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Academic Reading Practice Test 39

READING PASSAGE 1 Questions 1 - 13
You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 1 – 13 which are based on Reading Passage 1 below.

Ambergris

What is it and where does it come from?

Ambergris was used to perfume cosmetics in the days of ancient Mesopotamia and almost every civilization on the earth has a brush with Ambergris. Before 1,000 AD, the Chinese names ambergris as *lung sien hiang,* "dragon's spittle perfume," as they think that it was produced from the drooling of dragons sleeping on rocks at the edge of a sea. The Arabs knew ambergris as *anbar* who believed that it is produced from springs near seas. It also gets its name from here. For centuries, this substance has also been used as a flavouring for food.

During the Middle Ages, Europeans used ambergris as a remedy for headaches, colds, epilepsy, and other ailments. In the 1851 whaling novel *Moby-Dick,* Herman Melville claimed that ambergris was "largely used in perfumery." But nobody ever knew where it really came from. Experts were still guessing its origin thousands of years later, until the long ages of guesswork ended in the 1720's, when Nantucket whalers found gobs of the costly material inside the stomachs of sperm whales. Industrial whaling quickly burgeoned. By 20th century ambergris is mainly recovered from inside the carcasses of sperm whales.

Through countless ages, people have found pieces of ambergris on sandy beaches. It was named *grey amber* to distinguish it from golden amber, another rare treasure. Both of them were among **the** most sought-after substances in the world, almost as valuable as gold. (Ambergris sells for roughly $20 a gram, slightly less than gold at $30 a gram.) Amber floats in salt water, and in old times the origin of both these substances was mysterious. But it turned out that amber and ambergris have little in common. Amber is a fossilized resin from trees that was quite familiar to Europeans long before the discovery of the New World, and prized for jewelry Although considered a gem, amber is a hard, transparent, wholly-organic material derived from the resin of extinct species of trees, mainly pines.

To the earliest Western chroniclers, ambergris was variously thought to come from the same bituminous sea founts as amber, from the sperm of fishes or whales, from the droppings of strange sea birds (probably because of confusion over the included beaks of squid) or from the large hives of bees living near the sea. Marco Polo was the first Western chronicler who correctly attributed ambergris to sperm whales and its vomit.

As sperm whales navigate in the oceans, they often dive down to 2 km or more below the sea level to prey on squid, most famously the Giant Squid. It's commonly accepted that ambergris forms in the whale's gut or intestines as the creature attempts to "deal" with squid beaks. Sperm whales are rather partial to squid, but seemingly struggle to digest the hard, sharp, parrot-like beaks. It is thought their stomach juices become hyperactive trying to process the irritants, and eventually hard, resinous lumps are formed around the beaks, and then expelled from their innards by vomiting. When a whale initially vomits up ambergris, it is soft and has a terrible smell. Some marine biologists compare it to the unpleasant smell of cow dung. But after floating on the salty ocean for about a decade, the substance hardens with air and sun into a smooth, waxy, usually rounded piece of nostril heaven. The dung smell is gone, replaced by a sweet, smooth, musky and pleasant earthy aroma.

Since ambergris is derived from animals, naturally a question of ethics arises, and in the case of ambergris, it is very important to consider. Sperm whales are an endangered species, whose populations started to decline as far back as the 19th century due to the high demand for their highly emollient oil, and today their stocks still have not recovered. During the 1970's, the *Save the Whales* movement brought the plight of whales to international recognition. Many people now believe that whales are "saved". This couldn't be further from the truth. All around the world, whaling still exists. Many countries continue to hunt whales, in spite of international treaties to protect them. Many marine researchers are concerned that even the trade in naturally found ambergris can be harmful by creating further incentives to hunt whales for this valuable substance.

One of the forms ambergris is used today is as a valuable fixative in perfumes to enhance and prolong the scent. But nowadays, since ambergris is rare and expensive, and big fragrance suppliers that make most of the fragrances on the market today do not deal in it for reasons of cost, availability and murky legal issues, most perfumeries prefer to add a chemical derivative which mimics the properties of ambergris. As a fragrance consumer, you can assume that there is no natural ambergris in your perfume bottle, unless the company advertises this fact and unless you own vintage fragrances created before the 1980s. If you are wondering if you have been wearing a perfume with this legendary ingredient, you may want to review your scent collection. Here are a few of some of the top ambergris containing perfumes: Givenchy Amarige, Chanel No. 5, and Gucci Guilty.

Questions 1-6

Classify the following information as referring to

A ambergris only
B amber only
C both ambergris and amber
D neither ambergris nor amber

Write the correct letter, A, B, C, or D in boxes 1-6 on your answer sheet.

1. being expensive
2. adds flavor to food
3. used as currency
4. being see-through
5. referred to by Herman Melville
6. produces sweet smell

Questions 7-9

Complete the sentences below with NO MORE THAN ONE WORD from the passage. Write your answers in boxes 7-9 on your answer sheet.

7 Sperm whales can't digest the ___of the squids.
8 Sperm whales drive the irritants out of their intestines by __.
9 The vomit of sperm whale gradually _____on contact of air before having pleasant smell.

Questions 10-13

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage 1?
In boxes 10-13 on your answer sheet, write

TRUE *if the statement agrees with the information*
FALSE *if the statement contradicts the information*
NOT GIVEN *if there is no information on this*

10 Most ambergris comes from the dead whales today.
11 Ambergris is becoming more expensive than before.
12 Ambergris is still a popular ingredient in perfume production today.
13 New uses of ambergris have been discovered recently.

READING PASSAGE 2 Questions 14 - 26
You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 14 – 26 which are based on Reading Passage 2 on the following pages.

Questions 14-20

Reading passage 2 has seven paragraphs, A-G. *Choose the correct heading for each paragraph from the list of headings below. Write the correct number, i-xi, in boxes 14-20 on your answer sheet.*

List of Headings

i. Why better food helps students' learning
ii. Becoming the headmaster of Msekeni
iii. Surprising use of school premises
iv. Global perspective
v. Why students were undernourished
vi. Surprising academic outcome
vii. An innovative program to help girls
viii. How food program is operated
ix. How food program affects school attendance
x. None of the usual reasons
xi. How to maintain academic standard

14 Paragraph A
15 Paragraph B
16 Paragraph C
17 Paragraph D
18 Paragraph E
19 Paragraph F
20 Paragraph G

Tackling Hunger in Msekeni

A. There are not enough classrooms at the Msekeni primary school, so half the lessons take place in the shade of yellow-blossomed acacia trees. Given this shortage, it might seem odd that one of the school's purpose-built classrooms has been emptied of pupils and turned into a storeroom for sacks of grain. But it makes sense. Food matters more than shelter.

B. Msekeni is in one of the poorer parts of Malawi, a landlocked southern African country of exceptional beauty and great poverty. No war lays waste Malawi, nor is the land unusually crowded or infertile, but Malawians still have trouble finding enough to eat. Half of the children under five are underfed to the point of stunting. Hunger blights most aspects of Malawian life, so the country is as good a place as any to investigate how nutrition affects development, and vice versa.

C. The headmaster at Msekeni, Bernard Kumanda, has strong views on the subject. He thinks food is a priceless teaching aid. Since 1999, his pupils have received free school lunches. Donors such as the World Food Programme (WFP) provide the food: those sacks of grain (mostly mixed maize and soyabean flour, enriched with vitamin A) in that converted classroom. Local volunteers do the cooking—turning the dry ingredients into a bland but nutritious slop, and spooning it out on to plastic plates. The children line up in large crowds, cheerfully singing a song called "We are getting porridge".

D. When the school's feeding programme was introduced, enrolment at Msekeni doubled. Some of the new pupils had switched from nearby schools that did not give out free porridge, but most were children whose families had previously kept them at home to work. These families were so poor that the long-term benefits of education seemed unattractive when set against the short-term gain of sending children out to gather fire-wood or help in the fields. One plate of porridge a day completely altered the calculation. A child fed at school will not howl so plaintively for food at home. Girls, who are more likely than boys to be kept out of school, are given extra snacks to take home.

E. When a school takes in a horde of extra students from the poorest homes, you would expect standards to drop. Anywhere in the world, poor kids tend to perform worse than their better-off classmates. When the influx of new pupils is not accompanied by any increase in the number of teachers, as was the case at Msekeni, you would expect standards to fall even further. But they have not. Pass
rates at Msekeni improved dramatically, from 30% to 85%. Although this was an exceptional example, the nationwide results of school feeding programmes were still pretty good. On average, after a Malawian school started handing out free food it attracted 38% more girls and 24% more boys. The pass rate for boys stayed about the same, while for girls it improved by 9.5%.

F. Better nutrition makes for brighter children. Most immediately, well-fed children find it easier to concentrate. It is hard to focus the mind on long division when your stomach is screaming for food. Mr Kumanda says that it used to be easy to spot the kids who were really undernourished. "They were the ones who stared into space and didn't respond when you asked them questions," he says. More crucially, though, more and better food helps brains grow and develop. Like any

other organ in the body, the brain needs nutrition and exercise. But if it is starved of the necessary calories, proteins and micronutrients, it is stunted, perhaps not as severely as a muscle would be, but stunted nonetheless. That is why feeding children at schools works so well. And the fact that the effect of feeding was more pronounced on girls than on boys gives a clue to who eats first in rural Malawian households. It isn't the girls.

G. On a global scale, the good news is that people are eating better than ever before. Homo sapiens has grown 50% bigger since the industrial revolution. Three centuries ago, chronic malnutrition was more or less universal. Now, it is extremely rare in rich countries. In developing countries, where most people live, plates and rice bowls are also fuller than ever before. The proportion of children under five in the developing world who are malnourished to the point of stunting fell from 39% in 1990 to 30% in 2000, says the World Health Organisation (WHO). In other places, the battle against hunger is steadily being won. Better nutrition is making people cleverer and more energetic, which will help them grow more prosperous. And when they eventually join the ranks of the well-off, they can start fretting about growing too fat.

Questions 21-24

*Complete the sentences below using **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS / OR A** NUMBER from the passage. Write your answers in boxes 21-24 on your answer sheet.*

21 In Kumanda's school _____ are given to girls after the end of the school day.

22 Many children from poor families were sent to collect _____ from the field.

23 Thanks to the free food program, _____ of students passed the test.

24 The modern human is _____ bigger than before after the industrial revolution.

Questions 25-26

*Choose **TWO** letters, A-E Write the correct letters in boxes 25 and 26 on your answer sheet.*

Which **TWO** of the following statements are true?

A. Some children are taught in the open air.
B. Bernard Kumanda became the headmaster in 1991.
C. No new staffs were recruited when attendance rose.
D. Girls are often treated equally with boys in Malawi.
E. Scientists have devised ways to detect the most underfed students in school.
F. WHO is worried about malnutrition among kids in developing countries.

READING PASSAGE 3 Questions 27-40

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 27 – 40 which are based on Reading Passage 2 on the following pages.

Placebo effect – The Power of Nothing

Want to devise a new form of alternative medicine? No problem. Here's the recipe. Be warm, sympathetic, reassuring and enthusiastic. Your treatment should involve physical contact, and each session with your patients should last at least half an hour. Encourage your patients to take an active part in their treatment and understand how their disorders relate to the rest of their lives. Tell them that their own bodies possess the true power to heal. Make them pay you out of their own pockets. Describe your treatment in familiar words, but embroidered with a hint of mysticism: energy fields, energy flows, energy blocks, meridians, forces, auras, rhythms and the like. Refer to the knowledge of an earlier age: wisdom carelessly swept aside by the rise and rise of blind, mechanistic science. Oh, come off it, you're saying. Something invented off the top of your head couldn't possibly work, could it?

Well yes, it could—and often well enough to earn you a living. A good living if you are sufficiently convincing or, better still, really believe in your therapy. Many illnesses get better on their own, so if you are lucky and administer your treatment at just the right time you'll get the credit. But that's only part of it. Some of the improvement really would be down to you. Not necessarily because you'd recommended ginseng rather than camomile tea or used this crystal as opposed to that pressure point. Nothing so specific. Your healing power would be the outcome of a paradoxical force that conventional medicine recognises but remains oddly ambivalent about: the placebo effect.

Placebos are treatments that have no direct effect on the body, yet still work because the patient has faith in their power to heal. Most often the term refers to a dummy pill, but it applies just as much to any device or procedure, from a sticking plaster to a crystal to an operation. The existence of the placebo effect implies that even quackery may confer real benefits, which is why any mention of placebo is a touchy subject for many practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), who are likely to regard it as tantamount to a charge of charlatanism. In fact, the placebo effect is a powerful part of all medical care, orthodox or otherwise, though its role is often neglected and misunderstood.

One of the great strengths of CAM may be its practitioners' skill in deploying the placebo effect to accomplish real healing. "Complementary practitioners are miles better at producing non-specific effects and good therapeutic relationships," says Edzard Ernst, professor of CAM at Exeter University. The question is whether CAM could be integrated into conventional medicine, as some would like, without losing much of this power.

At one level, it should come as no surprise that our state of mind can influence our physiology: anger opens the superficial blood vessels of the face; sadness pumps the tear glands. But exactly how placebos work their medical magic is still largely unknown. Most of the scant research to date has focused on the control of pain, because it's one of the commonest complaints and lends itself to experimental study. Here, attention has turned to the endorphins, natural counterparts of morphine that are known to help control pain. "Any of the neurochemicals involved in transmitting pain impulses or modulating them might also be involved in generating the placebo response," says Don Price, an oral surgeon at the University of Florida who studies the placebo effect in dental pain.

"But endorphins are still out in front." That case has been strengthened by the recent work of Fabrizio Benedetti of the University of Turin, who showed that the placebo effect can be abolished by a drug, naloxone, which blocks the effects of endorphins. Benedetti induced pain in human volunteers by inflating a blood-pressure cuff on the forearm. He did this several times a day for several days, using morphine each time to control the pain. On the final day, without saying anything, he replaced the morphine with a saline solution. This still relieved the subjects' pain: a placebo effect. But when he added naloxone to the saline the pain relief disappeared. Here was direct proof that placebo analgesia is mediated, at least in part, by these natural opiates.

Still, no one knows how belief triggers endorphin release, or why most people can't achieve placebo pain relief simply by willing it. Though scientists don't know exactly how placebos work, they have accumulated a fair bit of knowledge about how to trigger the effect. A London rheumatologist found, for example, that red dummy capsules made more effective painkillers than blue, green or yellow ones. Research on American students revealed that blue pills make better sedatives than pink, a colour more suitable for stimulants. Even branding can make a difference: if Aspro or Tylenol are what you like to take for a headache, their chemically identical generic equivalents may be less effective.

It matters, too, how the treatment is delivered. Decades ago, when the major tranquilliser chlorpromazine was being introduced, a doctor in Kansas categorised his colleagues according to whether they were keen on it, openly sceptical of its benefits, or took a "let's try and see" attitude. His conclusion: the more enthusiastic the doctor, the better the drug performed. And this year Ernst surveyed published studies that compared doctors' bedside manners. The studies turned up one consistent finding: "Physicians who adopt a warm, friendly and reassuring manner," he reported, "are

more effective than those whose consultations are formal and do not offer reassurance."

Warm, friendly and reassuring are precisely CAM's strong suits, of course. Many of the ingredients of that opening recipe—the physical contact, the generous swathes of time, the strong hints of supernormal healing power—are just the kind of thing likely to impress patients. It's hardly surprising, then, that complementary practitioners are generally best at mobilising the placebo effect, says Arthur Kleinman, professor of social anthropology at Harvard University.

Questions 27-32

Complete the following sentences with the correct ending. Choose the correct letter, A-H, for each sentence below. Write your answers in boxes 27-32 on your answer sheet.

27 Appointments with alternative practitioner

28 An alternative practitioner's description of treatment

29 An alternative practitioner who has faith in what he does

30 The illness of patients convinced of alternative practice

31 Improvements of patients receiving alternative practice

32 Conventional medical doctors

A. should be easy to understand.

B. ought to improve by itself.

C. should not involve any mysticism.

D. ought to last a minimum length of time.

E. needs to be treated at the right time.

F. should give more recognition.

G. can earn high income.

H. do not rely on any specific treatment.

Questions 33-35

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D. Write your answers in boxes 33-35

33. In the fifth paragraph, the writer uses the example of anger and sadness to illustrate that
    A. people's feelings could affect their physical behavior.
    B. how placebo achieves its effect is yet to be understood.
    C. scientists don't understand how the mind influences the body.
    D. research on the placebo effect is very limited.
34. Research on pain control attracts most of the attention because
    A. only a limited number of researches have been conducted so far.
    B. scientists have discovered that endorphins can help to reduce pain.
    C. pain reducing agents might also be involved in placebo effect.
    D. patients often experience pain and like to complain about it.
35. Fabrizio Benedetti's research on endorphins indicates that
    A. they are widely used to regulate pain.
    B. they can be produced by willful thoughts.
    C. they can be neutralized by introducing naloxone.
    D. their pain-relieving effects do not last long enough.

Questions 36-40

TRUE	*if the statement agrees with the information*
FALSE	*if the statement contradicts the information*
NOT GIVEN	*if there is no information on this*

36. There is enough information for scientists to fully understand the placebo effect.
37. A London based researcher discovered that red pills should be taken off the market.
38. People's preference on brands would also have effect on their healing.
39. Medical doctors have a range of views of the newly introduced drug of chlorpromazine.
40. Alternative practitioners are seldom known for applying placebo effect.