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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (US) **0524/11**

Paper 1 Reading **October/November 2021**

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.

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

Text A: Two lives

This text is taken from a longer article describing the two extreme seasons in the place where the writer lives.

The rains are about to begin. I am walking down the town's central street, observing wilted trees and feeling the dead earth crumbling against my boots. A sudden gust of wind signals the arrival of the rains: torrential vertical sheets that sting my eyes and pit the road like machine-gun fire, kicking up muddy shrapnel. Everyone on the street flees in panic. I take cover under the corrugated iron awning of a shop selling groceries.

As the rain slams into the roof we huddle at the back of the shop, strangers thrown into close proximity as refugees from the weather. Conversation is limited if not impossible; we look out dimly through the downpour. Up and down the road the scene is repeated; the whole village crouches in silence, willing the rains to stop, hoping that homes and workplaces will not be very wet, and waiting for life to begin again.

The region has two lives. The first is waterlogged and still. During the long rainy season, which lasts from June to October, everything stops. The country has precious few miles of paved road, and the dirt tracks that knit it together rapidly become impassable. It is a lean time, a time of hunger. Supplies dwindle, and people hold out for the first harvests of September. Construction equipment malfunctions so building projects stop, and towns and villages are cut off from the rest of the country.

The country's second life is parched, hot and dusty. Despite the heat, the region breathes more easily, as the communal sense of shared hardship becomes less acute. Grim faces erased, adults share anecdotes and generously loaded bowls of fried rice with visiting relatives, while their excited children burst out from houses and onto the streets, like newly released prisoners.

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

Text B: Changing seasons

The text describes what living through a severe winter is like in the writer's locality.

It's no longer winter. I see fishermen readying their boats and gear for a new season, stacking lobster traps along the wharves and scraping and painting their vessels. And, alas, I notice the appearance of mud and potholes – all signs of spring. But something is missing.

I am no longer rushing to the market to make sure we have enough milk and eggs, candles and batteries – in case the next storm knocks out the power – oh, and to buy an extra shovel, should this replacement one also break.

Nor am I leaping out of bed early each morning, adrenalin rushing as I brush my teeth, donning snow pants, sweater, hooded coat over pajamas, then climbing into boots and heading downstairs to try the kitchen door. More often than not, I would find it sealed fast by snow. I'd gulp down coffee, and, with help from my husband, force open the front door. Shovels in hand, we'd begin the ritual: clear the front steps as the neighbors across the street run their snow blower and those next door shovel. We'd exchange nods, the occasional groan, ask, 'Where are we going to put it all?' – all the while eyeing property lines to make sure that shoveled snow lands where it ought to.

In novels I've read, winter is often the quiet season: a time for reading and reflection, letter writing, baking bread, stirring thick soups and curling up by the fire with a long novel.

In reality, we were all frenzied by the massive (and historic) back-to-back snowstorms, anxious about the next assault, and worried about our houses and families and jobs, not to mention the ice dams and ensuing leaky roofs.

Our frenzy was fed not just by the quantity and relentlessness of the storms, but by the anxiety (and exhaustion) they engendered and the fact that there was no one to blame. We could vent our anger at our neighbors or at the snow-plowing crews, but everyone was doing the best they could.

Lately, however, an unusual quiet appears to have descended, not suddenly, as it might when we're snowed in during a normal winter, but stealthily, without our even noticing it. In fact, what's noticeable is not what's present, but what's not: the stress.

Neighbors and friends have been emerging, tentatively, like bears from hibernation, as if nervous (and uncertain) about what will come next. I find myself stopping to make friendly chat at the post office, in the library, on the street. I pause to observe snowdrops arising from a patch of icy snow, the fattening buds on the lilacs and the calls of the first redwings in the marsh.

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

Text C: The long hot walk

This text is taken from a longer narrative. At this point, the writer is touring a foreign country. He decides to walk through countryside to a local city.

There had been a definite chill in the early morning air and the idea of walking to the city and enjoying my surroundings had seemed a good one. However, as I walked east along the road and towards the morning sun, which was already huge and bloated, I began to realise that the temperature was changing rapidly. After a while it seemed that there was little air to breathe. I remember stopping at a farm where unmoving and silent laborers scooped up water from wells and handed it to me warm and green. They stared at me with disbelief and pity in their eyes as I moved away again.

By mid-morning, the violence of the heat seemed to bruise the whole earth and turn its crust into one huge scar. The sun struck upwards, sideways and down, while the wheat went buckling across the fields like a solid sheet of copper. I kept walking because there was no shade to hide in and because it seemed to be the only way to agitate the air around me. Also, in my optimism, I really did hope I would soon see the evidence of the city. I walked on, conscious only of the red-hot dust grinding like pepper between my toes and the vast empty spaces on either side of me.

By mid-day, I was parched. Fantasies of water rose up and wrapped me in cool wet leaves or pressed the thought of cucumber peel across my stinging eyes and filled my mouth with dripping moss. I imagined drinking whole monsoons and winter mists and reclining on the sponge of a deep, cooling sea.

Then I saw the spire of a church rising from the plain like the jet of a fountain. There was a shower of eucalyptus trees brushing against a roadside café and I was standing there calling out for a cold drink.

‘No! You mustn’t drink too much. You may pass out.’ The café owner threw up her hands at the sight of me, then turned, alarmed, to shout at a couple of well-dressed gentlemen eating at a table in the corner.

The older man bowed: ‘The lady is right – you are too hot for sudden drinking.’

Everybody tutted at me and shook their heads. I could only stand there croaking, desperate with thirst. The owner gave me some ice to suck. Then she told me to rest indoors, while everyone asked me questions: Where I had come from? How I had got here? Where I was going?

At my replies, the owner threw up her hands again. ‘To the city? On foot? And you are carrying no water? It is unthinkable!’ The gentlemen started rapid-fire expressions of disbelief, spitting their food at each other like furious exclamations. ‘These idiots who walk all over the place! Up and down mountainsides! Round and round the plains in this heat! It is straightforward and cheap to hire a car!’

‘This is the third one in a month we have had to look after!’ exclaimed the owner.

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I heard their voices fading and booming around me. Then the owner's husband was leaning over me. 'Give the young man a little drink. If he doesn't pass out, and still wishes to go to the city, we can take him in the car. I'm sure he's learned his lesson.'

The first mouthful of mineral water burst in my throat and cascaded like frosted stars. Then I was given a plate of bread and cheese. A deep languor spread through my limbs. *40*
I remember no more of my benefactors, or what they said, only the drowsy glories of eating and drinking to my full. After that I was lifted to my feet and led outside. Then, stretched out across the back of the car, I was driven to the city by the café owner and her husband.

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