UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS
International General Certificate of Secondary Education

**FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH** **0500/13**

Paper 1 Reading Passage (Core) **October/November 2011**

READING BOOKLET INSERT

**1 hour 45 minutes**

**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This Insert contains the reading passage for use with both questions of the Question Paper.



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**Read the following passage carefully and then answer all the questions in the Answer Booklet.**

*The writer, Paul Theroux, travelled through South America by train about 30 years ago. In this passage he describes his journey to Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia.*

## The *Expreso de Sol* to Bogotá

The ticket window opened. I went over and asked for a sleeper to Bogotá.

'You have a family?' the woman in the ticket office asked.

'Yes.'

'They are travelling with you?'

'They are in Great Britain.'

'Then I cannot sell you a bed,' she said. 'Those compartments are for families. Six people or more.'

I bought an ordinary ticket and asked, 'What time does the train arrive?'

She smiled, but looked doubtful. 'Tomorrow?'

'And a bed is impossible, is that right?'

'If you really want one, ask the conductor when you get on the train. He might sell you one.'

I'll bribe the conductor, I thought; but when I saw the train and examined the sleepers – small dirty rooms with padded shelves – I was not encouraged. I hurried down the street and bought some loaves of bread, some cheese and cooked meat. There was no point in bribing my way into a sleeper: there was no bedding, no water, no locks on the doors. I would take my chances here in the open car, in a sloping plastic seat. Something told me this was going to be a long trip.

We left at sunset, and at once I had an urge to get off the train. Already I was uncomfortable, and the journey was not worth this discomfort. Children were crying in their mothers' arms and, as soon as we left the station, people began complaining loudly about the broken lights and the crowds and the heat.

'You're sitting in my place!' a boy yelled at an old man, who was travelling with his elderly wife.

'I'm not moving,' said the man. Everyone was perspiring and muttering.

'I can hardly breathe,' said a woman.

'What a smell!' said a cruel-looking man into his hand.

I had been moved by the tenderness on the platform, the fathers kissing their children goodbye, the boys hugging their girlfriends, the husband and wife holding hands. But now these same people were squawking irritably and I loathed them. I thought: They have to be here. They have a purpose. They're going home, or to work or to meet friends. I had no such justification.

I was a victim of my plans. I had got this far and had boarded the train for no other reason than to be on the train. It was going to Bogotá, so I was too. But Bogotá, the capital city, meant nothing to me: I was going there in order to leave it. At the best of times such a trip could be fun, but this one had begun joylessly. It was too late to get off the train; we were moving away from the sunset, into darkness; the whistle was blowing and the passengers, quieted by the racket of the wheels, were smiling rather sadly. I was sorry that the train was not taking me out of Colombia, but only deeper into it, on a route that everyone had warned me about because of the heat, the mosquitoes and the Magdalena swamps.

Out of Santa Marta we crossed a green plain at the far end of which were mountains of pale velvet covered with shrubbery which was yellow in the salmon-coloured light that shone from the sun. Then, along the Caribbean coast for several miles the pink sky made the swamps pink and the still pools mirrored the new stars. This, with the palms and the fertile fields, gave me a little hope. The tidal pools were stirred by the breeze and lost their colour.

The train was almost full, but at Ciénaga, the first stop, a cry went up from the crowd waiting at the platform, and fights broke out as the people pushed into the cars.

There was no air in the car. It had begun to rain, a warm night-time drizzle; the passengers had shut their windows. The lights flickered, the train lurched, and the passengers were so closely packed that the slightest lurch had them yelling in complaint. I thought that someone was going to turn on a radio but, before the thought became whole, the music started. It was an awful trumpeting and harmonising, the Latin quickstep that was like burning in my ears. The rain, the music, the hot steamy car; and the mosquitoes, the dim light bulbs that looked like withered tangerines. I propped my window up and pulled out my book, but I had not read two sentences when the lights failed entirely. We were in darkness.

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*Copyright Acknowledgements:*

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