IELTSFEVER ACADEMIC READING TEST 74

You should spend about 20 minutes on ***Questions 1–12****, which are based on Reading Passage 2 on pages 1 and 2.*

The soul of Irish writers

The wind swept clouds into inky puddles across the sky. A few swollen drops of rain fell on the windshield of our rental car as my friend and I sat at a service station. A red-haired lad with a spattering of freckles across his face pumped our gas. He craned his head upward. 'Ah, the weather is desperate today,' he said.

Desperate. The word clung to me. How had he found the most poetic and perfect word to describe the weather that day? Although this trip was many years ago, I still recall that young man, as well as the cadence and lilt of the words that greeted us in the shops and pubs at which we stopped to ask directions. As a writer, I was inspired and intrigued by the Irish and their wonderful facility for language and poetic prose.

While Ireland is a small island – you can drive from the east coast to the west coast, or north to the south in little more than four hours – this green and fertile land has produced more writers per square inch than any other country. And it has done so for centuries, from James Joyce to Nobel-Prize winning poet Seamus Heaney. But how? What organic ingredients have created a recipe for such talent? Could it be the mythical landscape itself?

During that trip, I still remember how the green, undulating mountains that opened up to vistas of the ocean, cliffs and ruined castles seemed to be permeated with an ancient wisdom and mysterious energy that seeped from the earth into my very spirit. Is it this that has made such prolific writers of the Irish and blessed them with their gift for the lyrical word?

Perhaps so, but I believe it is also about the Irish soul, which is so entwined with storytelling. Much like the primeval land that was carved over centuries, the Irish seem to allow for the flow of space and time. They are present to the rhythm of their lives and allow the creative process to speak to their souls. One of my favourite authors, the late John O'Donohue in his book *Anam Cara*, spoke of the power of simple presence which takes us ultimately where we need to be, as people and as creative writers.

'It is far more creative to work with the idea of mindfulness rather than with the idea of will. Too often people try to change their lives by using the will as a kind of hammer to beat their lives into shape. If you work with a different rhythm, you will come easily and naturally home to yourself. Your soul knows the geography of your destiny. Your soul alone has the map of your future, therefore, you can trust this indirect, oblique side of yourself. If you do, it will take you where you need to go.'

The Irish are also well-known storytellers. In fact the Seanachie (pronounced shawn-a-key) or storyteller is still an honoured profession in Ireland as it has been for centuries. Sean O Suilleabhain in *Storytelling in Irish Tradition*, writes:

'The good storyteller, who had a large repertoire stored in his memory, seated at his own fireside, in an honoured place in the house of a neighbour or at a wake, was assured of an attentive audience on winter nights. Nor was it only adults who wished to hear tales. My father described to me how himself and other children of eight years of age would spend hours, night after night, listening to an old woman storyteller in South Kerry, and an old man in the same area told me that, as a youth, he and his companions used to do all the household chores for an elderly neighbour each winter evening in order that he might be free to spend the night telling them long folktales …'

The desire to tell stories, to weave narratives, is still central to the Irish people, as their works of literature demonstrate. James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, C.S. Lewis, Frank McCourt, Maeve Binchy, Niall Williams, and countless other writers have not only given us moving stories but told them, often times, in words that resonate to the rhythm of our soul.

At the end of that trip, we found time to visit the site of Yeats' grave in County Sligo. The weather that day was more than desperate, as a biting wind whipped leaves around the Drumcliffe cemetery. I took a quick snapshot of his grave, and stood there, part of his poem *When You are Old and Gray* wafting through my thoughts.

I thanked him for sharing his gift of words with the world and asked him to help me do the same. Weeks later after we had returned home, I had the photos developed (there were no digital cameras back then) and was amazed at what I saw. There, above his grave, floated a form, a shape – a hazy gauze of white that I could not explain. I like to think his Irish soul was wishing me well as a writer.

Questions 1–6

Answer the questions. Use ***NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS*** *for each answer.*

Write your answers in boxes 1–6 on your answer sheet.

1 Which word did the gas pump attendant use that so impressed the writer?

2 Which TWO words in the second paragraph mean the accent and rhythm of the Irish voices the writer heard on her trip?

3 Which three physical features of the landscape of Ireland does the writer describe as having an unreal quality?

4 According to the writer, which basic elements of life do the Irish appreciate and embrace better than people elsewhere?

5 Which idea did the writer John O'Donohue believe to be preferable to determination and a desire to achieve?

6 What is the Irish word for a person who entertains with stories?

Questions 7–10

Complete the notes. Use ***NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS*** *from the passage for each answer.*

- tales were recalled from the storyteller's **7** .....
- storytellers were **8** ..... guests at social gatherings
- both **9** ..... were attentive listeners
- storytellers sometimes exchanged stories for **10** .....

Questions 11–12

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage 1?

In boxes 11–12 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.*

11 The weather on the day of the writer's trip to Yeats' grave was better than on the day she spoke at the gas station.

12 The writer would like to believe that Yeats responded to the request she made at his grave.

You should spend about 20 minutes on ***Questions 13–26****, which are based on Reading Passage 2 on pages* 5 *and* 6.

Marriage works – and it's the answer to the misery of loneliness

A This week the Office for National Statistics (ONS) confirmed that more of us than ever are living alone. This won't trouble the author Colm Tóibín, who once eulogised the freedom that living alone gives him, likening his solitary existence to that of 'a cloistered nun'. This is a terrifying image, surely, and not a metaphor for a life most of us would seek to inhabit. Certainly not my friend Helen: successful, well-off, homeowner; but tired of her single life, of the near-constant awareness that she's running out of time to have children, as fast as she's running out of the energy to embark on another round of futile first dates. Nor my friend Mark, divorced dad, active in his daughter's life – but who still, at the end of the weekend, returns the child to her mother, before driving back to his re-emptied house, where he spends the evenings with PlayStation and Sky Sports.

B In discussing solitary lives, we should ignore the Colm Tóibíns – financially independent people who realise that, for them, living alone brings more advantages than otherwise. Most people of my generation had such a stage in their lives – between university, and settling down – but we didn't want it to last forever. In any case, with property prices as they are, such self-selected solitude is not an option for much of the succeeding generation. Set aside, too, those figures pertaining to the very elderly; not because there aren't real problems faced by those (usually female) 'survivors', but because their existence is a function of the uneven impact of medical advances and lifestyle changes on the longevity of each of the genders.

C It's not the relatively young, or the very old, who are the main drivers of this demographic change. As the ONS makes clear, the largest increase in solitary living is down to the 45-64 age group. Almost two and a half million Britons in that age category have no one with whom to share their home, an increase of more than 800,000 households since the mid-Nineties. Even allowing for the increase in total population size, that's still a noticeable change, and they don't all enjoy the experience. I suspect there are more divorced parents, like my friend Mark, poking about their fridges for a pre-packed meal for one, than there are cloistered Irish novelists.

D This would all be fine, were this phenomenon merely to affect matters as concrete as housing. But evidence suggests a link between solitariness and poorer health outcomes (mirroring, bleakly, the evidence about the outcomes for children raised in single-parent households). One paper I read showed a significant increase in the prescription of antidepressants to the solitary, compared with cohabiting couples. Correlation doesn't prove a sociological theory, of course, but it's hard to ignore the link between living alone, and other detrimental life choices.

E The issue demands a political response: marriage is the most important institution to act as a bulwark against loneliness, and the British Government should promote it. Instead, the government is unwinding its insidious 'couples penalty': a financial punishment for initially setting up home with a

partner, and then after divorce, (probably the result of the stress brought on by all the expense), a further charge for a change to living conditions. The Centre for Social Justice discovered that the people most penalised for living together are – surprise – among the poorest. This must be fixed. What's more, couples who arrange to 'live apart together' shouldn't be demonised for rationally navigating the snares of the benefits system.

F But if we acknowledge that a financial penalty can cause the poorest to avoid marriage, why assume that monetary considerations don't affect the better-off? First, because politicians are scared to reward marriage in the tax system, and second, because our divorce laws so scar those who endure them that, I suspect, we've produced a generation with the motto 'once bitten, twice shy'. The changes to child benefit for the well-off hardly help either.

G Not very long ago, the then Home Secretary, Michael Howard deployed a powerful phrase in defence of his criminal justice policy: 'prison works'. It's time we used a similar phrase, in defence of social justice: marriage 'works' too. It works for most people and definitely for civic society, yet we find it hard to say this, and shy away from its political implications. What started as a desire not to judge 'lifestyle choices' has bred a generation living in lonely, quiet despair. Loneliness is a much harder political issue to tackle than, say, house-building, but – if we believe in society at all – hardly one of lesser significance.

Questions 13–19

Reading passage 2 has ***seven*** *paragraphs labelled A–G.*

Choose the correct heading for each from the list of headings below.

Write the correct number ***i–x*** *in boxes 13–19 on your answer sheet.*

	List of headings
	Middle age solitude is growing
ii	The institution of marriage needs a motto that resonates
iii	The young and the elderly are not relevant to the debate
iv	The system is clearly unfair
v	The real issue is a lack of affordable housing
vi	For many, the benefits of a single life are exaggerated
vii	The wealthy are affected by the same measures
viii	Most men would rather be single
ix	Loneliness has a range of consequences
x	Couples must work harder to make relationships work

13 Paragraph A

14 Paragraph B

15 Paragraph C

16 Paragraph D

17 Paragraph E

18 Paragraph F

19 Paragraph G

Questions 20–26

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer in the reading passage?

In boxes 20–26 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.*

20 The Irish author Colm Tóibín has a lifestyle that most people would envy.

21 His friends Helen and Mark would like their lives to be different.

22 Most students accept that the benefits of being single are temporary.

23 Most elderly women have not chosen to live alone.

24 Divorced men do not usually enjoy cooking.

25 Couples who try to deceive the benefits system deserve to be punished.

26 People who go through a divorce are afraid of marrying again.

You should spend about 20 minutes on ***Questions 27–40****, which are based on Reading Passage 3 on pages* 9 *and* 10*.*

How human language could have evolved from birdsong

Linguistics and biology researchers propose a new theory on the deep roots of human speech.

'The sounds uttered by birds offer in several respects the nearest analogy to language,' Charles Darwin wrote in *The Descent of Man* (1871), while contemplating how humans learned to speak. Language, he speculated, might have had its origins in singing, which 'might have given rise to words expressive of various complex emotions.'

Now researchers from MIT, along with a scholar from the University of Tokyo, say that Darwin was on the right path. The balance of evidence, they believe, suggests that human language is a grafting of two communication forms found elsewhere in the animal kingdom: first, the elaborate songs of birds, and second, the more utilitarian, information bearing types of expression seen in a diversity of other animals. 'It's this adventitious combination that triggered human language,' says Shigeru Miyagawa, a professor of linguistics in MIT's Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, and co-author of a new paper published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*.

The idea builds upon Miyagawa's conclusion, detailed in his previous work, that there are two 'layers' in all human languages: an 'expression' layer, which involves the changeable organisation of sentences, and a 'lexical' layer, which relates to the core content of a sentence. His conclusion is based on earlier work by linguists including Noam Chomsky, Kenneth Hale and Samuel Jay Keyser. Based on an analysis of animal communication, and using Miyagawa's framework, the authors say that birdsong closely resembles the expression layer of human sentences, whereas the communicative waggles of bees or the short, audible messages of primates are more like the lexical layer. At some point, between 50,000 and 80,000 years ago, humans may have merged these two types of expression into a uniquely sophisticated form of language.

'There were these two pre-existing systems,' Miyagawa says, 'like apples and oranges that just happened to be put together.' These kinds of adaptations of existing structures are common in natural history, notes Robert Berwick, a co-author of the paper, who is a professor of computational linguistics in MIT's Laboratory for Information and Decision Systems, in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. 'When something new evolves, it is often built out of old parts,' he says. 'We see this over and over again in evolution. Old structures can change just a little bit, and acquire radically new functions.'

The new paper, '*The Emergence of Hierarchical Structure in Human Language*,' was co-written by Miyagawa, Berwick and Kazuo Okanoya, a bio-psychologist and expert on animal communication. To consider the difference between the expression layer and the lexical layer, take a simple sentence: 'Todd saw a condor.' We can easily create variations of this, such as, 'When did Todd see a condor?' This rearranging of elements takes place in the expression layer and allows us to add complexity and ask questions. But the lexical layer remains the same, since it involves the same core elements: the subject, 'Todd,' the verb, 'to see,' and the object, 'condor.'

Birdsong lacks a lexical structure. Instead, birds sing learned melodies with what Berwick calls a 'holistic' structure; the entire song has one meaning, whether about mating, territory or other things. The Bengalese finch, as the authors note, can loop back to parts of previous melodies, allowing for greater variation and communication of more things; a nightingale may be able to recite from 100 to 200 different melodies.

By contrast, other types of animals have bare-bones modes of expression without the same melodic capacity. Bees communicate visually, using precise waggles to indicate sources of foods to their peers; other primates can make a range of sounds, comprising warnings about predators and other messages.

Humans, according to Miyagawa, Berwick and Okanoya, fruitfully combined these systems. We can communicate essential information, like bees or primates, but like birds, we also have a melodic capacity and an ability to recombine parts of our uttered language. For this reason, our finite vocabularies can generate a seemingly infinite string of words. Indeed, the researchers suggest that humans first had the ability to sing, as Darwin conjectured, and then managed to integrate specific lexical elements into those songs. 'It's not a very long step to say that what got joined together was the ability to construct these complex patterns, like a song, but with words,' Berwick says.

As they note in the paper, some of the 'striking parallels' between language acquisition in birds and humans include the phase of life when each is best at picking up languages, and the part of the brain used for language. Another similarity as Berwick puts it is that 'all human languages have a finite number of stress patterns, a certain number of beat patterns. Well, in birdsong, there is also this limited number of beat patterns.'

Norbert Hornstein, a professor of linguistics at the University of Maryland, says the paper has been 'very well received' among linguists, and 'perhaps will be the standard go-to paper for language-birdsong comparison for the next five years.' He adds that he would like to see further comparison of birdsong and sound production in human language, as well as more neuroscientific research, pertaining to both birds and humans, to see how brains are structured for making sounds.

The researchers acknowledge that further empirical studies on the subject would be desirable. 'It's just a hypothesis,' Berwick says. 'But it's a way to make explicit what Darwin was talking about very vaguely, because we know more about language now.' Miyagawa, for his part, asserts it is a viable idea in part because it could be subject to more scrutiny, as the communication patterns of other species are examined in further detail. 'If this is right, then human language has a precursor in nature, in evolution, that we can actually test today,' he says, adding that bees, birds and other primates could all be sources of further research insight.

MIT-based research in linguistics has *largely been* characterised by the search for universal aspects of all human languages. With this paper, Miyagawa, Berwick and Okanoya hope to spur others to think of the universality of language in evolutionary terms. It is not just a random cultural construct, they say, but based in part on capacities humans share with other species. At the same time, Miyagawa notes, human language is unique, in that two independent systems in nature merged, in our species, to allow us to generate unbounded linguistic possibilities, albeit within a constrained system. 'Human language is not just freeform, it's rule-based,' Miyagawa says. 'If we are right, human language has a very heavy constraint on what it can and cannot do, based on its antecedents in nature.'

Questions 27–29

Answer the questions. Use ***NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS*** *for each answer.*

Write your answers in boxes 27–29 on your answer sheet.

27 Who initially identified similarities between human language and birdsong?

28 What do most animals wish to convey through the sounds they make?

29 Which word in the second paragraph is used to emphasise that the development of human language probably happened by chance?

Questions 30–35

Complete each sentence with the correct ending **A–J** *from the box below.*

Write the correct letter **A–J** *in boxes 27–34 on your answer sheet.*

30 Birdsong

31 The waggle of bees

32 Human language

33 The expression layer of human language

34 The lexical layer of human language

35 Melody

A is as complex as human language.
B is characterised by form changes that express different meaning.
C is principally used to indicate danger.
D conveys simple but clear messages.
E consists of relatively few components.
F is an essential ingredient of birdsong.
G conveys both emotional and practical concepts.
H is relatively complex compared to language used by other animals.
I existed before birdsong.
J is less well understood than other forms of communication.

Questions 36–38

Complete the summary. Use ***ONE WORD ONLY*** *from the passage for each answer.*

Write your answers in boxes 36–38 on your answer sheet.

Norbert Hornstein admits that **36** ……..... are complimentary about the paper but would like to see more investigation. He would especially like to know more about the formation of both bird and human **37** ……..... . Miyagawa, Berwick and Okanoya agree that further research now needs to be **38** ……..... rather than theoretical.

Questions 39–40

Choose the correct letter ***A***, ***B***, ***C*** *or* ***D***.

Write your answers in boxes 39–40 on your answer sheet.

39 Miyagawa, Berwick and Okanoya want their research to

A give people the confidence to challenge theories of evolution.
B persuade people that early humans imitated birds.
C help people appreciate the achievements of mankind.
D encourage people to understand more about how language has evolved in humans and animals.

40 What is the conclusion that can be drawn from reading this passage?

A Birdsong is more complex than most people would imagine.
B Humans probably sang before they talked.
C Human language is less sophisticated than we tend to believe.
D Insufficient research has been conducted into the origins of human language.