Endangered languages?

English is an international language spoken by an increasing number of people around the world. In many English-speaking countries though, English isn't the only language. In the UK, for example, people speak Welsh, Gaelic and a few other old languages. Because these languages aren't international, people pay less attention to them. So what does this mean for children who grow up speaking them as their mother tongue?

I grew up in Wales. My family spoke English, but the Welsh language was everywhere. When you were driving around Wales, all the road signs were in English and Welsh. As a child, I hated reading everything twice! We had Welsh television programmes too. While everyone in England was watching fashionable American TV shows, we were learning about local farming in Welsh! At secondary school I was dreaming of going to live in Paris, when I realised that instead of Welsh lessons, I needed French lessons. No one spoke Welsh outside Wales. Now I'm older I feel differently. Welsh is a part of my identity and, besides, we have better Welsh TV now!

In parts of Scotland some children grow up in families where grandparents still speak Gaelic. Gaelic has even fewer speakers than Welsh, and few are confident that this part of their culture will survive. It's difficult when English is everywhere else in the country, but teaching subjects in Gaelic in schools helps. However, often there aren't enough Gaelic-speaking teachers. Unless families continue to speak the language at home too, these languages won't survive.

In fact, many old languages are disappearing in the UK. People on the Isle of Man spoke Manx for centuries until the last native speaker died in the twentieth century. The same thing has happened to Cornish. Cant was a language spoken by smugglers who were bringing goods into the country illegally, or travellers and criminals. It allowed them to keep secrets from the police but it too has disappeared. Languages, even if they are spoken by very few people, have a history and culture, and it's a shame to see them go. If we care about saving forests and animals, we should care about saving languages, too.

7 e Read the article again. For each question, choose the correct answer.

1 What does the writer say about English in the first paragraph?
- **A** It is the most popular language in the world.
- **B** It is one of several British languages.
- **C** It will become more important than it is now.
- **D** It has been replaced by other languages.

2 How did the writer feel about Welsh when he was younger?
- **A** annoyed about the quality of Welsh programmes
- **B** angry because he had to translate all the time
- **C** confused about when to use the two languages
- **D** disappointed because he had to learn a third language

3 What does the writer say about Gaelic speakers?
- **A** They find it hard to talk to relatives.
- **B** Many choose to stop speaking the language.
- **C** They understand that English matters more.
- **D** Too few speakers train in the field of education.

4 The writer mentions 'smugglers' Cant'
- **A** because it was frequently used in the past.
- **B** to show that languages have already been lost.
- **C** because it was a good thing that it died out.
- **D** to suggest how some languages can be saved.

5 What would the writer be most likely to say?
- **A** Children need to learn languages they can use internationally.
- **B** There should be more support for languages in danger.
- **C** English may possibly die out too one day.
- **D** Entertainment is the best hope for saving languages.

LIVEWORKSHEETS