Cambridge International Education

Cambridge O Level

ENGLISH LANGUAGE **1123/21**

Paper 2 Reading **October/November 2023**

INSERT **1 hour 45 minutes**

4373412350-I

INFORMATION

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

This document has **4** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

DC (CJ) 319103
© UCLES 2023

[Turn over

Passage 1

Farming

1 People in early times obtained food by hunting animals and collecting edible plants, giving rise to the term 'hunter-gatherer'. Through time, people started to live in settled communities and grow their own food, and this was the beginning of farming.

2 To plant crops, early people used ploughs, which cut a series of long lines in the soil called furrows, into which seed was then thrown. However, the seeds were not always planted at the correct depth or distance from each other to ensure maximum growth; seeds were also vulnerable to being eaten by birds or blown away by the wind. A major breakthrough came with the invention of seed drills – devices which spaced the seeds evenly at the ideal depth. This meant that seeds were not wasted and fewer grew into plants too early. A later development involved a tool called a flail which separated the grain from the outer husk, once the crops had been gathered. This was successful but very labour intensive.

3 Growing the same crop in the same place for many years gradually removes nutrients from the soil. Crop rotation was practised by farmers in some countries 5000 years ago: this is the practice of growing one type of crop in each field in one season, and then changing to another the next. Although farmers may not have understood the chemistry, they understood the results. Over time, the practice of leaving land empty, or fallow, evolved, which meant letting it rest and recover every few years by not planting crops on it at all.

4 The Industrial Revolution advanced farming methods by introducing mechanical agriculture, that is agriculture powered by machines, for example the tractor. These replaced many jobs previously performed by manual labour and working animals such as horses and oxen. Perhaps the most important development came with the invention of the combine harvester, a versatile and ingenious vehicle which combines harvesting operations. It reaps the crops, such as wheat and maize, separates the grain and combines the leftover straw into bales for animal feed or ploughs it back into the soil as fertiliser.

5 Modern times have seen the development of intensive farming, which produces more crops than traditional farming methods, but brings with it considerable disadvantages. We really ought to become more informed about the many criticisms of intensive farming. To improve crop yield, intensive farming uses chemical fertilisers which contaminate the water of rivers and lakes. Toxins in the soil are produced by chemical pesticides used to kill weeds and pests; these can affect animals adversely and then enter the human food chain. Crop dusting involves spraying crops with fertilisers or pesticides from an agricultural aircraft. This process of crop dusting can damage human health; the random nature of this spraying can cause people living in surrounding areas to ingest harmful chemicals. Farmers should therefore opt for more natural or organic products in the treatment of their crops.

6 Cutting down trees to create land for intensive farming threatens our planet's eco-system; it contributes to climate change, destroys natural habitats and, in some cases, causes the extinction of entire species. Traditional farming methods relied on a high level of manual labour; the machinery of intensive farming might be an attractive proposition for the farmers who benefit from the lower, labour-saving costs, but there are, nevertheless, human costs involved too: unemployment levels increase as machines replace people. The aim of intensive farming is to provide maximum output at the lowest possible cost and indeed the cheap food provided prevents starvation and future food shortages in some parts of the world. We do need to balance this with an awareness of the origins of our food. Because large numbers of animals are kept in confined spaces, often indoors, this can be cruel and inhumane. The additional danger is that such spaces can lead to cramped and unhealthy conditions which allow for diseases to spread easily from animals to human beings.

7 Farmers in early times appreciated the need for crop rotation, but in modern intensive farming some farmers often specialise in growing only one crop in order to maximise their profits. However, these monocultures, as they are called, can quickly reduce key nutrients in the soil – as can harvesting crops more than once a year – and cause a lowering in biodiversity.

© UCLES 2023

Passage 2

The Novel

1 Towards the end of my course at university, I found it difficult to concentrate on my studies. I quizzed myself on what to do – give up right at the end or try to get my degree? If I got my degree, I would be considered an important person in my neighbourhood, as this rarely happened to a child from a poor family. I lay in bed staring at the ceiling. I looked at the pages of the books without taking in any of the words.

2 One morning, as a kind of remedy for my problems, I bought a new notebook and began to write about events from my life. Then I wrote about the neighbourhood where I had lived as a young girl, being careful to change names, places and situations. I spent 20 days entirely absorbed in my writing; I found that I was calmer and I was able to study too. My parents hadn't gone beyond fifth grade in elementary school and none of my grandparents had learned to read fluently, but I graduated that summer and was really pleased with myself. Here I was, not yet 23, and I had obtained a literature degree with the highest grade. For me, the first member of my family to go to university, even getting there had been an astonishing achievement.

3 On graduation day, after the usual student rituals, some university friends and I went out for dinner with our tutor. I had put the notebook with the story I had written into my bag. 'I have a little present for you,' I said. Timidly, I took out the notebook and gave it to him. 'It's a novel,' I said, 'one of a kind, my only copy, my only attempt.' He looked puzzled. I was immediately sorry, thinking I should never have embarrassed him with a little story that wasn't even typewritten. Then when we left the restaurant, he actually forgot to pick up the notebook lying on the table and had to be reminded to run back and get it.

4 A few weeks later I received a phone call from a publisher. My tutor had sent my story to him and he wanted to print it. I blurted out that I hadn't even re-read it. 'Don't touch a comma,' he told me. 'It will need only slight revisions. There is a sincerity and naturalness about it that only truly good books have.' He hadn't realised that it was the very first thing I'd ever written. I wandered around the neighbourhood, overwhelmed with joy, my heart pounding. The publisher had told me how good the novel was, but then my mood altered. In a few days I'll discover that they have changed their minds, I thought gloomily; the book won't be published. They'll re-read it; those who had found it good will find it pointless, and those who haven't read it will be angry with those eager to publish it; they'll all be angry with my tutor, who will feel humiliated and blame me for disgracing him.

5 As I entered the familiar world of the old neighbourhood library, the aroma of the books enveloped me warmly. I moved absent-mindedly along the shelves. I touched tattered books without looking at title or author, just to feel them – old paper, letters of the alphabet, ink. In a few months there might be printed pages all covered with my words, and whose name would be on the cover? Mine! I focused on the fact that my book might end up on those shelves. It would be catalogued and people would ask to borrow it to find out what I had written.

6 When the publisher sent me a considerable sum of money as advanced payment and an invitation to the publishing house in the city, my mother was incredulous and my father began to brag about me in the neighbourhood. At the publishing house, the editor suggested some minor tweaks to the story I had put my whole heart into. On the train home, I worked on the manuscript, including changes that the editor had recommended. I wanted the novel to be good; I didn't want anyone to dislike it. I doubted that I would ever be able to write another.

© UCLES 2023

BLANK PAGE

Permission to reproduce items where third-party owned material protected by copyright is included has been sought and cleared where possible. Every reasonable effort has been made by the publisher (UCLES) to trace copyright holders, but if any items requiring clearance have unwittingly been included, the publisher will be pleased to make amends at the earliest possible opportunity.

To avoid the issue of disclosure of answer-related information to candidates, all copyright acknowledgements are reproduced online in the Cambridge Assessment International Education Copyright Acknowledgements Booklet. This is produced for each series of examinations and is freely available to download at www.cambridgeinternational.org after the live examination series.

Cambridge Assessment International Education is part of Cambridge Assessment. Cambridge Assessment is the brand name of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), which is a department of the University of Cambridge.

© UCLES 2023