YEAR 9 · PRACTICE PAPER 1

Reading Magazine

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HOW TO USE THIS MAGAZINE

Use this magazine with the question paper “Reading Year 9 — 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 keeper’s daughter

Nobody else wanted the Saturday shift at the Cape Farrow Lighthouse Museum, which was how Zara, fifteen and newly hired, came to be alone in the keeper’s cottage with a box of documents that had arrived that morning from a deceased estate.

“Catalogue them,” Mrs Hendry had said, handing her a pair of white cotton gloves. “Date, description, condition. Don’t read them properly, or you’ll never finish.”

Zara read them properly.

The box held a logbook bound in cracked green leather. The first pages were in a man’s cramped, slanting hand — wind directions, oil levels, ships sighted — the weekly ritual of a keeper in the 1890s. But halfway through, the handwriting changed. It became rounder, younger, pressed so hard into the paper that some letters had torn through.

> *14 June 1894. Father ill with fever. I have lit the lamp myself these three nights. The oil is heavy and my arms shake on the stairs, but the light has not failed. Mother says I must not write in the log, as it is not my place. I say if I keep the light, I keep the log.*

Zara sat back. Outside, the real lighthouse stood white against a sky the colour of pewter, its lamp long since replaced by an automatic beacon that no one needed to climb to. She turned the page.

> *21 June 1894. A storm from the south-west. The schooner Margaret Ellis passed close under the cape at two in the morning, too close. I kept the lamp turning though the glass rattled in its frame. At dawn she was safe in the bay. I do not think her captain will ever know my name.*

The entries went on for seven weeks. The girl — she never wrote her name — recorded every ship, every change of wind, every measure of oil. Her father’s handwriting returned in August, shaky at first, then firmer. Beneath the entry for 3 August, in the girl’s hand, were five words: He says I did well.

Zara looked for the girl in the museum’s displays. There was a photograph of the keeper, stern and bearded, beside a list of every keeper who had served at Cape Farrow, all of them men. There was no mention of a daughter who had carried oil up ninety-two steps for seven weeks while the storms came in.

When Mrs Hendry came back at four, Zara had catalogued three items out of forty. “I said not to read them,” Mrs Hendry sighed. Then she saw Zara’s face. “What is it?”

Zara turned the logbook around and pointed to the rounded handwriting. “Who was she?”

It took the two of them a month of searching old newspapers and church records to find out. Her name was Annie Walsh. She had died in 1961, in a town far inland, at the age of eighty-one. Her obituary said she had been a devoted mother and a keen gardener. It did not mention the lighthouse.

The following spring, a new card appeared beside the photograph of the stern, bearded keeper. It was small and plainly printed, and Zara had written it herself: Annie Walsh, aged 14, kept the Cape Farrow light alone from 11 June to 2 August 1894.

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Why forgetting is good for you

Mind & Brain

We tend to treat forgetting as a failure: the name that slips away, the formula that vanishes the moment the exam paper lands on the desk. But a growing number of memory scientists argue that forgetting is not a fault in the system. It is part of how the system works.

The curve

In the 1880s, the German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus spent years memorising lists of meaningless syllables, such as “dax” and “bup”, and testing how many he could recall after different delays. He found that much of what he learned disappeared within a day, and that the rate of forgetting then slowed. The shape of his results, a steep drop followed by a long, gentle slope, became known as the forgetting curve.

A brain that edits

Why would a brain throw information away? One answer is efficiency. Every day we take in an enormous amount of detail: what we ate, where we parked, the colour of a stranger’s jacket. Remembering all of it would bury the important things under the trivial. By letting unused memories fade, the brain keeps what we actually need easy to find.

Forgetting may also help us think more flexibly. If you remembered every detail of every dog you had ever met, you might struggle to recognise a new dog as a dog at all. Forgetting the details helps the brain hold on to the general pattern.

Making memories stick

The good news is that the forgetting curve can be flattened. Ebbinghaus himself noticed that relearning a list took less time than learning it the first time, and that spreading out his sessions made memories last much longer. Today this is known as spaced practice.

Another powerful technique is retrieval practice: testing yourself rather than simply rereading. Each time you drag a memory back up, you strengthen the pathway to it. Rereading notes feels productive, but it can create an illusion of knowing — the words look familiar, so we assume we have learned them.

Sleep matters too. During deep sleep, the brain appears to replay and strengthen the day’s important memories, while weaker ones fade. So the next time a fact escapes you, remember that your brain is not broken. It is deciding what is worth keeping — and with a little strategy, you can help it choose.

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The case for handwriting

Opinion — Maya Chen

Last year, my school stopped teaching handwriting after Year 4. The reasoning was simple: students type everything now, so why spend time on a skill that belongs to the past? I understand the argument. I also think it is wrong.

Start with what happens in the brain. When we write by hand, we have to form each letter, which forces us to slow down. That slowness turns out to be useful. In one well-known study, university students who took notes by hand understood lectures better than students who typed, even though the typists recorded more words. The typists tended to copy the lecture word for word; the hand-writers, unable to keep up, had to decide what mattered and put it in their own words. That decision is where the learning happens.

Handwriting is also a matter of fairness. Many exams, including those in the final years of school, are still sat on paper. A student who has barely written by hand since Year 4 is at a disadvantage when she has to write for three hours without stopping.

Then there are the moments when a screen simply is not there: a birthday card, a note left on the kitchen bench, a form filled in at the doctor’s, a signature. These are small things, but they are part of ordinary adult life.

None of this means we should throw away our laptops. Typing is faster for long pieces of writing and easier to edit, and for some students with disabilities it opens up learning that handwriting closes off. The point is not to choose one over the other. It is to make sure every student can do both.

Twenty minutes of handwriting a week in the middle years of school would be enough to keep the skill alive. That is a small price for better learning, fairer exams and a skill people will use for the rest of their lives.

Before you disagree, try this: write down the three most important points from this article by hand, from memory. Then ask yourself which version you will still remember next week.

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