Cambridge IGCSE

Cambridge Assessment International Education
Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/23**

Paper 2 Reading Passages (Extended) **October/November 2019**

READING BOOKLET INSERT

2 hours

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Reading Booklet Insert contains the reading passages for use with **all** the questions on the Question Paper.

You may annotate this Reading Booklet Insert and use the blank spaces for planning.
This Reading Booklet Insert is **not** assessed by the Examiner.

This document consists of **5** printed pages and **3** blank pages.

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Part 1

Read **Passage A** carefully, and then answer **Questions 1** and **2** on the Question Paper.

Passage A: Mountain biking

The narrator, Robert Costello, is a well-known cyclist. His expertise is in long-distance cycling on mainly flat ground. He decides to learn about mountain biking at the time of a carnival in a region renowned for competitive mountain biking.

It's a slightly humiliating admission given how long I've been cycling, but when it comes to the more technical descents of mountain biking I've always been a bit of a coward. Fire roads, gravel paths, even root-strewn forest tracks, in fact, anything that's moderately flat albeit containing obstacles – that's fine. But point me down an atypically steep slope littered with sizeable rocks or, even worse, one of those man-made tracks with steep walls, let alone jumps, and I freeze with terror. So it was that Flora, my guide and tutor in the snowy mountains, faced something of a challenge.

Downhill mountain biking has become increasingly important for this region's summer tourism business. I arrived for the area's annual mountain biking carnival, where thousands of downhill aficionados lug themselves and their lavishly suspensioned machines up via a network of chair-lifts. They immediately head downwards, inching and slipping at first like cautious baby penguins at the head of an ice skid, then succumb to the crazy dance of the drop, at manic speeds punctuated by brake-juddering twists and turns. Later, as night-time falls, the pine-panelled halls echo to the sound of embroidered tales of near catastrophe and indifferent rock music.

Since I am an avowed cross-country or long-distance rider, my bike is lightweight and has bone-jarringly little suspension. Up until now, mountain biking had been an alien experience to me, so, when the region's hugely enthusiastic local press team asked if I'd like to see what I'd been missing, my reservations were centred mainly on thoughts of painful injury. To help me out I was lent a far more suitable bike, strictly speaking an 'all mountain' rather than downhill machine, but with a positively sofa-like 140 mm of suspension both at front and rear. I was also kitted out with plastic armour for my elbows, knees and shins.

Most crucial of all was the expert assistance. This fell to Flora, an absurdly young and enthusiastic guide who perhaps has many teenagers' dream job: ski instructor by winter, mountain biking guide by summer. Endlessly patient at my initial tortoise-like progress, with her trademark starting cry of 'Go! Go! Go, Robert!' she led me through ever-quicker leans through the banked mud turns, managing to lead the way while simultaneously twisting back to watch my efforts and offer a raised thumb of approval.

Basking in a mild sense of accomplishment at the day's progress, and having enjoyed healthy fine dining at one of the resort's many restaurants, I decided to explore the region by foot that evening. Flora had told me there were some 80 kilometres of mountain biking tracks. Now bathed in the gentle violet hues of dusk, their inclines, twists and drops took on a softer presence. Large black conifer trees crept noiselessly up the most steep mountain sides as if in mild mockery of the raucous daytime chair-lift users. The snowy peaks peeped over their tops in modest affirmation of their majestic beauty. Stilled by wonder, I strolled slowly back to my comfortable chalet and slept like a baby.

The next day, after a healthy breakfast, Flora's plans for me were even more ambitious: re-learning my entire posture for riding downhill. My rear-stuck-out, leaning backwards position was, apparently, excessive, leaving me without sufficient control over the front end. The solution still involved an arched back, but the pivot point was more central and thus more flexible.

For all Flora's talents, I still never ventured down any trail more technical than a beginners' run, since it takes more than two mornings to undo twenty years of bad habits. However, by the end of the second day I was considerably more confident. I was also – and this was the real change – positively enjoying

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myself. I stood with the crowds and we all applauded the carnival prize winners in a range of different categories: Children, Paraplegic, Beginners, Advanced.

I doubt I'll ever be a convert to pure down-hilling. To me, the weighty bikes, armour, full-face helmets and baggy outfits belong more to the worlds of motorcross or speedway than cycling. I also remain sufficiently purist to consider it cheating if you don't ride up a hill before riding down it.

But I'd recommend it to anyone wanting to give it a try. It's certainly made me a more skilled rider.

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Part 2

Read **Passage B** carefully, and then answer **Question 3** on the Question Paper.

Passage B: Hot-air ballooning

Pujita and Priyanka are trying to plan for their father's 90th birthday. Priyanka disagrees with Pujita's plans and has told her so. The following is Pujita's reply by email.

Dear Priyanka,

I can't believe that you don't like my idea for Dad's surprise 90th birthday! I've been looking at the 'Hot-air ballooning for all' advertisement online and I hope I can allay your fears.

Firstly, the website says that the most mature passenger they have ever taken in one of their hot-air balloons was 96 years old, so let's cross that concern off the list. The personnel are very attentive and will ensure his safe and comfortable access to the basket. There is also ample seating around all four sides for all the passengers at once. I don't suppose anyone would wish to stand for very long, and if Dad wishes to sit for the duration, I'm sure that won't be a problem; I'll probably join him. You don't need to worry about missing the views yourself because of tending to Dad.

I agree that it can be difficult to keep warm if you have to remain still in one place, and that you don't want Dad to get cold, but that misses the point: it is actually very warm and comfortable in the basket because the balloon moves with the wind. There is no chill from the breeze at all: the only sensation we will have is that of being suspended in the sky. If the weather is completely unsuitable, if it is raining, for example, the pilot will simply postpone the flight until a more appropriate day.

And, no, Dad won't have to wait around before we get in the basket. They inflate the balloon while we are getting our safety briefing: I have read that it takes shape and is ready to rise off the ground in under ten minutes.

I think the only reason why Dad gets cantankerous these days is that he is frustrated by how difficult life has become for him in the last few years. I feel sorry for him. He gets little relief from his painkillers. The flight personnel are trained to attend politely and sensitively to all their passengers, because after all there will be sixteen of us all in one basket for three to four hours. I doubt if he will spend his time complaining anyway. I think he will be so captivated by the enthralling views, he will forget his aches and pains for the time that we are in the air. I deliberately chose the daytime mountain-viewing trip as a stunning contrast to the grey streets of his city.

I know that the hot-air balloon has no designated landing place and that we could land anywhere within a twenty-five mile radius of our starting point. However, it's patronising to suggest that Dad will be any more disorientated than the rest of us. And as for getting him back to our starting point, no, we won't have to take a bus or a train: the website tells me that ground crews will meet us as we land and transport us back to our starting point. Again, no waiting, as they track our flight and know when and where we will land.

I personally think that Dad is trapped in his routines and will jump at the opportunity to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Furthermore, it will give us all something to talk about in future. I've told them it's his birthday, and they are going to present him with a miniature chocolate cake shaped like a balloon. Imagine how important he will feel at the presentation at the end when he is given his commemorative flight certificate.

It's expensive, I know, but this is a special birthday. I've checked and we can spread the costs over three instalments, which makes it easier for us.

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Tell you what, let's not make it a surprise! Let's discuss it with Dad before I book, and he can be the one to decide if he wants to go.

Love, Pujita

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