Exercise 1

Look at the photos of Ellie Simmonds. Who do you think she is? What might she have taken a gap year from? Read the introduction to the article and check your ideas.

Ellie Simmonds, the Paralympic swimming gold medallist, took a solo trip around the world which tested her spirit and helped her realise how life after swimming might be. Here she describes her experiences.

I love airports. The moment I step into one, I know that I'm heading off on an adventure. Usually, I'm on my way to compete somewhere. For most of my life, I've been focused on my swimming routine: waking at 5.30 a.m. to swim from 6 a.m. until 8 a.m., going straight to school until 3 p.m. and then directly back to the pool to train for two more hours. Through swimming, I get to go to loads of amazing places, but I often see little more than the hotel, the airport and the swimming pool. Just over a year ago, right after the Rio Paralympics, I packed my bag for a different type of trip. I wanted to get away, consider my options for the future and be a normal, anonymous twenty-one-year-old. I visited nine countries over the course of the year, working and backpacking, mainly alone, but also meeting up with friends. Looking back, a few themes emerge.

1 ☐ The first thing that happened on my gap year was that I was upgraded. The charming flight attendants recognised me and moved me to first class for my flight from London to San Francisco. Once there, I just walked and spent my days people-watching. One day in a café, a woman sat down and started telling me all about her son, who had just been jailed. I think my UK accent gave her a sense of privacy. If I was American, she probably wouldn't have opened up to me in the same way. This is one of the privileges of being a traveller: your outsider status gains you access to people's lives.

2 ☐ A few years ago I did a TV documentary in Mozambique about swimming with dolphins and I met the free-diving expert and ocean conservationist, Hanli Prinsloo. This year we went to Mexico together, and swam with whale sharks. A few months later, I met her again in Cape Town and we surfed. I used to be very wary of the sea, and it's only recently – and largely thanks to these experiences – that I stopped feeling afraid.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

3☐ When I was in Thailand on my own, I wandered down back alleys that I probably shouldn't have – it was quite scary. It was wonderful to explore, but I felt like I was jumping into people's lives, and possibly invading their space. I also went to Vietnam with a friend and we took an overnight train. Was that a dangerous thing for two young women to do? That's hard to say, but we didn't run into any problems, except for some very smelly toilets, which we had no choice but to use!

4☐ While I was in Canada, I travelled to Ontario, for the Seventh World Dwarf Games, where I was part of the British football team. We trained for a few days in preparation for the competition, and I'm so glad I did it. If I hadn't gone, I wouldn't have all these new friendships with people from the dwarf community across the world. I met people from India, Russia, America – everywhere.

5☐ I spent more time alone this year than I ever have before, which can be isolating, but it can also help you to realise how friendly the world is. While in Bangkok, a Thai man helped me across the road. I was standing on a street corner and he decided that I needed help to cross the street. Of course, I didn't: I have achondroplasia, a common cause of dwarfism, but I'm perfectly capable of getting about on my own. Still, he was trying to be kind. Neither of us could actually make ourselves understood, but I said 'thank you' and he smiled.

6☐ Visiting schools everywhere from Cape Town to Shanghai, and meeting children wherever I went, has convinced me that I'd like to go into teaching. There's so much pressure on children – from social media, from their peers, from their parents – telling them what they should look like, how they should feel about things. Once I retire from swimming, I'd love to go to university and become a primary school teacher. I'd like to guide children into being comfortable with who they are, and not feel they have to try to change themselves. I have often visited places as an ambassador for Paralympics GB, and I'm really proud of that. But on this trip, I wasn't a gold-medal winner, I was just Ellie, and, to my surprise, that gave me huge confidence. I would recommend a gap year to anyone who wants to learn more about themselves and their place in the world.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Exercise 2

Read the text again and match headings A–F with paragraphs 1–6.

A Taking risks Select an option

B Finding my global community Select an option

C The search for anonymity Select an option

D Finding a new direction Select an option

E Overcoming my fears Select an option

F Learning the kindness of strangers Select an option

Exercise 3

Read the article again and choose the correct answers.

1 What do you think would be the best title for the article?
- How my gap year taught me who I am.
- How I learned to love the sea on my gap year.
- How my gap year helped me become a champion.
- My gap year: a welcome break from fame.

2 What does Ellie say about being a traveller in Paragraph 1?
- Having a foreign accent doesn't help you make friends.
- It's easy for a famous person to travel abroad anonymously.
- Locals are more honest with you because you're a stranger.
- People are curious about you because you are an outsider.

3 How did Ellie feel when the Thai man helped her across the road?
- She was annoyed by his assumptions.
- She was embarrassed by the situation.
- She misunderstood his intentions.
- She understood his reasons.

4 Why does Ellie say she wants to go into teaching?
- Because she loves children and wants to go to university.
- Because she feels she has a valuable lesson to teach children.
- Because she plans to end her swimming career.
- Because that's what her parents want her to do.

5 Why does Ellie refer to herself as 'just Ellie' in Paragraph 6?
- Because she felt more confident of herself after her trip.
- Because she wasn't travelling in connection with her swimming career.
- Because she was travelling alone for most of the trip.
- Because she left her friend in Vietnam.

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Vocabulary extension
Exercise 4

Match the highlighted words from the text with the definitions.

Move

wandered | outsider | wary | emerge | jailed | peers

1 Walked around without a specific purpose. wandered
2 Appear or become known. DRAG ITEM HERE
3 Person who does not belong to a group. DRAG ITEM HERE
4 Put in prison. DRAG ITEM HERE
5 People who are the same age or have the same job/social position, etc. DRAG ITEM HERE
6 Careful because you are worried someone/something may be harmful. DRAG ITEM HERE

Vocabulary extension
Exercise 5

Complete the sentences with the words from Exercise 4.

Move

peers | jailed | wandered | wary | emerge | outsider

1 When I first started at my new school, I felt like an outsider, but now I have lots of friends.
2 The famous singer was DRAG ITEM HERE for two months after being caught avoiding taxes.
3 It's better not to lie because the truth will almost always DRAG ITEM HERE in the end.
4 Teenagers usually choose to spend their free time with their DRAG ITEM HERE.
5 We DRAG ITEM HERE around the affluent part of the city and saw some rather extravagant architecture.
6 Ken is DRAG ITEM HERE of splashing out on designer clothes and shoes.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Vocabulary extension
Exercise 6

Complete the definitions with the correct nouns ending in the suffix *-ist*. Use a dictionary to help you if necessary.

1 A novelist is someone who writes novels.

2 An _____ is someone who holds extreme beliefs.

3 A _____ is someone who is concerned with language and linguistics.

4 A _____ is someone who owns and/or rides a motorcycle.

5 An _____ is someone who is concerned with the economy.

6 A _____ is someone who makes it to the final of a competition.

7 A _____ is someone who believes in the system of capitalism.

8 An _____ is someone who believes in protecting the natural environment.

ACTIVE VOCABULARY | Suffix *-ist*

The suffix *-ist* can be added to certain nouns to describe a person who practises or is concerned with something, or who holds certain beliefs.

- *A **psychiatrist** is someone who practices psychiatry.*
- *A **socialist** is someone who believes in socialism.*
- *A **gold medallist** is someone who has won a gold medal.*

Complete the sentences with *chance, luck, opportunity* or *risk*.

Keyboard instructions

Move

risk | opportunity | chance | luck

1 Base jumping is not worth the risk in my opinion.

2 Your mum and I met by DRAG ITEM HERE at a friend's party.

3 Finding a parking space so easily was a real piece of DRAG ITEM HERE.

4 Given the DRAG ITEM HERE, what would you like to do as a career?

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