

Main Idea of a Passage **

Trim. #: _____

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I. DIRECTIONS: Read the passages, then choose the correct answer.

1. Read the passage.

Publishing *Doctor Zhivago*

Boris Pasternak's 1956 novel *Doctor Zhivago* tells the story of a Russian doctor living at the time of the 1917 Russian Revolution, which led to the establishment of the Soviet Union. Because the book dealt with hardships people faced after the revolution, publishers in the Soviet Union refused to release it, calling it anti-Soviet. Pasternak's solution was to have the book smuggled out of the Soviet Union and published in Europe. Though Soviet authorities tried to prevent it, the book was published in Italy in 1957 and was immediately well-received. In 1958, it was translated into English and went on to become one of the most popular novels of the 1950s.

What is the main idea of the passage?

Boris Pasternak couldn't get his book *Doctor Zhivago* published in the Soviet Union, so he had the book smuggled out of the country.

Doctor Zhivago showed the problems that Russians faced following the Russian Revolution, so it was considered anti-Soviet.

2. Read the passage.

The Importance of Japan's Cherry Blossoms

In the northeastern United States, autumn is particularly colorful. Leaves change from green to red and orange, and many Americans take scenic fall foliage trips. In Japan, a similar phenomenon takes place in the spring. Cherry trees erupt in a shower of pink, and the entire country celebrates the arrival of *sakura*, or cherry blossoms. Though autumn leaves are admired in the United States, they are seen as just a pretty seasonal display. In Japan, on the other hand, cherry blossoms have much greater significance; the flowers are deeply rooted in Japan's culture and philosophy. Since as far back as the eighth century, *sakura* have symbolized change and beauty, new beginnings, and the circle of life. The blossoms have been celebrated in Japanese paintings, poems, and tea ceremonies for centuries.

What is the main idea of the passage?

Japan's spring cherry blossoms often serve as symbols of change or new beginnings in works of Japanese art or literature.

Americans appreciate the colorful leaves of fall, but the Japanese view the cherry blossoms of spring as part of their culture.

3. Read the passage.

The Evolving Human Skeleton

Our early ancestors were hunter-gatherers who obtained food by hunting and by searching for edible wild plants. They needed strong bones, including large, strong jaws that enabled them to eat tough, uncooked foods. When our ancestors developed agriculture, however, their diet changed. They began growing plants, such as grains and beans, and raising animals for food; they also started cooking their foods, making them softer and easier to chew. Consequently, the human skeleton underwent radical changes. Over time, the human jaw became smaller and changed shape. Other bones also evolved, becoming lighter, especially in the joints, as result of both dietary changes and a less active lifestyle.

What is the main idea of the passage?

Early humans ate uncooked meats and vegetables, so they needed strong jaws for chewing.

As early humans developed agriculture, their bones changed significantly.

4. Read the passage.

Eat Carrots, See Better?

Carrots contain high amounts of vitamin A and are good for general eye health. However, carrots will not improve night vision. That myth goes back to British propaganda during World War II. In 1940, the German *Luftwaffe*, or air force, began bombing Britain at night. In response, the British government ordered people to turn off their lights; the government wanted to make it difficult for German pilots to hit their targets. A new technology, radar, allowed the British air force to track and shoot down the German planes without light. To keep the technology secret, the government told the media that their pilots could see the German planes because they consumed so many carrots. Consequently, people began to believe that eating carrots would help them see better in the dark.

What is the main idea of the passage?

Because of a British media campaign, people thought that eating carrots would improve their night vision.

During World War II, the British government told the media that their pilots ate a lot of carrots.

5. Read the passage.

When *Heidi* Transformed Televised Football

On November 17, 1968, football fans across the United States sat glued to their televisions. A close game between two top teams—the New York Jets and the Oakland Raiders—was being broadcast. When the Jets pulled ahead with only fifty seconds remaining, viewers went wild. But then, just as the Raiders were bringing the ball across midfield, the game disappeared from the screen! In its place, a previously scheduled children's movie, *Heidi*, started playing. Callers flooded the TV network's phone lines, but it was too late. The Raiders scored two touchdowns in the very final moments—touchdowns that were unseen by all but West Coast viewers. As a result of the interrupted event, dubbed "the Heidi game," television networks began delaying their regularly scheduled programs until football games had ended.

What is the main idea of the passage?

After *Heidi* interrupted a crucial moment during a televised football game, networks began to delay regularly scheduled shows until football games were over.

After *Heidi* interrupted a crucial moment during a televised football game, the TV network received numerous calls from angry viewers who were unable to watch the final moments of the game.

6. Read the passage.

AC vs. DC

In the 1880s, the War of the Currents began. Thomas Edison developed direct current, or DC, a type of electricity that flows in one direction. By 1887, DC was in use around the United States. It had some drawbacks, though. Converting it to lower or higher voltages was difficult; that is, the current's force couldn't be changed easily. Transmitted at the low voltage needed for use in homes and businesses, it lost power after traveling only a mile. Meanwhile, Nikola Tesla was working with alternating current, or AC. AC reverses direction many times per second and can be changed to different voltages. At high voltage, it can be transmitted efficiently, traveling hundreds of miles with little energy loss. Because of its advantages, AC triumphed by the end of the nineteenth century.

What is the main idea of the passage?

AC reverses direction and can be converted to lower or higher voltage.

AC has distinct advantages over DC, so AC won the War of the Currents.