Cambridge IGCSE

Cambridge International Examinations
Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/31**

Paper 3 Directed Writing and Composition **October/November 2017**

2 hours

READING BOOKLET INSERT

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Reading Booklet Insert contains the reading passage for use with **Section 1**, **Question 1** on the Question Paper.

You may annotate this Reading Booklet Insert and use the blank spaces for planning.
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This document consists of **3** printed pages and **1** blank page.

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Read the passage carefully, and then answer **Question 1** on the Question Paper.

An e-reader is a portable electronic device which allows you to download and read books on a screen. The writer of this piece writes cookery books for a living and thinks that people should buy books rather than e-readers.

E-readers vs. Books

Telephoning just before my birthday last year, my parents suggested I might like an e-reader for a present.

They could tell I wasn't enthusiastic. I muttered something about not needing another expensive gadget to remember to charge up, and wanting to read outside in bright sunlight or by the pool, mostly because I couldn't find a way to shape my reluctance into words. The conversation was tactfully forgotten. Weeks later, as my twin happily un-wrapped her e-reader, I was greeted by a new pair of gardening gloves.

I've never used an e-reader and doubt they'd survive being dropped from my flour-covered hands as I tried to follow recipes. I've seen them in an over-the-shoulder sort of way – the sleek tablets with intricate book cover designs that materialise on their screens. Part of the reason I'm wary of picking one up is that I don't want to experience the inevitable lure, the wavering that might begin as I imagine myself pulling an e-reader out of my significantly lighter bag on the train, or in a coffee shop. Like the dieter who drives the long route home to avoid passing the sweetshop, I just don't want to be tempted.

And then there's my childhood habit of making books into companions. It isn't just about reading a novel – it's about my memories linked to my copy of that novel, with its cover wrinkled from hours of bathtub steam. I delight in the cracks on the spine of a book, the scribbled notes on some of the pages, and the sheer presence and number of books on my shelves.

'It's like this,' I explained to a friend once. 'Video-chatting is nice enough – I hear your voice, see your face on the screen. But the screen isn't you. There's a reason our friendship isn't conducted through a laptop.'

Books, as I grew up with them (real paper books with jackets, covers and spines), have stories that reach beyond what's written inside, and those stories are mine.

For example, there's my tattered, second-hand copy of 'Fahrenheit 451', signed by its famous author Ray Bradbury when he came to my hometown bookstore. If it weren't for the signature in that now valuable paperback, I wouldn't have felt a personal responsibility for books and a connection to their authors that led me to study classic world literature and its influence at university.

Then, there's the advance copy of 'The United States of Food Critics', given to me in the first week of an internship by my friendly magazine-boss and read entirely on the subway-train so fellow riders could observe my insider status. If it weren't for the gift of that book, I wouldn't have developed the friendship with my boss, a food editor, and that was what made me realise that exploring the place of food in our lives was what I really wanted to do.

Books have lives that have changed mine.

In eliminating a book's physical existence, something crucial is lost forever. Trapped in an e-reader, the story remains but the book can no longer be written in, hoarded, burned, donated, recycled, given or received. We may be able to read it, but we can't share it with others in the same way. Its ability to connect us to people, places and ideas is much less powerful.

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I know e-readers will eventually carry the day – no more library fines, no more frantic flipping through pages for a lost quotation or going to three bookstores in one afternoon to track down an evasive title. Who am I to advocate the doom of millions of trees, when the swipe of a finger can deliver for less than the price of a coffee all 838 pages of the classic 'Middlemarch' into my waiting hands?

But once we all power up our e-readers, something will be gone – a kind of language. Books communicate with us as readers – but just as importantly, we communicate with each other through books themselves. When that connection is lost, the experience of reading – and our lives – will be forever altered.

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