20 The arts

Art appreciation, the performing arts

Art appreciation

1.1 **Which art forms are shown in these pictures? What do we call the people who do these things?**

1.2 **Which of these art forms do you find the most and least appealing?**

1.3 **Read the text making sure you understand the meaning of the words in bold. Use a dictionary if necessary.**

The brain of the beholder

The cave figures of Lascaux, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, a Cubist painting by Pablo Picasso and the African **artefact** that **inspired** Picasso's work. These works of art are separated by great gulfs in time, different social and political systems, and language divides. Yet despite these variations, there is art in each place and era. That there is a seemingly **universal impulse** to express oneself this way suggests that human beings are neurologically hardwired for art.

Imagine yourself in the Louvre in Paris, pushing through the throngs to behold the Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile. Or recall the first time you ever saw the Sydney Opera House. Most likely your skin tingled, you felt a thrill and you paused for a moment of **reflection**. Even glimpses of **mundane** objects such as the latest curvaceous kettle, can inspire something similar. Art and design critics will describe how formal qualities like proportion are **choreographed** to produce the viewer's **rush**. But the fact that **aesthetic** experience can inspire such a biological response suggests that it's a stimulus neuroscientists could analyse just as **deftly**.

And that's exactly what they are doing. In laboratories and galleries around the world, researchers are showing how the organisation of the brain relates to the **conception** and experience of art. This is the **burgeoning** field of neuroaesthetics, in which scientists are discovering that – rather than **transcending** the ordinary – art and aesthetics are part of everyday experience. They're also finding that, in some **fundamental** ways, art really is an expression of human nature.

1.4 **Write *Yes* if these statements agree with the information in the text or *No* if the statements contradict the information. Write the words in bold that helped you with your answer.**

1 Pablo Picasso got the idea for one of his paintings from an ancient work of art from Africa.
Yes – artefact, inspired

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2 The desire to create art is limited to certain parts of the world. .....

3 When people look at works of art it provokes serious and careful thought. .....

4 Ordinary objects can be aesthetically pleasing. .....

5 Art critics believe that artistic elements are arranged and combined together in order to create a feeling of excitement. .....

6 Researchers are analysing how the brain creates the idea of art. .....

7 Neuroaesthetics is failing to catch on in the world of science. .....

8 Scientists have discovered that art is a way of rising above everyday life. .....

The performing arts

2.1 20a **You will hear a radio broadcast about three different arts festivals on Bethania island. Listen and complete column A below. Write NO MORE THAN ONE WORD for each answer.**

A	*B*
Living (1) .....**– Week** • Talks • (2) ..... lunches • Book (3) ..... • (4) ..... for children • This year's (5) ..... is Island Life	1 *the study of art in relation to its beauty =* ..... 2 *organised sets of special events =* .....
The (6) ..... **Arts** • A painting (7) ..... • Discussion of the (8) ..... process • Workshops at local (9) ..... • Display of local (10)	3 *skilled =* ..... 4 *creations =* ..... 5 *represent or show something in a picture or story =* ..... 6 *make shapes in wood or stone with a knife =* .....
• (11) ..... **of Voices** • Several performances will be (12) ..... • (13) ..... theatre • Free (14)	7 *describes a show that involves the audience =* ..... 8 *the people gathered to listen to a performance =* ..... 9 *take part in =* ..... 10 *musical performances =* .....

2.2 20a **Now listen again and find words or phrases to match the definitions in column B.**

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2.3 **WORD BUILDING Complete the table.**

Noun	*Verb*	*Adjective*
		creative
culture		
	influence	
	inspire	
imagination		
	participate	
		rich

3.1 **Try to talk for two minutes about the following topic. Use words from the table in 2.3 if you can.**

Describe the type of music that you like. You should say
- why you enjoy listening to this type of music
- the times or places when you listen to this music
- your feelings about music in general and say whether you prefer live or recorded music.

3.2 20b **You will hear somebody answering the question in 3.1. Listen and complete the text with no more than two words from the text. You may need to listen twice.**

My taste in music is quite [1] ..... and there isn't really one [2] ..... of music that I like. I listen to everything from [3] ..... music to [4] ..... . Music [5] ..... a very important [6] ..... in my life, and I listen to it almost constantly. I find that it helps to [7] ..... or to change a [8] ..... . So I tend to choose my music according to who I'm with or what I'm doing. For example, if I'm driving long distances in my car I prefer to play something [9] ..... to help keep me awake, but if I'm having a dinner party with friends then I play something more [10] ..... . I think that music helps to [11] ..... me when I'm working, although my colleagues find it [12] ..... so I tend to listen with [13] ..... on. In that way I can [14] ..... into my own little world. When I was younger I would definitely have said that I preferred live music. The [15] ..... in a live [16] ..... can be [17] ..... . Nowadays, though, a lot of popular groups only perform at very large [18] ..... in front of [19] ..... of 20,000 or more and I don't really like that. I prefer the [20] ..... of listening to recorded music, and the sound quality is better as well. Music really [21] ..... our lives – it can turn a boring, monotonous period of time into a [22] ..... . So I think it's essential to have music and, in fact, all of [23] ..... in your life.

4 **PRONUNCIATION** 20c **Each of the following words has a weak sound or *schwa* (ə), e.g. *about*. Underline the weak sounds in each word then listen and check your answers. Practise saying the words. There may be more than one schwa in each word.**

atmosphere classical edition festival fundamental imagination
literary monotonous musical performance popular visual

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Test practice

Academic Reading

You should spend about 20 minutes on questions 1–12, which are based on the reading passage.

Storytelling

Dr Tom Sjöblom, University of Helsinki, explores the link between narratives and memories.

Storytelling seems to be a fundamental feature of human existence. In a recent article, Paul Hernadi points out that storytelling and narratives are such widespread phenomena that they could justifiably be included in the list of human universals (Hernadi, 2001). But, our craving for narratives, or stories, goes deeper than this. It is embedded in our mental images of whatever happens around us (Boyer, 2001). In other words, creating narratives is our way of connecting and interacting with our environment (Mink, 1978).

As a species, we humans appear to have a much more active attitude towards our environment than any other species. Our bodies and minds not only adapt to the surrounding world, but we actively shape and construct our environment to better suit our needs (Plotkin, 1993). From this perspective, culture is nothing more than an environment that we create ourselves. Culture is not something in opposition to nature. Instead it is a part of it, it is – in a way – nature modified to better suit the requirements of the human life form. Thus, culture and all aspects of it are basically products of natural selection and, more specifically, the evolution of the human mind (Boyer, 2001).

Between 60,000 and 20,000 years ago the first signs of art and religion appeared and humans started to build houses and invent more sophisticated tools and weapons, such as bows and arrows. This period has been called the 'big bang' of human culture. There is still much controversy over how to explain this period of innovation, but a growing consensus connects the greater cultural energy and innovation of the period to the emergence of individuals as creative beings (Mellars, 1994).

The archaeologist Steven Mithen has suggested that this creativity can be explained by the emergence of a 'cognitively fluid' mentality, in other words, an ability to link together information from different areas of our life. Cognitive fluidity makes it possible for human beings to emerge from the concrete situational present and to adopt a more general and abstract approach (Mithen, 1996). As Gerald Edelman puts it: 'With that ability come the abilities to model the world, to make explicit comparisons and to weigh outcomes; through such comparisons comes the possibility of reorganizing plans.' (Edelman, 1992)

Edelman goes further than this and argues that it is the flexibility of our memory system which is the key for understanding how cognitive fluidity affects our ability to learn new things in general (Edelman, 1992). The basic idea here is that our memory does not really represent the past as it happened. In most of the cases it does not even represent it as it is stored and coded into our brains. Instead, our memory prefers creating the past from the perspective of how relevant it is to our present situation. Striving for this kind of coherence, our mind combines stored representations and blends information stored in them (Holyoak & Thagard, 1995). Thus, all things being equal, we do not remember the past, we create it.

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The medieval art of memory, known as *memoria*, has interested historians for a long time, but seldom from a psychological or cognitive perspective. Recently, this has been changed through the work of Mary Carruthers. According to Carruthers, *memoria* was the reason why literature, in a fundamental sense, existed in medieval Europe. It was the process by which a work of literature became both institutionalised by the group and learned by its individual members (Carruthers, 1990).

For those medieval experts who were educated in the art of memory there were two principal strategies for achieving their goal. The first and older of these strategies, attributed to Aristotle, relied on the concept of 'mental images'. Supporters of this strategy argued that remembering was to see mental pictures, which are firmly imprinted upon the memory. Thus, the best way to memorise narratives is to stimulate the act of memorising by using visual aids such as emotion-provoking representations, or so-called 'word pictures'. Descriptive language can also be used to create a kind of mental painting, although no actual pictures are present (Carruthers, 1990). As Albertus Magnus (1193–1280) puts it: 'something is not secure enough by hearing, but it is made firm by seeing' (Albertus I.1. ll. 6–7).

The second, and more popular, strategy for memorising narratives was by rote learning. This was achieved by the frequent repetition of a text until it was accurately memorised. In this case, the process of memorising was aided by the use of rhythmic and/or formulaic expressions, and by breaking longer texts into numbered segments and then memorising them one by one (Carruthers, 1990).

The followers of this strategy criticised the use of visual imagery because of its inaccuracy. It was argued that the use of visual aids was marginally helpful at best, providing cues for recollection, but could not in itself guarantee the accuracy of the memorising process (Carruthers, 1990). The latter countered the criticism by arguing that, while in ordinary circumstances the accuracy of visual imagery could not be trusted, this problem would disappear if the visual imagery was strong enough to make a person emotionally engaged with the text. Indeed, they argued, it is the creation of strong emotional responses that makes the use of visual images such a powerful tool for memory creation (Carruthers, 1990).

Questions 1–8

Look at the following theories (questions 1–8) and the list of people below.
Match each person with the correct theory.
Write the correct letter (A–H) next to questions 1–8.

1 Early European storytelling came about because of a traditional form of memorising. .....

2 Cognitive fluidity allowed early humans to make and change arrangements. .....

3 Telling stories allows us to relate to our surroundings. .....

4 The brain changes our recollection of past events to match our current circumstances. .....

5 Telling stories is a trait which is common to all nations. .....

6 Early humans became more inventive when they were able to make a connection between different ideas. .....

7 Your memory of something will be improved if you visualise it rather than just listen to it. .....

8 Humans adjust to their surroundings as well as changing them. .....

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List of people

A	Hernadi	**E**	Edelman
B	Mink	**F**	Holyoak & Thagard
C	Plotkin	**G**	Carruthers
D	Mithen	**H**	Albertus

Questions 9–12

Complete each sentence with the correct ending **A–F** from the box.
Write the correct letter **(A–F)** next to questions 9–12.

9 Those who memorised using Aristotle's theory were helped by .....

10 The experts who used rote learning were helped by .....

11 Those who supported rote learning believed that .....

12 Supporters of Aristotle's method of memorising believed that .....

A ...writing down their stories.
B ...using paintings aided the memory.
C ...visual aids were of limited help when memorising text.
D ...if images evoked a passionate response then the memory would be more accurate.
E ...creating a vivid image in their mind.
F ...turning a long text into a series of short parts.

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