Unit 4: Exercise 9

What was the information you needed to find the correct headings in Exercise 8? Match the underlined information in the headings with the information from the passage.

The meaning and celebration of Matariki

Henry Wilkes travels to New Zealand to investigate an ancient Māori tradition

A Current interest in a craft once commonly associated with celebrating Matariki

Over the cliffs at Mission Bay in Auckland, New Zealand, an incredible number of kites give extra colour to the cold blue sky. It is no coincidence that so many people have gathered here to fly them; they have come together to celebrate the arrival of the Matariki, the group of seven stars that appear in mid-winter. Many of the kite fliers are Māori, descendants of the people who first arrived in New Zealand in the 13th century, but others have European ancestors, or are recent immigrants to this country. What all of them have in common is that they are keen to take part in the celebration, and a key part of this is the designing and making of a kite. The Māori used to make them out of pampas grass, flax and the bark of the mulberry tree, and would often decorate them with shells or feathers. Nowadays, although it is easy enough to make a modern plastic kite, people prefer to follow their customs and use traditional methods and materials.

B The decline and later revival of the celebration of Matariki

Before the Europeans began to arrive and settle in New Zealand, festivities associated with the Matariki were popular amongst all Māori tribes. They gradually began to disappear, eventually coming to an end with the last traditional festival held in the 1940s. It wasn't until the beginning of the 21st century that people began calling in large numbers for Matariki to be brought back as a cultural event. In 2000, around 500 people attended a community gathering and public firework display in Hastings, New Zealand, to mark the return of Matariki. This year, over 20,000 people are expected to participate in the same event. And around the rest of New Zealand, other similar events are co-ordinated.

C Different ancient legends told in New Zealand about how the Matariki were created

Māori have several stories about the origins of the Matariki. One is connected to their creation myth, in which the god of the weather and winds threw his eyes into the heavens, where they became the seven stars. In another version, the god of the forests, Tāne Mahuta, became jealous of a very bright star which everyone admired. He angrily threw the star to destroy it but instead it broke up into seven smaller stars. In a third myth, the main star is a mother and the six smaller ones are her daughters. Regardless of the origins, Māori communities have traditionally celebrated in similar ways.

D A strategy for locating the formation of the stars that make up the Matariki

Although Māori living in New Zealand recognise January 1st as the official start of the year, it is the appearance of the Matariki which traditionally marks the beginning of the Māori New Year. Of course, people living in different parts of the world will be able to see the cluster of seven stars at different times of year. However, for New Zealanders hoping to see the Matariki, they should keep an eye out from the second week of June. If they look towards the north-east horizon, slightly to the west of where the sun rises, they should have a good chance of spotting it in the tail of the Milky Way. Of course, it is best to get up an hour before dawn, so the stars are bright enough to be easily noticed. A pair of binoculars can come in handy, too.

E The importance of the Matariki as a navigational tool in the past

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Like the first people to settle in Tonga, Samoa, Niue, the Cook Islands, Hawaii and Tahiti, the Māori were great sailors. All these Polynesian peoples were able to travel long distances over water by observing the position of the stars. The seven stars that made up the Matariki were especially useful due to the fact that they changed position during the year, showing a clear direction for the huge traditional canoes to follow. It's easy to see the common ancestry of the people of Polynesia when you look at the names for the Matariki in the different countries: it is *Matali'I* in Samoa, *Makali'I* in Hawaii, and *Mataliki* in Tonga, for example.

F The role of Matariki in bringing different generations of people together

Nowadays, as in the past, Matariki celebrations provide an excellent opportunity for communities to unite. It is a time when people reflect on the experiences of the year which has just passed, give thanks for the good things they have received from the land and the sea, and look forward to the year ahead. It is also the perfect time for older members of the extended family or local tribe to share their knowledge with the young. They may teach them traditional songs or stories, demonstrate old ways of fishing or catching eels, or show them how to prepare *hangi* (food which is cooked on heated stones in a hole in the ground). For many Māori children, this contact and experience gives them a strong sense of cultural identity and belonging.

G Matariki's influence on customs associated with agriculture

While Māori arts such as carving and weaving were practised during Matariki celebrations in the past, the arrival of the seven stars had another significant role. Māori decided when to plant their crops according to how easily the stars could be seen. If they were clear and bright, Māori believed that the growing season would be a productive one, and they would plant their crops in September. But if they appeared to be out-of-focus and closer together than usual, they knew that the winter was going to be an extremely cold one. This meant they wouldn't start planting until October. But Matariki also occurred at harvest time, so there was plenty of food to share around between family members and visitors. This kind of feasting is still very much part of the modern celebrations.

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crops, *plant* and *harvest* | *disappear* and *brought back* | making traditional kites

myth and *origins* | sailors | *spotting* | *unite*

1 What *craft* is mentioned in paragraph A? _____

2 What words also mean *decline* and *revival*? _____

3 What words have similar meanings to *legend* and *created*? _____

4 What word has a similar meaning to *locating*? _____

5 What type of people need to use *navigational tools*? _____

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6 What word also means *bring ... people together*?

7 What words are associated with the idea of *agriculture*?

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