5 **Identifying topic, main ideas and details** Read each paragraph and answer the questions that follow. Then combine the answers to express the main idea of each paragraph. Answers for paragraph A are given as examples.

Personality: Nature or Nurture?

A The nature/nurture question is not a new one. Its roots go back at least several hundred years. In the 1600s, the British philosopher John Locke wrote that a newborn infant was a "blank slate" on which his or her education and experience would be "written." In other words, Locke believed that environment alone determined each person's identity. In the 1700s, the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau claimed that "natural" characteristics were more important. Today, we realize that both play a role. The question now is, to what degree? To answer this question, researchers are studying identical twins, especially those who grew up in different environments.

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1. What is the main topic of paragraph A?
   - **A** John Locke
   - **B** Jean Jacques Rousseau
   - **C** newborn infants
   - **D** the nature/nurture question
   - **E** identical twins
2. What details about the topic does the paragraph provide? (Choose more than one answer.)
   - **A** People have just recently begun to discuss the nature/nurture question.
   - **B** John Locke believed in "nurture."
   - **C** Jean Jacques Rousseau believed in "nature."
   - **D** Today, we know that both nature and nurture determine a person's identity.
   - **E** Researchers are studying identical twins to learn the degree to which nature and nurture determine personal characteristics.
3. The main idea of the paragraph is that *both nature and nurture play a role in determining a person's identity, but the question is to what degree.*

B Jim Lewis and Jim Springer are identical twins who were separated five weeks after birth. They grew up in different families and didn't know about each other's existence. They were reunited at the age of 39. It is not surprising that they were physically alike – the same dark hair, the same height and weight. They both had high blood pressure and very bad headaches. But they also moved in the same way and made the same gestures. They both hated baseball. They both drank the same brand of coffee, drove the same make of car, and spent their vacations on the same small beach in Florida. They had both married women named Linda, gotten divorced, and then married women named Betty. Studies of these and other separated twins indicate that genetics (biology) plays a significant role in determining personal characteristics and behavior.

1. What is the main topic of paragraph B?
   - **A** a reunion
   - **B** twins
   - **C** similarities in twins who grew up in different environments
   - **D** genetics
   - **E** personal characteristics and behavior
2. What details about the topic does the paragraph provide? (Choose more than one answer.)
   - **A** Jim Lewis and Jim Springer were identical twins who grew up together.
   - **B** Jim Lewis and Jim Springer were identical twins who grew up separately.
   - **C** They have similar physical characteristics, interests, and preferences for specific products.
   - **D** They married twin sisters.
   - **E** Their example indicates the significance of genetics in determination of identity.
3. The main idea of the paragraph is that _____.

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C Various research centers are studying identical twins in order to discover the "heritability" of behavioral characteristics – that is, the degree to which a trait is due to genes ("nature") instead of environment. They have reached some surprising conclusions. One study found, for example, that optimism and pessimism are both very much influenced by genes, but only optimism is affected by environment, too. According to another study, genes influence our coffee consumption, but not consumption of tea. Anxiety (nervousness and worry) seems to be 40 to 50 percent heritable. Another study tells us that happiness does not depend much on money or love or professional success; instead, it is 80 percent heritable! Among the traits that appear to be largely heritable are shyness, attraction to danger (thrill seeking), choice of career, and religious belief.

1. What is the main topic of paragraph C?
   - **A** research centers
   - **B** optimism and pessimism
   - **C** behavioral characteristics
   - **D** happiness
   - **E** heritability of behavioral characteristics
2. What details about the topic does the paragraph provide? (Choose more than one answer.)
   - **A** Researchers want to understand "heritability."
   - **B** Researchers are studying identical twins.
   - **C** Most behavioral characteristics are the result of genes, not environment.
   - **D** A person who has money, love, and success will probably be happy.
   - **E** Examples of characteristics that are heritable to some degree are optimism, pessimism, happiness, thrill seeking, and choice of career.
3. The main idea of the paragraph is that _____.

D It is not easy to discover the genes that influence personality. The acid that carries genetic information in every human cell, DNA, contains just four chemicals: adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine. But a single gene is "spelled out" by perhaps a million combinations. As the Human Genome Project (which provided a "map" of human genes) was almost complete in the spring of 2000, there were a number of newspaper headlines about specific discoveries: Gene Linked to Anxiety and Thrill Seeking Due to Genetics. The newspaper articles led people to believe that a single gene is responsible for a certain personality trait, in the same way a single gene can be responsible for a physical characteristic or disease. However, one gene alone cannot cause people to become anxious or thrill seeking. Instead, many genes work together, and they direct the combination of chemicals in the body. These chemicals, such as dopamine and serotonin (which affect a person's mood), have a significant influence on personality.

1. What is the main topic of paragraph D?
   - **A** the Human Genome Project
   - **B** the effect of genes on personality
   - **C** chemicals
   - **D** DNA
   - **E** thrill seeking
2. What details about the topic does the paragraph provide? (Choose more than one answer.)
   - **A** It's difficult to find out which genes influence personality.
   - **B** A single gene is responsible for each personality trait such as thrill seeking.
   - **C** Many genes work together.
   - **D** Genes direct the combination of chemicals in the body.
   - **E** Chemicals have a significant influence on personality.
3. The main idea of the paragraph is that _____.

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E If, indeed, personality traits are, on average, about 50 percent heritable, then environment still plays an important role. Unlike other animals, human beings have choice. If our genes "program" us to be anxious, we can choose a low-stress lifestyle or choose to meditate or do relaxation exercises. But because of the powerful influence of genes, most psychologists believe that there is a limit to what we can choose to do. Thomas Bouchard, a psychologist and the director of one twin study, says that parents should not push children in directions that go against their nature. "The job of a parent," he says, "is to look for a kid's natural talents and then provide the best possible environment for them."

1. What is the main topic of paragraph E?
   - **A** the role of environment
   - **B** personality traits
   - **C** anxiety
   - **D** psychologists
   - **E** parenting
2. What details about the topic does the paragraph provide? (Choose more than one answer.)
   - **A** Environment still plays an important role.
   - **B** Human beings have choice.
   - **C** Human beings can choose to do anything they want.
   - **D** Psychologists say that parents should not push children against their nature.
   - **E** Parents should provide their child with the best environment for the child's natural talents.
3. The main idea of the paragraph is that _____.

Write (T) if the statement is true or (F) if the statement is False:

1. _____ The philosophical question of nature/nurture is an old one.
2. _____ The environments in which Jim Springer and Jim Lewis grew up had no effect on their behaviors or personalities.
3. _____ The goal of twin studies is to identify the amount of influence from genes, and the amount from education and experiences, that determine our identity.
4. _____ The possibility of being happy is mostly a result of our genes, not our situations in life.
5. _____ A single gene determines each personality characteristic.
6. _____ The genetic contribution to personality is complicated.
7. _____ Human beings are able to change their family genetics.

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