

READING PRACTICE 7-FULL TEST

READING PASSAGE 3

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 27–40, which are based on Reading Passage 3 below.

RETHINKING THE PAST

1. It is by now a truism that the story of human evolution is being rethought. Discoveries have come thick and fast over the last decade or so, and these have forced us to rethink many crucial points, such as how old our species is – about 300,000 years old as opposed to 200,000 – and what extinct hominins, such as our cousins the Neanderthals, were really like. But because there are so many species and eras involved, it's hard to discern the common threads linking them.

2. However, I do think it's possible to draw out some overall messages from the blizzard of archaeological finds in recent years. Two things stand out to me. One is the growing evidence that many supposedly 'advanced' behaviours, such as architecture and art, can be traced much further back in time than we thought, often to hominin species that existed before modern humans. And the other is that we have badly misunderstood gender roles in prehistoric societies, imposing patriarchal values onto cultures that had very different ideas about how women should behave.

3. Let's start with architecture. At Kalambo Falls in Zambia, researchers found buried logs that had been shaped with stone tools so that they interlocked. They seem to have once been part of a larger structure, perhaps a building. This would be unsurprising if they weren't 476,000 years old. That's almost 200,000 years before our species, *Homo sapiens*, evolved. Extinct hominins also managed to settle in extreme places. For instance, we now know that extinct hominins such as the Denisovans lived on the frozen heights of high-altitude regions 200,000 years ago – upending the old notion that such environments were only settled by modern humans around 3,600 years ago.

4. Art also seems to have been invented by older hominins. We have had evidence for a long time now that Neanderthals painted on cave walls. Even earlier species, such as *Homo erectus*, may also have made art, for example by engraving patterns on shells. By far the most contentious claim in this area is that *Homo naledi* made art. *H. naledi* lived around 250,000 years ago, making it a contemporary of our species. However, it had quite a small brain, typical of older hominins – and was therefore, according to palaeoanthropological dogma, incapable of complex behaviours. Nevertheless, in the Rising Star cave system in South Africa where the *H. naledi* remains were found, researchers have found what seem to be etchings – resembling rudimentary artwork – on the cave walls, though these have yet to be firmly dated.

5. To say these claims about *H. naledi* are controversial is to understate the situation. Many experts say the evidence presented so far is completely inadequate to support them. The dispute has only been heightened by the way the results were released, in a non-traditional journal that publishes peer reviews publicly alongside the paper. My views on the *H. naledi* controversy are complicated. I do think more evidence is needed: in particular with regard to the dating of the etchings. At the same time, I think the species' small brains are a distraction. Palaeoanthropologists got fixated on brain size because it was what they could see: if what you have is skeletons, then all you know about brains are their shapes and sizes. But other properties, such as the brain's internal wiring, are surely equally important and may explain how a species like *H. naledi* might have been capable of complex behaviours, despite their small brains.

6. In a sense, we shouldn't be surprised that so many of these behaviours had their origins in older, extinct hominins. Evolution usually works by incremental steps and so does technology. The first birds weren't great at flying, and the first mobile phones weren't great at, well, anything really. The idea that there was a sudden explosion of intelligence and creativity at some point in our evolution isn't inherently ridiculous: sometimes a system hits a tipping point and undergoes runaway change. But there was never that much evidence that human evolution worked this way. Instead, it seems the Neanderthals and many others all walked so we could run.

7. One way or another, the *H. naledi* story is going to be an example of letting our preconceptions get in the way of the evidence. The same is true for our ideas about gender in prehistory. Archaeology was invented by individuals with now unfashionably patriarchal views about gender, and those notions fed into their research. Today's researchers are trying to unpick this stuff, and there have been some significant steps in recent years.

8. Perhaps the most dramatic was the demolition of 'Man the Hunter'. This was the idea, promoted for decades, that in most prehistoric societies the men went out to hunt and the women looked after the home. However, a meta-analysis published in June 2023 compiled data on several dozen foraging societies and found women hunted in 80 per cent of them. In line with this, it emerged that an ancient spear-throwing tool called an atlatl enables women to launch projectiles at the same speed as men. We have also seen growing evidence of women occupying positions of authority in ancient societies. The Viking queen Thyra may have helped unify Denmark in the 900s. Going further back, an Iberian leader from around 4000 years ago turned out to be female, not male as many had assumed, when proteins in her teeth were analysed.

9. It seems that the more we find out about past societies, the more our preconceptions about the ways society 'has to be' turn out to be wrong. Inequality, authoritarianism and patriarchy aren't inevitable. They're choices, and prehistory shows us that we can choose differently.

Questions 27-30. Choose the correct letter, **A, B, C or D**.

Write the correct letter in boxes 27-30 on your answer sheet.

- 27** What is the writer doing in the second paragraph?
A pinpointing some key changes in our understanding of prehistory
B outlining some aspects of prehistory which are still poorly understood
C summarising some attitudes towards recent archaeological revelations
D giving an overview of some current disagreements among archaeologists
- 28** In the sixth paragraph, the writer mentions mobile phones to make the point that
A most developments happen in a gradual way.
B innovation can come from a variety of sources.
C not all technological advancements are positive.
D the path of evolution can often be unpredictable.
- 29** In the seventh paragraph, the phrase 'unpick this stuff' refers to the task of
A assessing the impact of certain recent research findings.
B questioning the authenticity of evidence used in earlier research.
C conducting research into how prehistoric societies were organised.
D reevaluating research influenced by outdated beliefs about society.
- 30** What does the writer suggest in the final paragraph?
A Studying past societies could help us create a fairer society today.
B We should not judge past societies by the standards of modern society.
C We still have much to learn about how societies have evolved over history.
D There is more than one way to interpret evidence about societies in prehistoric times.

Questions 31-34. Complete each sentence with the correct ending, **A-F**, below.

Write the correct letter, **A-F**, in boxes 31-34 on your answer sheet.

- 31** The findings at Kalambo Falls revealed that
32 Evidence from high-altitude regions suggests that
33 An academic publication from June 2023 shows that
34 Analysis of a 4000-year-old Iberian leader indicates that
- A** *Homo sapiens* emerged at an earlier point in time than experts previously believed.
B previous assumptions about who had power in the prehistoric world were inaccurate.
C gender roles in extinct hominin species were different from those in *Homo sapiens* societies.
D experts may have been mistaken about who looked for food in early human communities.
E *Homo sapiens* was probably not the only species capable of sophisticated workmanship.
F other species managed to survive in harsh environments before the arrival of *Homo sapiens*.

Questions 35-40

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer in Reading Passage 3?

In boxes 35-40 on your answer sheet, write

YES if the statement agrees with the views of the writer

NO if the statement contradicts the views of the writer

NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

- 35** It seems likely that the Neanderthals' cave paintings were the first examples of artwork ever created.
- 36** It is very rare to find prehistoric artwork carved onto shells.
- 37** The methods which the researchers used to examine the Rising Star cave system were rather unconventional.
- 38** It is unclear how old the etchings in the Rising Star cave system are.
- 39** The means used to publicise the findings from the Rising Star cave system added to the controversy that surrounds them.
- 40** The size of *H. naledi* brains is a key factor in the question of whether these hominins were able to produce art.