Cambridge Assessment International Education

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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/13**

Paper 1 Reading **October/November 2024**

INSERT **2 hours**

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INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading texts.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.

This document has **8** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

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Read **Text A**, and then answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** on the question paper.

Text A: What are earthscrapers?

While 'skyscraper' is a well-known term for a very tall building that reaches up to the skies from the ground, there is another term that is less well-known: 'earthscraper'. Earthscrapers are best described as inverted skyscrapers. They start at ground level and then extend downwards an impressive distance from the surface.

Countless structures, such as car parks, arenas and laboratories, are buried underground, but their shallow setting means that these are not earthscrapers. As far as we are aware, no actual earthscrapers have been built yet. To date, these wondrous multifunctional subterranean designs excite our imaginations only in fiction and architectural plans.

One proposal for an earthscraper was an entry to a Skyscraper Competition in 2012 by a team of Mexican architects. The competition required entrants to design practical solutions to the problems caused by restricted space and growing populations in cities. The ambitious Mexican proposal imagined a '65-storey deep' earthscraper placed beneath Mexico City's central square, with living, office and retail spaces as well as a 10-floor museum. This would also conserve the city's threatened historic buildings.

Building underground is no easy task, especially the deeper you go, where engineering problems are potentially significant. Mexico has a hot climate and the immense glass top of the earthscraper could well act as a greenhouse, so the provision of adequate ventilation throughout the structure would need to be considered. The best in human ingenuity would be demanded in teams both overseeing and implementing the project.

There are mixed feelings about constructing such earthscrapers in the world's biggest cities. Some experts speculate that they would be environmentally friendly and require very little energy for heating and cooling, but this is not a commonly held view. Meanwhile governments, who must weigh up spending priorities and the management of the inevitable increases in traffic congestion and pollution above ground, have a lot to consider too.

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Read **Text B**, and then answer **Question 1(f)** on the question paper.

Text B: *Buying an underground house*

In this text the narrator describes her family's experiences when buying and living in an underground home.

We learnt quickly that a positive mindset was required when considering living underground. Important things like researching locations and finding companies who offered home insurance were challenging. We also soon realised that this was going to be much more expensive than conventional above-land living. It wasn't a scheme for the faint-hearted or those who couldn't invest a substantial amount of cash.

We were advised not to build our home in some splendidly remote hillside, but to find a pre-built home in an underground community. This saddened us as we had indulged in a romantic notion of complete independence and freedom, cut off from the hustle and bustle of human life. It would have been a dream to design the house ourselves then oversee its construction. But after reading online stories of people who'd thought like us and their house's subsequent leaks, mould and constant repairs, we sadly concluded that this was not a good idea. After all, we reasoned, being part of a community would be more practical: advice and a potential support network in case of problems were definite advantages.

So, when a couple living in an underground home needed to return to life above land for family reasons, we jumped at the opportunity to buy their 2-year-old dwelling on the edge of a smallish community of 20 similar homes. Being peripheral to the community rather than at its heart seemed like a good compromise to my ideals. Not only that, but the homes in the community also enjoyed an efficient drainage system, keeping them all soundly water-proofed, while potential condensation issues had been resolved by effective insulation. We could cross those concerns off our list.

We were so excited to move in! It was lovely. The huge dome-shaped glass entrance gave us considerable natural light. People imagine that an underground home must be dark and gloomy, but a good architect will ensure that this is not the case. There was also an open area at the centre of the house, where we sat on warm evenings to watch the sky darken above us. It was our own slice of the natural world, inaccessible to anyone else but us. How thrilling!

We love wildlife. This is just as well, as taking up residence underground means you often have these uninvited guests. To manage the situation, we installed a small pond for turtles and the several varieties of frogs and toads that are found locally. Two king snakes - one of which actually allows me to pet him - roam freely in one of the bedrooms and sometimes burrow in a laundry basket.

Read **Text C**, and then answer **Questions 2(a)–(d)** and **Question 3** on the question paper.

Text C: *Visiting Underground City*

The narrator is called Simon. He, Jodie and their 8-year-old son, Ben, are on holiday in a region called Tassos.

We descend the stairway into a dark labyrinth unfurling below us. The passage allows just two visitors abreast, so we jostle shoulders and unforgiving walls. Lighting is muted: just a few gentle torches discreetly hidden in unexpected crevices project alluring shades of tan, gold and red onto the exposed stone walls. Now we are under the surface, the heat has also dissipated: cold air pushes past us, a desperate thief escaping the scene of its crime.

'You may find the descent a bit difficult,' our guide, Milo, says, 'but think how much more difficult it was without light and without someone like me showing you the way.'

Ben nods in silent agreement. He is impressed; I am glad we came.

This visit had been my idea earlier today. Ben had been lonely and, feeling guilty about choosing a hotel without children's activities, I'd googled 'family-friendly trips' on my phone. Jodie had sniffed uncertainly when 'Tassos's thirteenth century Underground City' showed. 'Oh, Simon, it'll be stuffy in this heat,' she'd complained.

Jodie was right about the heat outside. The sun had been unrelenting since our arrival, but fortunately, most of Tassos is within a short distance of the coast. On our morning beach visits, fresh breezes whipped the heaviness out of the air, while fun in the sea energised us. But now, sitting in the still courtyard of our hotel, everywhere was parched and begged for hydration. In front of me a dying tree had collapsed, its trunk riven at the base. Oddly, its spindly uppermost branches still stretched skyward, while its lower boughs wept dry tears into the cracked earth.

Jodie and I studied the Underground City website together. 'Eight floors over 100 metres. Friendly tour guide. Amazing!' I said. 'Let's book it.'

The coach journey took an hour, and we were grateful that we'd paid the extra for an air-conditioned vehicle.

Underground, the chill is pleasant. Jodie holds Ben's hand firmly as we negotiate some narrow twists and turns. Ahead, Milo warns us about a low roof, so we stoop slightly.

Then we enter a large chamber. Milo is waiting for us to gather round him. He smiles expansively and beckons us closer. His eyes pick out Ben and a young girl, the only two children present. 'Do you know what this room was for?' asks Milo.

Ben and the girl shake their heads, mouths open.

'It's a school classroom,' announces Milo. 'The teacher probably stood where I am and the children would sit on the floor. No desks, no whiteboards, definitely no computers or phones.'

Milo now addresses us all: 'This was a sophisticated society. For safety reasons we can only visit this area. You can see one of the many ventilation shafts above our heads and there are wells like this one here to store fresh water. Families had their own living quarters – a bit like modern day apartments. There were communal areas and shops.'

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Half an hour later we resurface into the heat and board our coach back. Milo provides us with refreshments, while Ben, sitting next to the girl he met in Underground City, is talking animatedly. She's called Anna. Anna and her mother are staying in a hotel that is not far from ours and Jodie has already exchanged phone numbers with them. I notice how the volcanic rock and soil that had made burrowing underground so easy once means that this is not a land of fertile forests. A handful of lonely broken trees wither in the dry flat land as far as the eye can see. An evening walk to see this open landscape under a vast sky is a tempting idea. My camera would capture some spectacular panoramic vistas. Meanwhile, Milo is telling us about a must-visit outdoor market selling local crafts. Not my favourite thing to do, but Jodie looks excited. She and Anna's mother exchange conspiratorial glances.

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