

**Difficulty level:** C1 / advanced

In this part, there is an emphasis on the understanding of a long text, including detail, opinion, tone, purpose, main idea, implication, attitude, and also text organisation features such as exemplification, comparison and reference.

*You are going to read a magazine article about an African film festival. For questions 1-6, choose the answer which you think best fits according to the text.*

## The Sahara Film Festival

After a bumpy 225km drive from a meagre airstrip in Tindouf, south western Algeria, a sprawling single-story town begins to emerge from the desert's dust. As the sun climbs in the cloudless sky, visitors are rewarded with their first glimpse of Dakhla refugee camp. It isn't the most obvious setting for a film festival, but for seven years, just before the glitz and glamour of Cannes, the Sahrawi people of Dakhla have hosted actors and film-makers from around the world for this six-day event. This year, for the first time, direct flights were laid on from London, giving the opportunity for overseas visitors to play a part in this extraordinary occasion. But despite the energy and excitement, the background to the film festival is a serious one, as the Sahrawi people have been living for thirty years in this isolated desert outpost, having been forced to flee their native Western Sahara.

Western Sahara, Africa's last colony, was taken over by Morocco when the Spanish withdrew in 1976, despite a ruling from the International Court of Justice. This was followed by a brutal 16-year war, during which time tens of thousands of Sahrawis fled across the Algerian border to refugee camps. In 1991, a ceasefire agreement was drawn up, in which a referendum on self-determination was promised to decide the fate of the country and its people. However, almost twenty years later, the gears of diplomacy have turned slowly and nothing has happened. Meanwhile the refugees have been left stranded in five refugee camps dotted around the vast, inhospitable desert.

Dakhla, home to nearly 30,000 of these refugees, is the most remote of these camps, being located 175 km from the nearest city. Unlike its namesake, the beautiful coastal city in Western Sahara, this Dakhla has no paved roads and is entirely dependent on outside supplies for food and water. Temperatures regularly top 120 degrees, there is minimal vegetation and there are frequent sandstorms. Locally it is known as the Devil's Garden. Despite these obvious setbacks, the town is clean and well organised, with wide sandy streets. Houses and tents are grouped in neat family compounds. There are hospitals, funded by aid agencies, and a good standard of education. For the duration of the festival, an articulated lorry is parked in the central compound, and a multiplex-sized screen is mounted on its side. Around it are stalls and tents housing workshops and exhibitions.

The aim of the festival is to raise international awareness on the plight of the refugees. However, it also offers a rare chance for the refugees to go to the movies and experience some educational opportunities. It is hoped that it might foster a new generation of Sahrawi film-makers, especially as this year, the festival also celebrated the opening of a permanent film, radio and television school in a neighbouring camp.

The program of films for this year included over forty films from around the world. Films range from international blockbusters to various works on and by the Sahrawi people. The themes mostly centre on experiences of struggle and hope, but there were lighter moments, such as an animated film for the children and a flash of Rachel Weisz's naked bottom during the ancient Egyptian epic *Agora* which proved to be a highlight for many older boys. However, the runaway favourite was 'a Victime', a documentary about Ibrahim Leibeit, a 19-year-old Sahrawi who lost his leg to a land mine last year.

Films are screened at night, so the daytime is taken up with exhibitions, camel races and football matches. One afternoon the London-based charity 'Sandblast' put on a joint workshop with a film-maker, giving refugees the opportunity to learn about filmmaking and create their own video messages. These were put online so that their extended families in Western Sahara, from whom they have been separated for more than 33 years, could watch them. Helen Whitehead, a film-maker from London said, 'Working together really broke down language and cultural barriers. It was very rewarding, and we came across some real talent.'

More than 500 visitors flew into Tindouf on charter planes and braved the rough drive to the settlement. All the visitors to the festival stay with Sahrawi families, sharing their homes and partaking of their food. Living with these displaced people gives overseas participants an invaluable insight into the conditions in which the refugees live. Alongside the film buffs there are real celebrities such as actors Victoria Demayo and Helena Olano. They are mostly B and C listers from the Spanish film industry, although the real stars do take an interest. Director Javier Cardozo was a visitor last year, and Penelope Cruz is a long-term supporter, but pulled out of attending the festival this year at the last minute. Will the celebrity backing make a difference to the plight of the refugees? Possibly. Cardozo's suggestion that the Spanish, as the ex-colonial masters of Western Sahara, were responsible for the situation received significant coverage in the Spanish Media and put some pressure on the government to take some action. However, although the campaign in Spain is growing steadily, the focus of attention cannot only be on the Spanish government.

On the final day of the gathering, there is a dusty red-carpet ceremony in which the White Camel award for best picture is presented to Jordi Ferrer and Paul Vidal for 'El Problema', their 2009 film about Western Sahara. Actors, activists and festival organisers gather on stage in high spirits to show their solidarity with the refugees. But as the stalls are dismantled and the trucks are driven away, the thoughts of the visitors turn to the people they are leaving behind. They may never get the chance to see the world or fulfil their dreams of becoming actors or film-makers. For them, there is nowhere to go. Dakhla is essentially a desert prison.

1 In the first paragraph, the writer emphasises:

- ☐ the enthusiasm that the festival instils
- ☐ the sensational nature of the festival
- ☐ the festival's increasing media attention
- ☐ the festival's unlikely location

2 According to the writer, the refugees have been in the desert for so long because:

- ☐ International agencies do not know they are there
- ☐ the Moroccan government disagree with the UN
- ☐ a proposed vote is yet to take place
- ☐ there is a war in their home country

3 What does the writer say about the original city of Dakhla?

- ☐ It is by the sea.
- ☐ It has good health and educational facilities.
- ☐ It does not have proper roads
- ☐ It gets food and water from aid agencies.

4 What is said about the films shown at the festival?

- ☐ They mostly show the personal experiences of the Sahwari people.
- ☐ All of the films are serious in content.
- ☐ The variety of films suited a wide range of tastes
- ☐ The international films were more popular than the local films

5 What was the British visitors' response to the workshops?

- ☐ They were surprised by the refugee's film knowledge
- ☐ The workshops enabled them to communicate with local people.
- ☐ the workshops taught the visitors a lot about local culture.
- ☐ They showed the local films to their families via the internet.

6 What point does the writer highlight in the final paragraph?

- ☐ There is a contrast between the visitors' freedom and the refugees' confinement
- ☐ The film festival only gives the refugees unattainable dreams
- ☐ The visitors only care about the refugees for the duration of the festival
- ☐ The festival is a poor copy of the more famous film festivals.