1 READING

Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.

Nowadays sections of the media seem to believe that people are more stupid and less well-informed than they used to be. And young people are the focus of their attention. But, how can society be ‘dumbing down’ and becoming more stupid, when both common sense and statistics suggest that this can’t be true? It’s a fact that levels of intelligence have been rising steadily over the past 50 years, and it’s surely reasonable to suspect that, in an age when technology provides easy access to information, young people might just know more about what’s going on than previous generations did.

That’s why I was deeply irritated to find unreliable research being used to promote the idea that today’s young people are less well-informed and therefore less intelligent. Research carried out in the United States has discovered that young people no longer read newspapers regularly. The researchers claim they are astonished that, whereas decades ago young and old Americans got their news from the same sources, nowadays teenagers and young adults don’t read a newspaper as part of their typical daily routine. But why the astonishment? I’m convinced that this has always been true. Young people’s lives aren’t built around routines, but are often chaotic and unplanned. What’s more, why should they make the time to read something that was never written with their interests in mind, anyway? In my experience, such a habit is and always has been something that comes with getting older and settling down.

Some people have taken the results of this research to conclude that, because young people don’t read newspapers, they must be less well-informed. But they fail to consider that the widespread use of the Internet has not only changed but improved the way young people access the news. Newspapers are quickly becoming old-fashioned, and I suspect that, as more older people get used to obtaining news faster and for free online, newsprint will soon be a thing of the past read only by those too afraid to use a computer.

One thing that the American research gets right is its description that how people get the news has changed over time, with newspapers being the main source of news until the fifties when television took over. The rise of the Internet, providing news that is not only up to date, but also designed to meet the interests and demands of the reader, is also described accurately. However the research then goes on to argue that one of the problems with online access to news is that people who view it find it hard to remember what they’ve read. The implication is that reading information printed in a paper is somehow a more reliable way of getting and remembering it than reading it on a computer screen. But there is no evidence to support such a claim. I’m sure that 1940s newspaper readers forgot everything they read some time between breakfast and dinner, too.

So what can we make of the American research? That it tells us nothing new. Or, more worryingly, that, once again, unreliable and biased research is being used to promote the false idea that young people today are not as intelligent as we used to be.

2 READING

Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.

One of the most popular programmes on prime time TV at the moment is *Tribe*, which stars Bruce Parry, a former soldier who, like any good TV anthropologist, takes his camera into the heart of the tribal communities he visits, and films the traditions and customs of people who follow an ancient way of life. Bruce takes a slightly different approach, however. Rather than just telling us about remote tribes, Bruce joins them. He eats their food, takes part in their rituals, and completely involves himself in their daily lives.

When I met Bruce Parry in an upmarket restaurant in London, he was smartly dressed with shiny shoes and neatly-combed hair, not exactly the look of a tribal warrior, but not surprising when you consider his time as a soldier. He had his familiar smile and easy-going manner, but he looked tired. Bruce admitted that after spending an exciting year filming the programme, he wasn’t feeling as energetic as usual.

Our lunch couldn’t have been more different from Bruce’s recent experiences. On his travels, to prove his status as an adult male, he’s been hit with a stick, and he’s allowed himself to be given frog poison. The poison made him particularly ill, but if he hadn’t done it, he wouldn’t have been allowed to take part in the life of the tribe, hunt for wild pigs or, indeed, been able to call himself a man in the eyes of the tribespeople. He’s eaten food cooked on hot stones with cannibals and he’s lunched on insects. I was keen to find out how he could have such horrible things done to himself in the name of TV entertainment so I asked him about those terrible lunches. Bruce was quick to explain that the Kombai tribe he met in Papua New Guinea had recently given up human flesh and that their cooking was surprisingly appetizing, but admitted that, crunchy, black and nutritious though they might be, after three days he got fed up with the insects he ate with the Adi people of Ethiopia.

Bruce describes himself as a man who desperately wants to be part of an ancient way of life. He also argues that the tribes he visits are not being used by his programmes for entertainment. Some people in the media think otherwise and have compared the tribespeople to contestants in a sort of reality TV show, who are there for us to laugh at, but Parry points out that these people are not unaware of the outside world. Rather, they have met people from the so-called civilized world and have decided they are happier living their ancient ways of life. When they agree to the films they know what they are doing and, as such, are happy to show the world their culture, and are pleased that outsiders are curious enough to visit them. Spending time with people and doing what they do is, after all, a form of respect.

3 READING

Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.

Imagine being able to go back in time and have a little chat with the 17-year-old you. We asked two 30-somethings what advice they would give their younger selves.

**Martha Lee**

The problem with most 17-year-olds is not that they are wild or rebellious but that they’re just so sensitive, and so self-obsessed that even an innocent comment might cause them much emotional pain. So, what I’d tell my younger self is to live a little, relax, and take no notice of what anyone else says. At parties, when I was 17, I’d sit in the corner trying to look grown up and sophisticated instead of enjoying myself. I’d soon put a stop to that if I could go back in time. I’d drag the silly girl up and show her just how much fun dancing in an embarrassing way can be! Mind you, I might have a word with her about how a little lipstick is more appealing than layers and layers, and why that lovely flowery dress didn’t suit those awful high-heeled white sandals.

When I was 17, I was constantly worrying about boys. So, I’d tell her to lighten up, forget about them, and spend more time with the girls. I’d love her to know that not having a date on a Saturday night was not the end of the world, and didn’t mean she was a loser. And I’d tell her that if a boy she liked didn’t fancy her, he was allowed to have that opinion, and that following him around, changing hairstyles, or ringing him up and putting the phone down as soon as he answered wouldn’t change anything.

The other thing I’d tell her is that her mother was not an ignorant, embarrassing but loveable idiot, who didn’t know what she was talking about, but rather a witty and forgiving woman who was intelligent enough to be amused rather than annoyed at how arrogant and selfish teenagers can be.

**Jim Stewart**

To be honest with you, I don’t think there would be much point in going back in time and talking to me as a 17-year-old, and not because I wouldn’t listen. I was always being given advice, but, at that age, however hard I tried, I just couldn’t take it in. My world was listening to rock music, cleaning my new motorbike and watching football. Everything else seemed irrelevant. I tried to have ambitions and be sensible, but I really couldn’t see why.

But if I did have the chance to talk to tall, skinny, long-haired me, what would I say? Get your hair cut? No, I don’t think so, although I would tell the younger me to try to eat more healthily. Not that I was overweight. On the contrary, when I look at old photos I always envy the fact that I managed to wear such tight jeans. Actually, what I’d really want to tell myself is to think bigger and to not limit my horizons. I don’t think I was encouraged to take risks and to try to find out what I really wanted to do. Perhaps there was pressure on me to conform, to go to college, to get a good job, that sort of thing.

Oh, and the other thing I’d tell the 17-year-old me is to cut up all my credit cards. I wasn’t very good with money and I just didn’t realize how quickly you can get into debt. If it hadn’t been for my dad, it would have taken years to pay off all the bills I ran up.

**4**

**READING**

**Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.**

Increasingly, these days, people lead busy professional lives in which they have little time for lunch, let alone time to meet the next possible Mr or Ms Right. The emphasis in our lives is on using time we have left outside of work well, spending ‘quality time’ with our family and friends. So, it’s no surprise that speed dating has become so popular. An activity in which busy men and women go to an organized event, have three-minute chats with more eligible members of the opposite sex than they would normally meet in a year, and then decide who might or might not be a potential partner, is a great example of perfect time management.

Speed dating is a relatively new phenomenon. Its first event was staged at Pete’s Café in Beverly Hills California in 1998, and organized by a group of Jewish students who wanted to meet other singles of the same religion. They were sure it was a good idea and expected that large numbers of people would enjoy it, but not immediately. Within a very short time, however, it had spread everywhere, and its popularity was confirmed when a speed dating story line appeared in the hit American comedy series *Sex and the City*.

It hasn’t taken sociologists very long to take an interest, either. An American study, carried out in 2005, discovered that it took hardly any time at all for men and women to choose who they would like to meet again in the future. Just seconds, in fact. This study would appear to completely undermine the argument of all those romantics who wonder how three minutes can possibly be enough to decide whether somebody might be ‘the one’. It seems that we know instantly. Interestingly, women have a greater instinct for this than men. In a 2006 study, carried out by a Scottish university, over 40 per cent of women, which was twice the percentage figure for men, had made their minds up about the person they were chatting to within thirty seconds.

Other studies have looked into how to increase your chances of success when attending a speed dating event. They have produced some interesting results. For example, what you smell like could be vital. And I’m not talking about remembering to wash before you go. Women are attracted to men with a similar background and interests but a very different scent. There’s no greater turn off than a guy with an identical natural body smell, it would seem. Height, too, seems to be important to attraction, although short men shouldn’t lose all hope. The important thing is to be a few centimetres taller than the woman you’re trying to chat up – being too tall can be just as bad as not being tall enough.

What you talk about can make all the difference, too. You’d think that speaking intelligently about the latest movie or play would impress the girls or the guys, but nothing could be further from the truth. No-one likes someone who’s too clever. According to a recent study, it’s life experiences that attract the opposite sex, so don’t forget to tell them about all those places you’ve been to and things you’ve seen.

5

**READING**

**Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.**

There are times in the history of any great city when it feels that it’s at the centre of all that’s fashionable. Though it was depressing and old-fashioned in the fifties, and a bit scruffy at the edges for most of the seventies, London led the world of fashion during the ‘swinging’ years of the sixties and during the punk revolution at the end of the seventies. Showing the way were its fashion designers, notably Mary Quant and Vivienne Westwood.

**Mary Quant**

Mary Quant left Goldsmith College, London, in the early fifties with very clear ideas of what she wanted to achieve in the world of fashion. She was fed up with the idea that high fashion should be for the rich and the middle-aged, and thought that it should be fun and liberating. She started making clothes designed around simple shapes and patterns, and bright colours.

Mary had been lucky enough to meet and marry a wealthy businessman called Alexander Plunket Green while she was at college, and it was his investment that allowed her to open a shop soon after finishing her studies. Mary opened a boutique in the King’s Road, Chelsea, in the centre of London. The year was 1955. It was an immediate success, thanks to her innovative designs, comparatively low prices, and eccentric window displays, which made the clothes look even more stylish.

By the mid sixties, Mary Quant was a household name, and a fashion leader of sorts. She had popularized, some people would say invented, the mini skirt, which was arguably the most iconic fashion statement of the sixties, and she had done more than anyone to make clothes youthful, sexy, and natural.

**Vivienne Westwood**

In 1971, Vivienne Westwood’s partner, and the father of her son Joseph, opened a shop in the King’s Road called Let it Rock. His name was Malcolm Maclaren. Vivienne, who had briefly studied at the Harrow School of Art in London, then started to sell her designs in the shop. They weren’t ordinary clothes, nor were they inexpensive. She combined traditional British materials such as tartan with more outrageous items like black leather, metal chains, large safety pins, razor blades, and dog collars.

After years of selling to a small, alternative set of customers, Vivienne’s designs were suddenly in demand overnight after the punk rock band The Sex Pistols wore her clothes at their first gig. Perhaps they loved the style, but it is more likely that their manager, Malcolm Maclaren, influenced their choice of shop. Although probably motivated by Maclaren’s business interests, the clothes and band worked well together. The band’s anarchic energy combined with Vivienne’s sense of punk style to take the world by storm in the late seventies, rocking the foundations of the fashion world. The influence of those designs is still felt today.

In more recent years, Vivienne has introduced many other elements into her fashion design, such as ways of cutting material borrowed from eighteenth-century clothes makers, and patterns first used by indigenous South American peoples. She is always looking for the innovative and shocking, and her ready-to-wear clothes, while no longer strictly punk, are still different and edgy.

**6 READING**

**Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.**

Derek Bentley was sentenced to death and was subsequently hanged on 28 January 1953. He was 19 years old and had been found guilty of murder. However, many thought that his trial was a great legal tragedy and it served to help end the use of the death penalty in Britain a few years later.

So, why was he hanged?

It all began on a Sunday in November 1952 when Bentley attempted to carry out a burglary with his friend Christopher Craig. Whose idea the burglary was isn’t known for sure, although the personalities of the two men do suggest who might have been the leader. Craig was loud and had a high opinion of himself, whereas Bentley, in contrast, was quiet and reserved, and very much impressed by his younger friend’s confidence. Both were armed with knives, but Craig also had a revolver concealed in his jacket, something that Bentley almost certainly knew about. Bentley himself also carried a knuckleduster, a small metal weapon that could seriously hurt someone in a fight.

The two were on the roof of a building when the police spotted them. They had earlier been seen breaking into the building by a young girl whose mother had called the police, and now they were trapped. Two policemen chased them, and soon caught Bentley, but Craig decided to try and get away. He fired his gun, hitting a policeman in the shoulder. It was then that Bentley shouted to Craig, ‘Let him have it!’, words that would become famous as a key piece of evidence in the trial. Moments later, more police arrived and started to chase Craig up some stairs. He turned and fired, killing a policeman before jumping from the roof and breaking his back. He was then arrested.

Both Bentley and Craig were charged with murder, and both, at their trial, told the court that they were innocent. This was a mistake. There was so much evidence to prove that Craig had committed the crime that it would have been better for him to plead guilty. Unsurprisingly, it took the jury little more than an hour to find both men guilty, and Bentley was sentenced to death by hanging. Craig, however, was only 16, and avoided the same punishment.

The trial, and particularly Bentley’s sentence, shocked many people. In part, this was because of the prosecution lawyers’ arguments. Central to their case against Bentley was that he and Craig were equally responsible for the murder. The prosecution was able to prove to the jury that by planning a burglary, carrying a weapon, although not the murder weapon, and shouting ‘let him have it’ to Craig, Bentley was as much a murderer as his younger friend. However, the court didn’t consider it important that Bentley had a mental age of 11, that the phrase ‘let him have it’ could mean ‘shoot him’ but could also mean ‘give him the gun’, and the fact that, unlike Craig, Bentley was restrained, though not arrested, by another policeman at the time of the murder.

Forty-five years after the trial, following years of arguing, campaigning and protests by Bentley’s father and sister, the Court of Appeal finally ruled, admitting that the original sentence and verdict were mistaken. Sadly, neither his father nor his sister lived long enough to see Bentley’s name cleared.

**7 READING**

**Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.**

We’ve all heard amazing stories in which people struggle heroically to survive against all the odds. We wonder what we would have done in similar impossible situations and find it hard to imagine how these people found the strength to stay alive. The truth, though, is that not all survivors are quite so heroic. As these two stories show, the will to survive isn’t always so strong.

**The marathon runner**

Thrilling yet terrifying, the Marathon des Sables is arguably the world’s toughest foot race. Competitors attempt a six-day 150-mile run across the Sahara desert in temperatures of over 100 degrees. Just imagine getting lost. That, however, is exactly what happened to an Italian policeman called Marco Contadino, a regular competitor, when he took part in the race in 1996. A sandstorm developed as he was running, which covered the marks of the course he was following with sand. Marco should have stopped and waited for the storm to calm down, but he kept on, desperate to stay in seventh place in the race, only to find that when the wind dropped he could no longer see the course. He reached for his water bottle and found there were only a few drops left in the bottom of it.

For three whole days Marco tried to find his way back to the course, with barely any water and no idea what direction he was heading in. He started to visualize the agonising death he would soon have to face. A friend had once told him that dying of thirst was the worst of all possible deaths. Fearing such a long and painful death, he decided to cut his wrists with a knife. But, short of water, his blood was thick and would not flow. In desperation, he headed out into the desert one more time, expecting to die. Five more days passed until, miraculously, a group of Tuareg nomads found him and took him to a village. Marco discovered he was in Algeria, 130 miles away from the race course.

**The yachtswoman**

As an experienced sailor, Lynn Walker knows nothing is ever certain on the high seas. However, when she took on the job of sailing a luxury yacht from Tahiti to San Diego, she must have believed that it would be one of the less complicated trips she had done. Little did she know that after a week of calm sailing the weather would change dramatically, bringing a tropical depression from Central America to blast the yacht with 50-foot waves. Lynn found herself battling against Hurricane Raymond. It was an unequal battle, and the boat soon turned over.

Lynn was unconscious for a long time. When she did finally come round, she realized that the boat had miraculously righted itself, and that she had been saved by the lifeline connecting her to the boat. She had tied it to herself moments before the boat had first gone under the waves. Tragically, she could see Simon, her boyfriend, lying dead in the water.

There was plenty of food on the boat, and the weather was calm again, but Lynn could only feel an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. She found that she couldn’t eat, and simply sat on the soaking wet deck. It was as if she had given up, and was waiting to die. Then, all of a sudden, a voice in her head told her to survive. She managed to put up a makeshift sail, and consulting the surviving charts on the boat, somehow sailed to Hawaii.

**8 READING**

**Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.**

The UK government has revealed plans to build 10 new ‘eco towns’, the first new towns to be built in England since the 1960s. According to ministers, the ‘eco towns’ will help provide a solution to the increasing housing shortage while helping to tackle climate change. It is planned that each new town will contain between 5,000 and 20,000 new homes.

There are few details about what the ‘eco towns’ will actually be like, but there are already examples in other parts of Europe. The town of Hammarby Sjöstad in Sweden was built on what had been a polluted industrial area south-east of the centre of Stockholm and currently contains 10,000 homes. All homes are built to make the best use of natural light and are fitted with solar panels as well as a system for collecting and reusing rainwater. Waste from the town is processed to produce gas which powers cookers, buses, and cars and is also used to fertilize a nearby forest which provides wood which can be burned to heat the homes. There is a free ferry and tram link to the centre of Stockholm and two-thirds of all journeys are made by public transport, bicycle, or walking.

Another example is Vauban, near Freiburg in Germany. Vauban, which now contains 5,000 homes, was built on the site of a former army base and architects worked with local residents in an attempt to make the development genuinely family-friendly. As a result shops, schools, parks, and businesses are all easily accessible, and there are 600 jobs within walking or cycling distance of the residential area. Again all homes have solar panels and nearly 100 buildings generate more energy than they use.

While ‘eco town’ plans may appear attractive, they have met with fierce opposition, both from residents of surrounding areas of the proposed sites and from environmental groups. Many argue that the focus should be not on building new homes, but on regenerating run-down houses in existing towns and cities and there is concern that new ‘eco towns’ may be built on green spaces and land used for farming. Another fear is that residents of the ‘eco towns’ will not be working in local businesses, but will be forced to commute to other cities, encouraging more people into their cars and increasing the congestion on the roads.

It is perhaps an irony that the strongest opponents of the ‘eco town’ plan are environmentalists, but as one local politician commented, increasing the number of traffic jams in the local area ‘would not be that environmentally-friendly at all’.

**9 Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.**

Until recently evidence that the world’s weather is becoming more extreme and harder to predict was largely anecdotal, without the support of any factual proof, and often angrily argued over. The majority of scientists pointed out that drawing conclusions based on a couple of scorching hot summers or a particularly damp spring was misleading. There have always been occasional weather extremes, and, although it’s tempting to believe the contrary, single events do not indicate a general change to the climate.

However, a study by the World Weather Organization suggests that there may well be factual evidence to support the idea that the world’s weather patterns are changing. By recording weather events over the past two decades, the organization has been able to ascertain that the number, although not necessarily the strength of, such extreme weather events as floods, droughts, and tornadoes has risen. Moreover, it predicts that weather events we now consider unusual will have become the norm by the end of the next decade.

The world’s climate has been setting new records over the last year. Just over 500 tornadoes hit the United States in May, causing untold damage, and breaking the previous monthly record by more than 100. A heatwave in India killed hundreds, with temperatures rising to an astonishing 49 degrees Celsius, and also breaking all sorts of records. Meanwhile, heavy rainfall in Sri Lanka resulted in terrible floods and many casualties. And parts of Europe recorded average summer temperatures five degrees above what would normally be expected. Looked at separately, none of these events is particularly remarkable, but when put together they represent a clear and worrying change to the world’s climate.

As a general rule, the World Weather Organization only compiles and reports its statistics. However, the figures for the last year were so alarming that the organization felt compelled to issue a warning of sorts. It pointed out that the increase in the world’s temperature was greater between 1900 and 2000 than it had been for any other 100-year period during the past 1,000 years. Not only that, but temperatures from 1976 to 2000 rose at a faster rate than the previous 75 years when surface temperatures warmed up in an uneven way.

So, what or who is to blame? The World Weather Organization avoids this question, defining its own role as a gatherer rather than an interpreter of information. The study recognizes that global warming is taking place, and points out that the figures are irrefutable in this respect, but it has no opinion about whether global warming is a natural phenomenon or one that humans are directly responsible for.

**10 READING**

**Read the article and tick (✓) A, B, or C.**

For centuries, sleep was a complete mystery. In the last few years, however, scientists have been able to use new technology to investigate electrical and muscular states of the body during sleep. These investigations have shed new light on the six recurring stages of sleep, which were first described in the early 20th century. It is fair to say that we now have a much better understanding of what actually happens to us when we are sleeping, though it is far from a totally clear picture.

The first stage of sleeping is called, somewhat confusingly, ‘waking’. By this, sleep scientists mean a short period of wakefulness, just a matter of minutes, when the body is relaxed and prepares for sleep. Tense muscles relax, eye movement slows down, and the body slips gently towards drowsiness.

Once feeling drowsy, the sleeper has moved into a period known to the scientists as ‘stage 1 sleep’, a period which lasts no more than ten minutes. A way of describing this stage is to say that the sleeper is on the very edge of sleep, with their eyes closed and their bodies still. However, it wouldn’t be difficult to rouse a person at this stage. And once awake, a person may feel as if he or she has not slept.

By stage 2, the sleeper has entered a period of light sleep, perhaps best explained as a time when the muscles of the body hover between being completely relaxed and being responsive. Then, as the heart rate quickly slows down, and the body temperature drops, the body prepares to enter a much deeper phase of sleep. The third and fourth stage of sleep are when the body is completely asleep, its muscles paralysed, its breathing regular.

What happens next is quite unexpected. From the deep sleep of stage 4, the body works backwards through stage 3 sleep to the light sleep of stage 2, but then, instead of waking, it enters the bizarre and magical stage of REM sleep. The body has been asleep for about an hour and a half before reaching this stage.

REM stands for ‘rapid eye movement’. The heart rate speeds up, breathing becomes erratic, and the brain becomes very active. The sleeper is dreaming, something that only happens during the REM stage. Fortunately, however, while the brain is in overdrive, the rest of the body’s muscles are paralysed.

The initial REM stage is over after ten minutes or so. Then, the body starts its sleep cycle all over again, with the next REM stage taking a bit longer. In a typical night’s sleep, there will be five different sleep cycles with the final REM stage lasting as long as an hour.

Naturally, there are many factors which influence our sleep cycle, not least age. Small children get more deep sleep than anybody else, and, as a general rule, the older we get the shorter the time we spend in deep sleep. But, while stage 3 and stage 4 of the sleep cycle shorten with age, the first REM stage lengthens.

So, there you have it. Next time you go to bed and lay your head on the pillow, just imagine what adventures your sleeping self is about to set off on.