The Lost Art of Conversation

Read the text and choose the best answer (A), (B), or (C) for questions 1-5.

When rummaging around in my grandparent's 'study' one day, I found a textbook copyrighted in 1896, entitled *The Art of Elocution*. I dusted off the very small volume and read the following definition of elocution: 'The art by which, in delivering a discourse before an audience, the speaker is enabled to render it effective and impressive.' The textbook turned out to be the curriculum written for young women to learn to be 'effective and impressive' conversationalists.

Today, we are often admonished to 'talk to our children.' Tell them stories. Talk to them about why the leaves fall from trees. Describe for them what 'is going to happen' and how to cope with the world. Talk to them about what they see on television and what they are learning in school.

Parents often speak to their children only with criticism, admonishments, commands and demands. Children are often spoken to when they have done something 'wrong' or something they 'shouldn't have.' Then, without the help of explanation or information, they are left to figure out for themselves what to do differently. Perhaps parents need to take the course in *The Art Of Elocution*, and practise its principles instead of sitting quietly in front of the TV watching everyone else converse. Do we know how to be friends, as well as parents, to our children? Whatever happened to 'good conversationalists'? Can the art of conversation ever be revived? Or like Latin, is it a 'dead language' pattern? In an effort to breathe life back into the art of conversation, I offer the following suggestions.

1. Learn the vocabulary of feelings and emotions. Conversation is a powerful connection between people and the cement of that connection is the sharing of feelings.

2. Be genuinely curious or interested in the other's feelings, ideas, thoughts and opinions. You can always learn something you didn't know before a good conversation.

3. Be comfortable with self-revelation. Time the revelations about you so that the connection with your partner is strengthened.

4. Give your partner your undivided attention when they are speaking. Attention is to conversation what oil is to an engine. It protects and smoothes the production of energy. And energetic conversation is the primary goal of the art.

5. Listen to others without distraction or rehearsing what you want to say next. Don't interrupt.

6. Don't assume a conversation cut short is a personal rejection. Perhaps you tried to start a conversation with someone who was obviously busy or in a hurry.

7. Maintain straight-on eye contact with whom you are speaking. Your eyes lowered communicates disinterest. Your eyes raised communicates impatience or boredom. Your eyes at one side or another communicates distraction.

8. Never apologise for something you know or are actually proud of. Never discount the importance of your own knowledge or feelings (eg 'Well, I really don't know anything about that ... but ...').

9. Never launch into a long story unless you are certain you would be interested if everyone else told you an equally lengthy story about which you knew nothing.

10. Put some energy behind your words. Communicate enthusiasm about the process of conversing.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Perhaps if we conversed more and regularly, our relationships would be enriched and rewarding. Let's resurrect the lost art of conversation and the bonds of friendship might just be renewed. After all, the world could do so much better with a lot more friendships.

1. Elocution is defined as something which enables people to
   a) communicate with others.
   b) pronounce clearly.
   c) speak loudly.

2.Nowadays parents
   a) spend too much time watching TV.
   b) never praise their children.
   c) don't tell their children why something is wrong.

3. Talking about yourself to others will
   a) make them feel uncomfortable.
   b) be very boring.
   c) make relationships stronger.

4. According to the writer, you should not
   a) think about your answer while the other person is talking.
   b) ignore people who keep interrupting.
   c) stop a conversation if you are in a hurry.

5. A person looking up while listening
   a) is thinking about something else.
   b) wants the speaker to stop.
   c) has no views on the topic of conversation.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

LIVEWORKSHEETS