YEAR 9 · PRACTICE PAPER 1

Reading Magazine

IN THIS MAGAZINE

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.

PrepNest

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.

PrepNest

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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Migration

Each autumn the godwits leave
the mudflats where my grandmother walks,
rising in their thousands, a blur of wings
that tilts and gathers and is gone,
bound for the far edge of the world
along a road they cannot see.

She came the other way
in 1968, on a ship that smelled
of diesel and oranges,
a cardboard suitcase, a word or two
of English folded in her pocket
like a map she could not read.

She tells me the first winter
was the loneliest thing she ever knew.
She tells me, too, how one day
the strange streets began to hold her
the way the tide holds the flats,
gently, and then completely.

Now she stands at the water’s edge,
her hand above her eyes,
watching the birds begin their journey,
and I think she is the only one
on this whole shore who knows
exactly what they are leaving.

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The wire that shrank the world

In the 1860s, news from Britain took around two months to reach Australia. It travelled by ship, and by the time Australians read about an election, a war or a royal birth, the world had already moved on.

That changed on 22 August 1872, when the final join was made in the Overland Telegraph Line, a single wire stretching more than 3,000 kilometres across the continent. It connected Adelaide with Darwin, where an undersea cable carried messages on to Java and, from there, all the way to London. A message that had taken weeks could now arrive in hours.

The project was the idea of Charles Todd, South Australia's superintendent of telegraphs, and many people thought it could not be done. The route crossed deserts, gorges and tropical swamps — country that few Europeans had seen, although Aboriginal people had known and travelled it for tens of thousands of years. The explorer John McDouall Stuart had crossed the continent a decade earlier, and his route was used as a guide.

Work began in 1870. Teams of workers dug holes for more than 36,000 poles, often in heat above 40 degrees. In the north, termites ate the wooden poles, and many had to be replaced with iron ones shipped from England. In the wet season, floods washed away camps and bogged the wagons. Supplies ran short, and some workers died. The line was meant to take two years. It took almost three.

The effects were enormous. Businesses could check prices in London within a day. Newspapers printed overseas news while it was still news. Families could send urgent messages across the world. Historians often say the telegraph began to end what one writer called Australia's "tyranny of distance".

The line also changed the country it crossed. Repeater stations, built every few hundred kilometres to boost the signal, became the seeds of towns; Alice Springs grew from one of them. For many Aboriginal communities along the route, the line and its stations brought lasting, and often painful, disruption to their lives and lands.

Today, a message crosses the same distance in a fraction of a second. But for the Australians of 1872, that single wire must have felt like the whole world arriving at once.

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Local family discovers “outside”

The Weekly Ruckus — satire

A Westfield family has made a shocking discovery just metres from their own back door: a vast, uncharted region they are calling “outside”.

The Tran family made the find on Sunday afternoon, when the Wi-Fi went down for almost forty minutes. With no other options, fourteen-year-old Daniel Tran opened the sliding door “just to see what was there”.

“It was huge,” Daniel said. “There was this blue ceiling that went on forever, and the lighting was incredible. Honestly, the graphics were better than anything I’ve played.”

His sister Kim, 12, described meeting a “fuzzy four-legged creature” on the lawn, which later turned out to be the family’s dog, Pickles. “We thought he lived in the laundry,” she admitted. “Apparently he’s been out there for years.”

Experts say the family’s experience is increasingly common. “We are seeing more and more families stumble on outside by accident,” said Dr Sunny Greene of the Institute of Obvious Studies. “The symptoms are always the same: squinting, confusion about where the sound of birds is coming from, and a strange urge to kick a ball.”

Not everyone was impressed. “There was no charging port anywhere,” said Mrs Tran. “And it had no pause button. I tried to stop the rain and it just kept going.”

Despite this, the family say they may return. Daniel is already planning a second expedition. “I’ve heard that if you go far enough, there’s a thing called a park,” he said. “I’m not saying I believe it. But I want to see.”

The Institute of Obvious Studies recommends that families visit outside at least once a day, preferably without a device, and reminds parents that, unlike most games, it is free to play.

PrepNest

The Glass Orchard

Book review

The Glass Orchard is Rosalind Mercer's first novel for young adults, and it arrives carrying a great deal of excitement. It deserves most of it.

The story is set in a near-future Tasmania where orchards have been sealed under vast glass domes to protect them from a blight that has wiped out fruit trees across the world. Sixteen-year-old Wren works in the Huon dome, pollinating apple blossoms by hand, because the bees are long gone. When she finds a single wild apple tree growing outside the dome, healthy and heavy with fruit, she begins to suspect that the story everyone has been told about the blight is not the whole truth.

Mercer is at her best describing the domes themselves: the damp, humming warmth, the condensation running down the glass "like the orchard was sweating out a fever", the eerie silence of a spring without insects. The world feels thought-through and unsettlingly possible.

Wren is a memorable narrator, prickly and funny, and her friendship with Tomas, an engineer's son who has never been outside, is handled with real tenderness. It never tips into the predictable romance that the first chapters seem to promise, which is a welcome surprise.

The novel is less sure-footed in its final third. Once Wren leaves the dome, the plot speeds up so much that important revelations are rushed, and the villain, a company director with a fondness for long speeches, is disappointingly one-dimensional. A book that has spent two hundred pages asking complex questions settles for simple answers.

Even so, The Glass Orchard is an absorbing, intelligent debut. Readers who enjoy stories that ask what we owe the natural world will find plenty to think about, and Wren's voice will stay with them long after the last page.

Four stars out of five

PrepNest

Food waste in Westvale

Last year, Westvale Council asked 500 households to sort their rubbish for one week and record every piece of food they threw away. The results surprised even the council's own waste team.

On average, each household threw out 4.2 kilograms of food a week. Over a year, that adds up to more than 200 kilograms per household, about the weight of an upright piano.

Fresh fruit and vegetables made up the largest share. Many were thrown out whole and uncooked, often because they had been bought and then forgotten at the back of the fridge. Leftovers were the second-largest category.

The survey also asked households why they threw food away. The most common reasons were that food had gone off before it could be eaten, that people had cooked too much, and confusion about date labels. Many households did not know that a best-before date is about quality, while a use-by date is about safety. Food can often be eaten safely after its best-before date, but it should never be eaten after its use-by date.

The council will use the results in a campaign called Buy It, Use It, with tips on planning meals, storing food and understanding labels.

Food thrown away per household each week

Type of food	Kilograms
Fruit and vegetables	1.6
Leftovers	1.1
Bread and bakery	0.6
Dairy	0.4
Meat and fish	0.3
Other	0.2

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