YEAR 9 · PRACTICE PAPER 2

Reading Magazine

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HOW TO USE THIS MAGAZINE

Use this magazine with the question paper “Reading Year 9 — Practice Paper 2”. 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 tapes

Every Sunday, Leila's mother drove them out to Greenhaven, where Grandpa had lived since the spring. The corridors smelled of lemon polish and boiled vegetables, and somewhere a television was always playing too loudly.

Grandpa no longer knew who Leila was. Some weeks he called her Suzie, which had been her mother's childhood nickname. Some weeks he was polite and distant, the way people are with strangers on trains. Leila had stopped correcting him. It only frightened him when she did.

Today he was sitting by the window, turning a teaspoon over and over in his fingers. "Lovely day for it," he said, to nobody in particular.

Leila's mother had brought a shoebox from the garage. Inside, wrapped in rubber bands that had gone brittle with age, were dozens of cassette tapes, each labelled in Grandpa's neat capitals: RIVERVIEW BREAKFAST — MAY 1979. RIVERVIEW BREAKFAST — XMAS 1981.

"He was on the radio for twenty years," her mother said. "Did you know that? Half the town woke up to him."

Leila hadn't known. She had only ever known the quiet man who fixed bicycles in the shed and fell asleep in front of the cricket.

It took the staff twenty minutes to find something that could still play a cassette: an old stereo from the recreation room, with a handle on top and a tape deck that squeaked when it opened. Leila chose a tape at random, pushed it in and pressed play.

For a moment there was only hiss. Then a voice filled the room — young, bright, impossibly quick. "Good morning, Riverview! It's six o'clock, it's thirteen degrees and the frost is on the paddocks, so put the kettle on and stay with me —"

Leila looked at her grandfather. He had stopped turning the spoon.

On the tape, the young man laughed at his own joke, read the school closures, wished a Mrs Pollard a happy ninetieth birthday and introduced a song. The music was old and crackly, a man crooning about the moon over some faraway bay. Grandpa's lips began to move.

He was singing. Quietly, a little behind the beat, but he knew every word. His hand tapped the arm of his chair. When the song ended, he leaned towards the stereo as if he were waiting for the voice to come back, and when it did, he said softly, "That's me."

Leila's mother put her hand over her mouth.

"That's you," Leila said. "You were brilliant."

He turned and looked at her properly then, for the first time in months. His eyes were very clear. "Did you listen?" he asked. "In the mornings?"

She could have explained that she had not been born yet. Instead she said, "Every morning."

He smiled, satisfied, and turned back to the window. By the time the tape reached the weather, he was calling her Suzie again.

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But the next Sunday, and the Sunday after that, they brought another tape. And every week, for the length of a song, he knew exactly who he was.

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Stage fright: your body’s false alarm

Your name is called. You walk to the front of the room, and suddenly your heart is pounding, your mouth is dry and your hands are shaking so badly that your notes rattle. You are not in danger. So why does your body behave as if you are?

An ancient alarm

Stage fright is a version of the fight-or-flight response, a survival system that evolved long before speeches and school assemblies. When the brain senses a threat, it signals the adrenal glands to release adrenaline. Within seconds, the heart beats faster to pump more blood to the muscles, breathing quickens and digestion slows down — which is why your mouth goes dry and your stomach feels full of butterflies.

For our ancestors, facing a predator, this was exactly the right reaction. The problem is that the same alarm goes off when the “threat” is a room full of classmates. Our brains are very sensitive to being judged, perhaps because, for most of human history, being rejected by your group was genuinely dangerous.

Nervous or excited?

Here is the curious thing: the physical feelings of fear and excitement are almost identical. A racing heart and quick breathing could mean terror before a speech or a thrill before a roller-coaster. The difference lies largely in how we interpret them.

In one well-known experiment, researchers asked people to prepare a speech. Before speaking, some were told to say “I am calm” and others to say “I am excited”. Those who called their feelings excitement gave speeches that were rated as more persuasive and confident. Trying to calm down, it seems, is harder than relabelling the energy you already have.

Taming the alarm

Other strategies help too. Slow breathing, with a longer breath out than in, signals to the body that it is safe. Practice builds familiarity, so the brain sees less of a threat. And remembering that audiences usually want a speaker to succeed can shrink the imagined danger.

Stage fright may never disappear completely; many famous performers still feel it before every show. But understanding it — an old alarm doing its job a little too enthusiastically — can make it easier to turn into fuel.

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Sixteen is old enough

A speech to the Youth Parliament by Harriet Okoye

Madam Speaker, members of the Youth Parliament: at sixteen, an Australian can leave school, work and pay tax, and in most states can get a learner's permit to drive. What a sixteen-year-old cannot do is vote for the people who make decisions about all of those things. Today I argue that this should change.

My first argument is about fairness. Decisions made by governments now — about climate, housing and education — will shape the lives of young people for decades, long after many of today's voters are gone. If we are old enough to live with the consequences, we are old enough to have a say.

My second argument is that voting is a habit. Research from countries such as Austria, which lowered its voting age to sixteen in 2007, suggests that people who vote in their first election are more likely to keep voting for the rest of their lives. At sixteen, most young people are still living at home and going to school, where they can be taught how to enrol and how voting works. At eighteen, many have just moved out, started work or begun university, and their first election can slip past unnoticed.

My opponents will say that sixteen-year-olds are not mature enough. But we do not give adults a maturity test before they vote. And studies in countries that have lowered the age have found little evidence that sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds make less informed choices than older first-time voters.

Others will say that young people are not interested in politics. Some are not — and neither are some forty-year-olds. Interest grows when people are given responsibility, not when they are told to wait.

Members of this Parliament, a vote is not a reward for turning eighteen. It is a voice in the decisions that shape our lives. I ask you to support this motion, and to trust sixteen-year-olds with a say in the future they will inherit.

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What the river knows

The river has been here
longer than the town,
longer than the bridge
and the people on the bridge
who throw in coins and wishes.

It remembers the floods
the way skin remembers a scar.
It remembers canoes of bark,
the paddle-steamers' smoke,
the drought that showed its bones.

It does not hurry.
It has carved a valley
one grain at a time,
and it will carve another
long after the bridge is rust.

Stand at the edge on a still night
and you can hear it
saying the only thing it knows:
go on, go on, go on.

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