YEAR 9 · PRACTICE PAPER 3

Reading Magazine

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HOW TO USE THIS MAGAZINE

Use this magazine with the question paper “Reading Year 9 — Practice Paper 3”. 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

Firebreak

The first hot northerly of the season arrived in the second week of October, and by nine o'clock the paddocks were already shimmering. Josh's grandfather stood at the back gate, sniffing the wind the way other people check a weather app.

"Early," was all he said. Then: "Get the rake-hoe. We're doing the break today."

The firebreak ran around the whole house block: a strip of bare earth, ten metres wide, between the homestead garden and the long dry grass of the paddocks. Every spring Pop scraped it clean of anything that could burn. Every spring Josh, who had lived with him since his parents split up, complained about it.

He didn't complain this year. Last summer he had stood on this same veranda and watched the sky to the west turn the colour of a bruise, seen ash drifting down like grey snow, and heard the radio say the fire had jumped the highway. It had missed them by eleven kilometres. Eleven kilometres was not very far.

They worked for three hours without much talking. Pop worked slowly but never stopped, his shirt dark with sweat, dragging dead branches from under the gums and piling them on the trailer. Josh raked leaves and bark into heaps until his palms blistered. The cicadas screamed. Every so often a willy-willy whirled across the paddock, lifting a column of dust and straw into the air, then collapsed as suddenly as it had come.

At lunch they sat in the shade of the tank stand with cold tea and sandwiches.

"Pop," Josh said. "If a fire comes, are we staying?"

His grandfather took a long time to answer. He looked out at the house his own father had built, at the woodpile, at the old dog asleep under the ute.

"When I was your age," he said at last, "everyone stayed. You fought it with wet bags and buckets, and some years you won." He rubbed his thumb over a scar on his wrist. "And some years you didn't."

Josh waited.

"The fires are different now," Pop said. "Hotter. Faster. The fella from the fire brigade said to me, a house can be rebuilt. You can't." He finished his tea. "So here's the plan. On a bad day — a really bad day — we go early. We don't wait to see smoke. We load the dog and the photo albums and we drive to your aunt's in town before breakfast."

"And the house?"

"The house has the break," Pop said. "And the sprinklers on the roof. That's its best chance. Us leaving is ours."

That evening Josh wrote the plan on the back of an envelope and stuck it to the fridge with a magnet shaped like a cow: WHEN TO GO. WHAT TO TAKE. WHERE TO MEET. Pop read it twice, then added one line at the bottom in his square, careful capitals: DON'T FORGET THE DOG.

PrepNest

How bats see with sound

On a warm evening, bats flit through the dark, snatching insects out of the air with astonishing precision. Many of them do it in near-total darkness. Their secret is echolocation: finding things by listening to echoes.

Calls and echoes

As a bat flies, it sends out a stream of very high-pitched calls, most of them far too high for human ears to hear. When these sound waves hit an object — a tree, a wall, a moth — they bounce back. The bat's large, sensitive ears pick up the returning echoes, and its brain turns them into a detailed picture of its surroundings.

The time an echo takes to return tells the bat how far away something is: the longer the delay, the further away the object. Tiny differences between the echoes reaching its left and right ears tell it the direction. The strength and pattern of an echo can even reveal an object's size, shape and texture — enough for some bats to tell a moth from a falling leaf.

The feeding buzz

When a bat closes in on an insect, it speeds up its calls dramatically, from around ten calls a second to as many as two hundred. Scientists call this the feeding buzz. The faster calls give the bat constant updates on exactly where its prey is, right up to the moment of capture.

An arms race

Some insects have evolved defences. Certain moths can hear bat calls and dive towards the ground when a bat approaches. Some tiger moths go further, producing clicking sounds of their own that may jam the bat's echolocation or warn that they taste bad.

Not all bats echolocate. Many large fruit bats, including Australia's flying-foxes, rely mainly on their excellent eyesight and sense of smell.

Did you know?

- Australia has around 80 species of bats.
- A single small bat can catch hundreds of insects in an hour.

PrepNest

Is social media good for teenagers?

Two views, published side by side in a school magazine

It connects us — Priya, Year 10

Adults love to blame social media for everything, but for many teenagers it is a lifeline. When I moved schools in Year 8, the group chat with my old friends kept me from feeling completely alone. For young people who feel different — because of their culture, their interests or a disability — online communities can be the first place they find others like them.

Social media is also where a lot of us learn about the world. I follow scientists, environmental campaigners and artists I would never have heard of otherwise. And creating things online — videos, music, art — has given many teenagers real skills and even an income.

Of course there are risks. But the answer is to teach young people to use social media wisely, not to pretend we can switch it off.

It costs us more than it gives — Tom, Year 10

I deleted my social media apps six months ago, and I have never been happier. I sleep better, because I am not scrolling at midnight. I get more homework done. And I no longer spend my evenings comparing my life with carefully edited photos of other people's.

My experience is not unusual. Many studies have found links between heavy social media use and poor sleep, and some have found links with anxiety and low self-esteem. The apps are designed to keep us scrolling for as long as possible, because that is how their makers earn money from advertising.

I am not saying no one should use social media. But we should be honest that it is built to capture our attention, and that our attention is worth protecting.

PrepNest

Heirloom

My grandfather’s watch
does not keep time any more.
It stopped the winter he did,
at ten past four,
and no one has had the heart
to wind it.

It sits in a drawer with the buttons
and the keys to doors we no longer own,
the gold gone soft and pale
where his thumb wore it smooth
over fifty years of asking
How long now? How long?

Sometimes I hold it to my ear
the way he taught me,
expecting nothing,
and hear it anyway —
the small, steady sound
of someone who was always on time.

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