a memorial. But what goes up must come down, and when balloons come down, they become rubbish, often in the places least able to cope with it.

A released balloon can travel hundreds of kilometres before it bursts or slowly loses its gas. Many end up in the ocean. There, a deflated balloon with its trailing ribbon looks remarkably like a jellyfish, one of the favourite foods of sea turtles. A study of seabirds found that although balloons made up only a small share of the plastic the birds had swallowed, they were by far the most likely item to kill them. Ribbons tangle around the legs and wings of birds and other animals.

Some balloon makers claim their latex balloons are biodegradable. The word sounds reassuring, but latex can take months or even years to break down, especially in cold sea water. Months is more than enough time for a turtle to mistake one for a meal.

Several Australian states have already banned or restricted deliberate mass balloon releases. The rest of the country should follow.

None of this means our celebrations have to be dull. Bubbles, flags, paper streamers, planting a tree or lighting candles can all mark an important moment without leaving a trail of litter across the sea.

When we release a balloon, we are not sending it to the sky. We are sending it to someone else’s beach, or into someone else’s stomach. It is time we kept our balloons on the ground.

PrepNest