Student Name: _____

Class: _____ **Date:** _____

MINDSET FOR IELTS 2

UNIT 2: LEISURE & RECREATION

Reading

Exercise 1: Read the passage.

Fashion Victim

By 1830, wallpaper production had risen to over a million rolls in the UK and it continued to increase to 30 million a year by 1870. Other synthetic alternatives had appeared by Scheele's green remained popular with designers, despite the many warning signs. At a formal meal held by the military in London in the 1850s, the table decorations were leaves made from sugar paste and coloured with Scheele's green. Many of the guests took the attractive leaves home for their children, and several deaths then followed. The event prompted The Times newspaper to start an investigation in the 1860s. They ran a series of articles once they had gathered anecdotal evidence that children sleeping in bedrooms painted with arsenic green had a tendency to get suck and even die at rates far higher than the average child.

The famous designer, William Morris, used poisoned paint in his wallpaper. His patterns were popular and are still influential today, which means that small pieces of his wallpaper have survived and can be tested. One piece dating back to 1864 clearly contained the naturally occurring poison, arsenic. Morris himself commented on the arguments against Scheele's green at the time, but Scheele's green was made from natural minerals, and he disliked the new 'synthetic dyes' that were being produced. The arguments that his paints were poisonous were, he said, not worth wasting time on.

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Natural paints, made with mineral products, were more beautiful, and that was all that mattered, in Morris' view.

Although the majority of deaths from wallpaper poisoning went unnoticed, there was one very famous victim, famous enough to leave evidence of the cause of his death centuries later. Napoleon Bonaparte had been imprisoned on the island of St Helena, after losing the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. He lived there just a few short years more before his mysterious death in 1821. Although technically in a prison, he was kept in a comfortable room in luxury. He was said to have died naturally of cancer, though few people believed that story. Many suggested that he had been murdered by the British government, keen on prevent him from coming to power again.

The debate appeared to be resolved in 1955, when a diary was made public. The owner of the diary, a servant who attended Napoleon for his six-year imprisonment, described the slow and painful death the former leader went through. Modern scientists reading the description immediately identified arsenic poisoning as the most likely cause, pointing to a strong case for murder. The fact that Napoleon's body was remarkably well preserved when it was eventually moved in 1840 also confirmed their theory. But was it intentional? A third theory emerged, with the sale of a piece of wallpaper from the emperor's bedroom in the last few years. It had survived because it had been used to wrap an important book, and was large enough to still contain the evidence scientists needed to confirm where the poison was coming from. The tests proved without doubt that the wallpaper, like many others of its day, contained arsenic in the design. With the emperor having spent years locked up in a room with this wallpaper, it was a sign of his strength that he survived so long. Fashion in home decoration has never had such a famous victim.

Choose the appropriate letters A, B or C.

1. The Time newspaper warned of the dangers when

A. the green was added to children's sweets.

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B. the colour was linked to unexplained deaths.

C. the guests invited to a special dinner were all poisoned.

D. the demand for sale wallpaper grew too great.

2. The designer William Morris ignored the problem because he

A. had commercial reasons to hide the truth.

B. refused to use artificial colours in his work.

C. preferred the latest paints to old-fashioned ones.

D. felt confident that his paint met safety standards.

3. Why does Napoleon Bonaparte's death stand out from other deaths at the time?

A. It was the first time that wallpaper was linked to cancer.

B. It was caused by the unfair conditions he was kept in.

C. It was politically important to prove that his death was natural.

D. It was possible afterwards to connect his death to arsenic poisoning.

4. What evidence for Napoleon Bonaparte's poisoning appeared most recently?

A. a recording of his state of health in the last days of his life

B. the account of the condition of his body months after his death

C. an object that was taken from his room and preserved

D. the description of the way he decorated the room

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Exercise 2:

THE ASSASSIN

a film review

The Assassin, released in January 2015, was the first film in eight years from the Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-Hsien. Hou is known internationally for his serious dramas, with their close attention to artistic detail. His films deal with important events in the history of Taiwan (and occasionally larger China) during the last century, by viewing their impact on individuals or small groups of characters.

The Assassin was the winner of the prize for best director at the Cannes Film Festival, and is a perfect treasure-box of light, texture and movement. All it takes to change the mood of a scene in the film is a piece of silk gently blowing in the wind, and just when you think you've followed, it changes as quickly as its lead character running through a forest of silver-birch trees.

Now, for the first time in his impressive 35-year career, Hou has made a *wuxia*, (a traditional martial-arts[1] film). This genre is one of the basic forms of Hong Kong action cinema, which found fans worldwide through films such as Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and Zhang Yimou's *Hero*. If you've seen men and women with swords bouncing through a bamboo forest, you've seen *wuxia* – yet you've almost certainly never seen it carried out with this degree of sophistication. There's a little forest-bouncing here, but the fight scenes are few and far between. What combat there is looks less like dancing than like Chinese writing, the fighters' bodies turning through the shot like ink-brushes over paper.



1 fighting skills

2 the place where the Emperor, his family, and those who are employed by him live

The plot is based on a seventh-century Chinese folk tale about a female assassin who is given the responsibility of restoring balance to the failing Tang Dynasty court. The actress Shu Qi, a long-time colleague of Hou, plays the assassin Nie Yinniang, who has been trained since the age of ten to be a silent killer for the Imperial Chinese Court[2]. In a brief, black-and-white introduction, she's sent by her tutor to kill two noblemen who have been disloyal. The first, out riding with his servants, is dead almost before Hou's camera can catch up with him. However, after seeing the second playing with his son, Yinniang feels sorry for him and lets him live. Her tutor is very angry, and tells her that next time she should 'first kill the one he loves, then the man himself.'

That next mission, for which the film switches into full colour, tests Yinniang's loyalty to the limit. She is sent to Weibo, the province of her birth, to kill the governor Tian Ji'an (actor Chang Chen), who was also once her intended husband before his father found a more advantageous bride for him. After being warmly welcomed home, Yinniang plots her next move. While secretly watching Tian and his wife (played by Yun Zhou), she discovers a network of plots against the governor. Separately, Yinniang confronts both Tian and his wife in combat – and the latter, carrying a curved knife and wearing a fine golden mask, turns out to have significant martial-arts skills of her own.

The drama mostly plays out in very quiet scenes which are almost like paintings: silk curtains move slightly and then fall, candles glow, fires crackle softly in the grate. Every scene, every camera shot, has been composed with total precision, and designed to have maximum, amazing impact.

Hou uses costumes, props and colours to express the emotions that his cast deliberately hold back. For a western audience these can be hard to interpret, but those pink pomegranate fruits, snow-white peony blossoms and paintings of pine trees in the background aren't just there to look pretty: they are traditional symbols. But you don't have to be educated in Chinese plant symbolism to recognise *The Assassin's* extraordinary beauty. A shot of frightened servants hurrying through the temple outbuildings at night, holding flaming torches, provides a frightening thrill of action, even though it takes place in near silence, while a landscape of a mirror-like lake in the early morning, with mist dancing on its surface and cranes lazily flying overhead, is thrillingly beautiful.

Though *The Assassin* has its roots in action cinema, Hou wants to lower your heart rate, not raise it. The soundtrack rarely gets more complex than a low drum-beat, which could almost be the controlled heartbeat of the assassin. This is a work of strange and clever power, unlike anything else you'll see this year, and an extraordinary return for a very important filmmaker.

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Choose the appropriate letters A, B or C.

1. What does the writer say about Hou Hsiao Hsien's previous work?

A. His films are generally set in the past.

B. His main concern is the factual accuracy of his films.

C. He produces new films very regularly.

D. He focuses on the interaction between social classes.

2. When comparing 'The Assassin' to other martial-art films, what does the writer imply?

A. It is typical of the genre. C. It is a superior wuxia film.

B. It lacks originality. D. It lacks excitement.

3. What do we learn about the film's main character?

A. She is unlike anyone in Chinese mythology.

B. She works for the Chinese emperor.

C. She is completely lacking in pity.

D. She had a conventional childhood.

4. What does Yinniang do in Weibo?

A. She hides her identity. C. She disobeys her olders.

B. She marries a former admirer. D. She fights with two people.

5. According to the writer, which aspect of The Assassin conveys most meaning?

A. the script B. the sound C. the images D. the actor's expressions

6. What is the writer's main reaction to The Assassin?

A. He admires the skill of the director.

B. He finds some aspects of the film confusing.

C. He feels it does not meet the director's usual standards.

D. He appreciates the acting ability.

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