

READING EXC 1

Read the text and look at the questions that follow it. In this reading comprehension, the questions are multiple choice.

It was only minus 28 degrees Celsius when we landed in Irkutsk. But that was cold enough to make breathing an effort - the air felt like ice as it scraped the back of my throat. Five minutes later, I needed a second pair of gloves and pulled my scarf tight over my nose and mouth. I was obviously a beginner at this.

At the petrol station, Mikhail the attendant laughed when we asked if he wasn't freezing. He'd spent the whole day outside with no more than his fur hat and a sheepskin coat for warmth. It was mid-afternoon and icicles were hanging from his moustache like Dracula's fangs. He said he never drank to stay warm - unlike many others.

Vodka

There's a belief in Siberia that enough vodka will insulate you from the cold. It's been proved tragically wrong in the past few weeks. Dozens of bodies of the homeless or men walking drunkenly back from the pub were hauled out of the snowdrifts, frozen or so badly frost-bitten that many will never walk again.

The local hospital in Irkutsk is overwhelmed. Ironically, it's the burns unit that's taken all the frostbite victims - 200 of them in just two weeks in one town. Even here, icicles are hanging down on the inside of the windows, though the heating is on full power. The doctor was too busy performing amputations to talk to us.

Shortages

But we could hear the screams from the operating room. They'd run out of anaesthetic after performing 60 amputations that week. The other patients could hear it too, and one girl in the corridor, clinging to her mother for support, was near to tears.

Nastya is only 16. Last week she missed her last bus home, so she walked instead - seven kilometres through the snow, in temperatures of minus 40. She had no gloves. Now her hands are bandaged and hang down uselessly. She'll find out soon if they need to be amputated.

She was far from the worst case. In one bed, Nikolai Dobtsov lay quietly staring at the ceiling. Underneath the sheets, blood was seeping through his bandages, from where his feet and hands had

been amputated the day before. He was a truck driver, he explained, with a good job delivering wood - and recently there'd been a lot of demand. So he'd set out to deliver a last load upcountry. The weather forecast - just minus 25 in Irkutsk - seemed to suggest that the journey was safe. It wasn't. His truck broke down miles from anywhere, and for 6 desperate hours he fought to repair the axle. He even greased his hands for protection, and finally managed to get the truck going again. Somehow he found the strength to drive himself back and straight to hospital, but it was already too late.

I asked Nikolai what would happen to him now. He just laughed, and shrugged. Nikolai has no wife or family in Irkutsk - and invalidity benefit is a pittance. Life in an institution may be the best he can hope for, and he'll almost certainly never work again.

Resilience

That incredible stoicism is everywhere. In Irkutsk at least, people seem simply to accept that winter is harsh - and this one especially so. It is without doubt the cruellest Siberian winter in living memory. Yet outdoors, everything appears to function normally - even schools re-opened as the temperature rose briefly to minus 25.

The trams and buses are back on the roads, though everyone drives slowly to avoid skidding on the layers of ice below the grit. The main street bustles with people wrapped in layers against the cold. But even indoors, the chill is inescapable. After her shift as a tram conductor, Natasha Fillipova comes home to a freezing house. She shows us the bedroom - where ice has built up on the inside walls. She scrapes it off with her fingers, but that has little effect. One night, Natasha says, she washed her hair before going to bed. When she woke up, it was frozen solid to the wall. The children are doing their homework in the bathroom - the only room warm enough to sit in. Natasha doesn't want to complain. But she is angry with the state and the architects for building shoddy houses.

The flats here are supposed to withstand up to minus 40 degrees. They don't, and her children are ill with coughs and colds. Natasha's anger is brief, and she seems faintly embarrassed about it. Siberians are used to cold weather, she explains. Here, she tells us, people prefer to rely on themselves - and the knowledge that eventually, spring will come.

WRITE YOUR ANSWERS IN THE BOXES PROVIDED

1. What do we learn in the opening paragraph?

- A** The author arrived by bus.
- B** The author wasn't accustomed to such cold.
- C** The author wished he had had another pair of gloves.
- D** The author ate some ice when he arrived.



2. What is the local theory about vodka?

☐

A If you drink too much, you may never walk again.

B If you don't drink it, you may lose your legs.

C If you drink it, you may suffer less from the cold.

D You shouldn't drink it if you are old.

3. Which sentence is true about the hospital?

☐

A It is too warm inside.

B They don't have enough supplies and equipment.

C The staff didn't want to talk to the journalist.

D Most frost-bite victims need to have operations.

4. What happened to Nikolai?

☐

A He almost lost his hands.

B He ignored the weather forecast.

C He had a problem with his engine.

D He had had to help himself.

5. Houses in Irkutsk...

☐

A don't have separate bathrooms.

B were built by private companies for profit.

C are too cold if the temperature is less than -40°C.

D cause health problems for their residents.

READING EXERCISE 2

You are going to read an article in which four people comment on a book they have read recently. For questions 1-15, choose from the people A-D. The people may be chosen more than once.

A

Sundance by Teresa Wilson

Kerry:

I really don't know why this book is so popular. I mean, I suppose it is going to appeal to young girls who want danger and romance, but I found this book really tedious. For a start, the characters were really unconvincing. The author went out of her way to add lots of details about the characters, but I found these details really pointless. I thought that some of the facts she presented about the main characters would become significant in some way later in the novel, but they didn't. They were just worthless bits of information. I also was disappointed that, although this book is meant to be about kids at high school, the writer seems to have no recollection at all about what it's like to be 17. The main

character thought and acted like a 32-year old. It just wasn't believable. I'm not saying Teresa Wilson is a bad writer. She can obviously string words together and come up with a story that is appealing to a large number of people, but she lacks anything original. There is no flair. It just uses the same sort of language as you can see in many other mediocre novels.

B

Wild Ways by Margery Emerson

Liz:

I have to say that I won't forget this book for a long time. I was hooked from the very first chapter. The devastating story affected me so much that I don't know if I'll ever feel the same again. I was close to tears on several occasions. I've got images in my brain now that I don't think will ever leave me. It's incredibly well-researched and, although it is fiction, is based on shocking real-life events. I learned an awful lot about things that went on that I never knew before. Margaret Emerson has a brilliant way with words and I really felt real empathy towards the characters, although I was sometimes irritated by the choices they made. However, the parallel story, the part that is set in the present, is not quite so good. I found myself just flicking through that part so that I could get back to 1940s Paris.

C

Orchid by Henry Rathbone

Imogen:

This is a delightful novel full of wonderful imagery, it paints a remarkable picture of life in a distant time and a far-away place. If you're looking to learn about Eastern culture in great detail, then this is probably not the book for you, as the writer skims over most of the more complicated aspects of the country's etiquette. The historical aspects are also not covered in much depth. However, I wonder whether this was the writer's intention. By doing this, he symbolises the superficiality of the girl's life. She, like the book, is beautiful and eager to please, but remains too distant from us, the readers, to teach us much. Although I loved the book and read it in one sitting, the ending was a bit of a disappointment. A story which involves so much turmoil, in a place where the future is uncertain, should not have a happy-ever-after fairy-tale ending.

D

High Hills by Mary Holland

Hannah:

I read this book for a literature class. I know it's a classic, and I did try to like it, but I just didn't get into it. I kept persevering, hoping that I'd start to enjoy it, but no such luck. The famous scene out on the moors was definitely the best bit of the book, but even that I found ridiculous when it is clearly supposed to be passionate. As I approached the end of the book, I figured there must be some kind of moral to the story, something that I would learn from the experience of trudging through seven hundred long pages, but there was nothing worthwhile. I don't know why the literary world sees this book as such a masterpiece. The characters are portrayed as being intelligent, but they do such stupid things! And as for it being a *love* story - marrying someone you don't love and then being abused by them - that doesn't spell love to me.

Which person read a book which...

1. was set in an Oriental country
2. finished in an unrealistic way
3. had characters that the reader could sympathise with
4. is well-known and was written a long time ago
5. contained two stories
6. was not set in the past
7. was historically accurate
8. made the reader cry
9. contained insignificant details
10. has a well-known scene
11. is written for teenagers
12. had unbelievable characters
13. is classed as romantic fiction
14. contains nothing new in the way of writing
15. has an attractive but shallow heroine