UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS
International General Certificate of Secondary Education

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/12**

Paper 1 Reading Passage (Core) **May/June 2012**

READING BOOKLET INSERT

1 hour 45 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Insert contains the reading passage for use with all questions on the Question Paper.

This document consists of **3** printed pages and **1** blank page.

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UNIVERSITY of CAMBRIDGE
International Examinations

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Read the following passage carefully and then answer all the questions on the Question Paper.

Gerald Durrell, an author and animal lover, spent part of his childhood in the 1930s on the Greek island of Corfu. In this passage he describes the Belgian consul in Corfu, who was one of his private tutors.

A New Tutor

The consul's home was situated in the maze of narrow, smelly alleyways that made up the old quarter of the town. It was a fascinating area, the cobbled streets crammed with stalls that were piled high with gaily-coloured bales of cloth, mountains of shining sweetmeats, ornaments of beaten silver, fruit and vegetables. The streets were so narrow that you had to stand back against the wall to allow the donkeys to stagger past with their loads of merchandise. It was a rich and colourful part of the town, full of noise and bustle, the screeches of people bargaining, the cluck of hens, the barking of dogs, and the wailing cry of the men carrying great trays of fresh hot loaves on their heads. Right in the very centre, in the top flat of a tall, rickety building that leant tiredly over a tiny square, lived the Belgian consul. He was a sweet little man, whose most striking attribute was a magnificent beard and carefully waxed moustache.

The first morning I arrived he welcomed me into a living-room whose walls were decorated with a mass of heavily-framed photographs of himself. In order to test the extent of my knowledge of French the consul sat me down at the table, produced a fat and battered French dictionary, and placed it in front of me, open at page one.

'You will please to read this,' he said, his gold teeth glittering amicably through his beard.

He twisted the points of his moustache, pursed his lips, clasped his hands behind his back, and paced slowly across to the window, while I started down the list of words beginning with 'A'. I had hardly stumbled through the first three when the consul stiffened and uttered a suppressed exclamation. I thought at first he was shocked by my accent, but it was apparently nothing to do with me. He rushed across the room, muttering to himself, tore open a cupboard, and pulled out a powerful-looking air rifle, while I watched him with a certain alarm for my own safety. He loaded the weapon, dropping pellets all over the carpet in his frantic haste. Then he crouched and crept back to the window, where, half concealed by the curtain, he peered out intently. Then he raised the gun, took careful aim at something, and fired. When he turned round, slowly and sadly shaking his head, and laid the gun aside, I was surprised to see tears in his eyes. He drew a great length of silk handkerchief out of his breast pocket and blew his nose violently.

'Ah, ah, ah,' he intoned, shaking his head sadly, 'the poor little fellow. But we must work … please to continue with your reading, *mon ami*.'

For the rest of the morning I toyed with the exciting idea that the consul had committed a murder before my very eyes, or, at least, that he was carrying out a blood feud with some neighbouring householder. But when, after the fourth morning, the consul was still firing periodically out of his window, I decided that my explanation could not be the right one. It was a week before I found out the reason for the consul's incessant fusillade, and the reason was cats. In this part of town, the cats were allowed to breed unchecked. There were literally hundreds of them. They belonged to no one and were uncared for, so that most of them were in a frightful state, covered with sores and all of them so thin that it was a wonder they were alive at all. The consul was a great cat-lover, and he possessed three large and well-fed ones to prove it. But the sight of all these starving, sore-ridden animals stalking about on the roof-tops opposite his window was too much for his sensitive nature.

'I cannot feed them all,' he explained to me, 'so I like to make them happy by shooting them. They are better so, but it makes me feel so sad.'

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He was, in fact, performing a very necessary and humane service, as anyone who had seen the cats would agree. So my lessons in French were being continuously interrupted while the consul leapt to the window to send yet another cat to a happier hunting ground. After the report of the gun there would be a moment's silence in respect for the dead, and then the consul would blow his nose violently, sigh tragically, and we would plunge once more into the tangled labyrinth of French verbs.

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