

Stage I National Students Olympiad in the English Language

Reading Comprehension Test for 9th Form Students

TASK 1. Read each text and choose the correct option to complete the text

TASK 1

1. Taking photos or videos whilst in the theatre is strictly _____
 - a) Forbidden
 - b) Stopped
 - c) Avoided
2. After you have prepared the other vegetables, cut up the aubergines and brush them with olive oil. Barbecue or grill the aubergine _____ until they are lightly browned on both sides.
 - a) Shares
 - b) Slices
 - c) Parts
3. It will soon be St Valentine's Day, February 14th. The idea for sending cards to your beloved comes from _____ in the nineteenth century in Britain.
 - a) A fashion
 - b) A celebration
 - c) An occasion
4. Some studies have suggested that young people nowadays are better at communicating than their parents were. _____, the evidence is not conclusive.
 - a) Although
 - b) However
 - c) Therefore
5. Bring your i-phone to life with this ultra-cool case! It protects your i-phone against _____, dirt and bumps and comes with an all-round screen protector.
 - a) Noises
 - b) Expense
 - c) Scratches

TASK 2. Read the text and answer the questions. (An answer up to four words phrase is accepted)

TOMATO FESTIVAL

The Tomato Festival is an annual festival held in Bunol, near Valencia in Spain. Unusually for festivals, there are no religious connections. The festival, which started nearly seventy years ago, is basically a food fight. On the last Wednesday of August, the 9,000 inhabitants are joined by over 30,000 visitors and, after a breakfast of chorizo, a Spanish sausage, and wine, the festivities begin.

At 11 a.m., truckloads of poor quality tomatoes are brought into the town centre and a cannon is fired. People then throw tomatoes at each other following the two rules that the tomatoes must be squashed and nothing else must be thrown.

After about two hours another cannon is fired, the fight is over and everyone helps clean up the town.

6. How often does the festival take place?
7. When was the first festival held?
8. What do the people eat before the fight?
9. What is the sign for the fight to start?
10. How do the people work together?

TASK 3 Read the text and decide if the sentence is TRUE or FALSE

The Bridge That Changed a City

When the old river bridge collapsed during a storm, the city was suddenly divided in half. Shops could not receive goods, children could not reach schools, and even ambulances had to drive ten extra kilometers. Within weeks, the local council promised a modern replacement—stronger, wider, safer.

But not everyone welcomed the plan. Some residents feared that a large bridge would destroy the view of the riverbanks, which had become a quiet park for families. Others worried about traffic noise and pollution. The debate lasted for two years, filling newspapers and council meetings with angry letters.

When construction finally began, many still doubted it would succeed. Yet, when the new bridge opened, its elegant shape and silent surface surprised even the critics. It quickly became a symbol of the city's rebirth—a reminder that progress often demands patience, but can still respect beauty.

11. The bridge collapse immediately cut off access between city areas.
12. Everyone agreed that a bigger bridge was the best solution.
13. Some citizens opposed the bridge because of environmental concerns.
14. Hardly anyone questioned the success of the bridge project while it was being built.
15. The new bridge eventually improved the city's image.

TASK 4. Read each text and choose the correct option to complete the text

16. The scientist spent months collecting data, but his results were _____ by an unexpected computer error.
A) Improved B) delayed C) damaged D) replaced
17. When the train stopped between stations, passengers remained calm _____ the driver explained the delay.
A) while B) since C) until D) though
18. Many students avoid speaking in class because they are afraid of _____ mistakes.
A) making B) doing C) having D) taking
19. The new law will be enforced _____ the first day of.
A) at B) in C) on D) from
20. By the time we reached the castle, the rain had _____, and the sun was breaking through.

- A) stopped B) been stopping C) stops D) stopping

Task 4. Read the text and choose the correct option while answering the question

A Library Without Walls

When a small coastal town lost its public library in a flood, most people believed that reading would quietly disappear from daily life. Yet something remarkable happened instead. Local teachers began lending books from their homes, and a group of teenagers created a digital reading club on social media.

Soon, the “library without walls” had more members than the original building ever did. Readers from nearby villages joined online discussions, recommending books and even recording short reviews. Still, some older residents missed the feeling of sitting among shelves and whispering pages. To help them, volunteers set up tiny “book corners” in cafés and shops.

Two years later, the town council offered funds for a new library—but the community voted to keep the project digital. They had discovered that reading was not about a place, but about connection.

21. What caused the town to lose its library?
A) Fire B) Storm C) Flood D) Neglect
22. Why did people think reading would disappear?
A) Books were destroyed. B) People moved away. C) The town was isolated.
D) There was no library left.
23. Who started lending books?
A) Local teachers B) Teenagers C) Librarians D) Shop owners
24. What was unusual about the teenagers’ reading club?
A) It met at night. B) It had no building. C) It required membership fees. D) It was secret.
25. Why did people from other villages join?
A) They liked the online discussions. B) They got free internet.
C) They were invited by the mayor. D) They were students.
26. What did some older residents miss?
A) Borrowing new books. B) The smell of coffee.
C) The physical space of the library. D) Reading online.
27. How were “book corners” used?
A) To sell novels. B) To store newspapers. C) To recreate reading spaces. D)
To teach writing.
28. What decision did the community make after two years?
A) To rebuild the library. B) To keep everything online.
C) To stop reading clubs. D) To donate books abroad.
29. What lesson did the town learn?
A) Reading depends on technology. B) Reading is about human connection.
C) Libraries are no longer needed. D) Digital reading is faster.
30. The overall tone of the text is:

A) Hopeless B) Nostalgic C) Encouraging D) Critical

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TASK 1. Read each text and choose the correct option to complete the text

1. We are a long-established family business that provides a reliable upholstery service that repairs antiques furniture. If you have _____ please visit us at our shop to get an estimate and see our extensive range of fabrics.
a) An enquiry
b) Some work
c) Suggestion
2. It has become clear that John Simons is to _____ - as editor of the *DAILY TIMES* after the surprise resignation of Simon Rathbone.
a) Move in
b) Take over
c) Carry on
3. For me, the most depressing thing about their new album is its lack of invention – they just seem to be _____ old ideas.
a) Revising
b) Reviewing
c) Recycling
4. Hotels in this area are certainly close to all the sights and nightlife, but the obvious downside to this is that they aren't exactly _____.
a) Popular
b) Plentiful
c) Peaceful
5. We apologise for any disruption to normal museum services while we are in the process of _____ the old entrance hall.
a) Refreshing
b) Renovating
c) Replacing

TASK 2. Read the text and answer the questions. (An answer up to four words phrase is accepted)

In the 1990s, Robin Dunbar, an Oxford University Professor, introduced the idea of what came to be called "Dunbar's number". His theory was that the maximum number relationships (not counting casual social contacts) that anyone could have was 150, simple because the brain can't store the information necessary to keep up more than that number.

Now Prof. Dunbar has extended his research to include social networking websites like Facebook and Bebo. He wanted to see whether online activity increased the brain's capacity. The answer, it seems, is no. "You can have 1500 friends online," he says, "but when you look at traffic on sites, you see people maintain the same inner circle of around 150 people that we observe in the real world."

6. What is Robin Dunbar's job?
7. What kind of relationships are excluded from Dunbar's theory?
8. What limits the number of relationships a person can have?
9. What is the focus of Professor Dunbar's latest study?
10. What phrase is used to describe a group of close friends?

TASK 3 Read the text and decide if the sentence is TRUE or FALSE

Technological Progress and Its Phenomenon

Technological advancement has propelled human societies to unprecedented levels of productivity and comfort. Innovations in communication, transportation, and medicine have transformed everyday life, shrinking distances and extending lifespans. However, progress is rarely linear; it often introduces unforeseen consequences that challenge social, ethical, and environmental systems.

For instance, the rise of automation has streamlined manufacturing and office work, but it has simultaneously displaced certain labor groups, forcing economies to reconsider education and retraining programs. Similarly, while digital platforms democratize information, they also amplify misinformation, polarization, and data privacy concerns. The speed at which technologies evolve often outpaces the frameworks needed to regulate them, leaving policymakers scrambling to address ethical dilemmas.

Moreover, the psychological impact of constant connectivity is increasingly evident. While people can work, socialize, and learn across the globe instantly, studies suggest that perpetual exposure to digital stimuli contributes to stress, decreased attention spans, and a sense of isolation. Humanity's relationship with technology is thus paradoxical: it can liberate and constrain, empower and overwhelm.

As societies adapt, the question remains: how can humans leverage innovation without succumbing to its unintended consequences? Thoughtful integration, ethical oversight, and interdisciplinary collaboration may be key to ensuring that technological growth serves broader societal goals rather than narrow economic interests.

11. Technological progress always benefits society without negative consequences.
12. Automation can improve productivity but may also displace workers.
13. Digital platforms have no influence on misinformation or social polarization.
14. Rapid technological change can outpace regulation and ethical oversight.
15. The psychological effects of constant connectivity are entirely positive.

TASK 4. Read each text and choose the correct option to complete the text

16. Artificial Intelligence

AI can process vast amounts of data faster than humans, but it may also _____ errors from historical datasets, leading to unfair outcomes in finance, recruitment, or law enforcement.

- A) perpetuate
- B) eradicate
- C) conceal
- D) amplify

17. Climate Migration

Rising sea levels and extreme droughts force populations to relocate. Governments that ignore these trends risk _____ humanitarian crises in the near future.

- A) precipitating
- B) postponing
- C) observing
- D) alleviating

18. Space Technology

Private companies now develop reusable rockets, which significantly reduce costs. Without proper regulation, wealthy nations or corporations could _____ the most lucrative or strategically important sectors of space activity.

- A) dominate
- B) neglect
- C) distribute
- D) explore

19. Renewable Energy

Solar panels and wind turbines produce clean energy, but their efficiency depends on weather and storage. Without improvements, energy supply may remain _____ and unpredictable.

- A) intermittent
- B) constant
- C) negligible
- D) stable

20. Automation in the Workplace

Machines increasingly perform routine tasks, leaving humans to focus on creative and interpersonal skills. Workers who fail to adapt risk being _____ in a rapidly changing economy.

- A) obsolete
- B) redundant
- C) marginalized
- D) outpaced

Task 4. Read the text and choose the correct option while answering the question

The Paradox of Urban Innovation

Cities are often celebrated as engines of innovation, cultural exchange, and economic growth. Urban environments concentrate talent, resources, and infrastructure, fostering creativity and collaboration. However, the very density that stimulates progress also produces unintended consequences, creating paradoxical effects that policymakers and urban planners must confront.

One example is technological integration. Smart city technologies—ranging from real-time traffic management to predictive policing—promise efficiency and improved quality of life. Yet, overreliance on these systems can exacerbate inequality. Wealthier districts typically benefit first from advanced technologies, while marginalized neighborhoods risk exclusion. Furthermore,

predictive algorithms may unintentionally encode historical biases, amplifying social disparities rather than mitigating them.

Environmental sustainability presents another tension. Urban centers consume vast amounts of energy, produce significant carbon emissions, and often reduce green spaces in favor of construction. Even well-intentioned initiatives, such as urban densification to limit suburban sprawl, may increase heat islands and strain water and waste management systems. Planners must navigate these trade-offs while balancing growth, environmental resilience, and social equity.

Finally, the human dimension cannot be overlooked. Rapid urban change can disrupt community networks, reduce public trust, and increase psychological stress. Residents face the paradox of simultaneous connection and isolation: digital technologies link them globally, yet social cohesion within neighborhoods may weaken. Consequently, urban policy must address not only material infrastructure but also social and ethical implications.

In essence, cities illustrate that innovation is rarely straightforward. Maximizing benefits requires interdisciplinary planning, continuous assessment, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable trade-offs between efficiency, equity, and sustainability. Only by embracing these complexities can urban centers become truly resilient, inclusive, and dynamic spaces.

21. Why are cities described as “engines of innovation”?
 - A) They have low population density
 - B) They reduce technological integration
 - C) They minimize collaboration
 - D) They concentrate talent and resources
22. What paradox does urban density create?
 - A) Encourages growth but limits innovation
 - B) Stimulates progress but produces unintended consequences
 - C) Reduces inequality and environmental strain
 - D) Eliminates social disparities automatically
23. How might smart city technologies increase inequality?
 - A) By prioritizing wealthier districts
 - B) By distributing resources equally
 - C) By reducing predictive policing
 - D) By eliminating traffic congestion
24. Predictive algorithms can:
 - A) Encode historical biases
 - B) Always ensure fairness
 - C) Replace city planners entirely
 - D) Eliminate social disparities automatically
25. What is a potential environmental drawback of densification?
 - A) Reduced energy consumption
 - B) Increased heat islands
 - C) Enhanced water management
 - D) More green spaces automatically

26. Rapid urban growth can:
- A) Strengthen all community networks
 - B) Disrupt community cohesion
 - C) Reduce psychological stress
 - D) Eliminate ethical concerns
27. Digital technologies in cities can result in:
- A) Only local connections
 - B) Global links but weaker neighborhood cohesion
 - C) Stronger local bonds automatically
 - D) No impact on social dynamics
28. Addressing urban challenges requires:
- A) Ignoring social implications
 - B) Interdisciplinary planning and continuous assessment
 - C) Focusing solely on material infrastructure
 - D) Eliminating ethical considerations
29. What is meant by “uncomfortable trade-offs”?
- A) Decisions that balance efficiency, equity, and sustainability
 - B) Policies that ignore social issues
 - C) Unnecessary technological integration
 - D) Simple solutions to complex problems
30. Which area is NOT discussed as a challenge of urban innovation?
- A) Social inequality
 - B) Environmental sustainability
 - C) Human psychological well-being
 - D) Space exploration

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1. The value of older books is determined by many of the same criteria as modern books^ condition, content and edition. Many people think that just because the book is old it is valuable, but a book has no collectible value by _____
 - a) Age alone
 - b) Normal standards
 - c) Today's collectors
2. If you want a quality steam cleaner for cleaning numerous surfaces in the home, this one gives a high standard of hygiene and kills dust mites and other allergens. It can be used in kitchens and bathrooms, and is also _____ for cleaning your upholstery and mattresses.
 - a) Suitable
 - b) Proper
 - c) Prepared
3. Did you know? For the first time since the Civil War, American life expectancy will soon decrease, owing to the diseases associated with obesity. Dr Mitchel Fuchs, eminent nutritionist, will be talking about how to _____ obesity in Tuesday's lunchtime lecture.
 - a) Avoid
 - b) Help
 - c) Disable
4. If you want a fantastic read from a really great writer, why not come in and browse through our special offer, classic novels section. _____ find something you'll like and you'll like the price too.
 - a) I hope you'll
 - b) You're bound to
 - c) I wonder if you'll
5. He writes lucidly and informatively of the shaping of post-war Britain through the creation of a solid background _____ flashes of illuminating detail.
 - a) Included in
 - b) Highlighted by
 - c) Exemplified by

TASK 2. Read the text and answer the questions. (An answer up to four words phrase is accepted)

How do we cry? Tears require an emotional response to be activated, which can be caused by pain or loss of love. When emotions affect us, the nervous system stimulates the brain which sends signals to the tear glands. The lacrimal gland produces the tears of emotion. Scientists believe that the body depends on this gland to release excess amounts of chemicals and hormones, returning it to a stable state.

There are many culturally acceptable reasons to cry in society. The first is probably death. Grieving includes crying and it was often believed that if someone did not cry, they would suffer physically because they did not release their pain. Experiences in life and love are other reasons society allows us to cry. Women have been allowed to cry more than men traditionally, but the benefits of crying seem to suggest that men need to cry more.

6. What does crying depend on?
7. What do tear glands require before they release tears?
8. What accumulates in the body when people get emotional?
9. What do people avoid through crying when someone dies?
10. Why is it more acceptable for women to cry more than men?

TASK 3 Read the text and decide if the sentence is TRUE or FALSE

The Ethics of Genetic Editing

The rapid advancement of genetic editing technologies, particularly CRISPR-Cas9, has sparked unprecedented opportunities in medicine, agriculture, and bioengineering. Scientists now have the capacity to modify genes with remarkable precision, potentially eliminating hereditary diseases, increasing crop resilience, and even enhancing human capabilities. Yet alongside this promise comes profound ethical and societal dilemmas.

One primary concern is the potential for unintended consequences. Even small modifications can have cascading effects on ecosystems or human biology. In medicine, off-target mutations may introduce new health risks, while in agriculture, genetically modified organisms might disrupt local biodiversity or food chains. The challenge lies in predicting outcomes in complex systems that are not fully understood, raising questions about whether scientific capability should outpace precautionary measures.

Equity is another pressing issue. Access to advanced genetic therapies may be limited to affluent populations, exacerbating social inequalities. The prospect of “designer babies” further complicates the debate: if genetic enhancements become commodified, genetic privilege could emerge alongside existing social hierarchies, leading to moral and legal quandaries.

Public engagement is often inadequate. Policymakers and scientists may advance technologies faster than societal understanding, creating a gap between innovation and public consensus. Ethical oversight must therefore extend beyond regulatory compliance to include transparent dialogue, interdisciplinary consultation, and robust risk assessment.

Finally, the philosophical implications challenge our conception of humanity itself. Altering the genetic code raises questions about identity, naturalness, and the limits of human intervention. While genetic editing holds transformative potential, it is not merely a scientific or technical endeavor; it is a profound moral and societal experiment. Navigating this frontier requires not only scientific rigor but also ethical discernment, humility, and a willingness to confront difficult questions about the very nature of life.

11. CRISPR-Cas9 allows precise gene editing that could prevent hereditary diseases.
12. Genetic modifications always have predictable outcomes without risk.
13. Designer babies could exacerbate existing social inequalities.
14. Public understanding and engagement with genetic editing is generally sufficient.
15. Ethical oversight should consider moral, societal, and scientific dimensions.

TASK 4. Read each text and choose the correct option to complete the text

16. Cultural Identity

The idea of national identity is often _____ debate, yet it remains one of the most powerful forces shaping society. In an era of globalization, individuals constantly negotiate between tradition and modernity, belonging and independence — a process that can be

both enriching and deeply divisive.

A. above B. on C. under D. beyond

17. Scientific Progress

Scientific revolutions rarely occur overnight. They emerge when evidence gradually _____ long-held assumptions, forcing scholars to rethink what was once considered unshakable truth. Yet every breakthrough carries a paradox: as knowledge expands, the boundary between certainty and doubt becomes increasingly blurred.

A. reinforces B. undermines C. imitates D. simplifies

18. Economic History

The industrial revolution did more than transform production; it reshaped social values. Wealth was no longer inherited but could be acquired through innovation and risk. This shift empowered a new middle class, whose ambitions often _____ those of the traditional aristocracy.

A. contradicted B. surpassed C. mirrored D. undermined

19. Environmental Ethics

Efforts to combat climate change often reveal a moral dilemma: should nations prioritize growth or restraint? True sustainability requires policies that are not only economically sound but also compatible with ethical responsibility. Without this balance, progress risks becoming merely a more sophisticated form of _____.

A. exploitation B. innovation C. preservation D. hesitation

20. Philosophy of Technology

Technology promises connection but often delivers isolation. The more seamlessly we communicate online, the more we risk losing the slow, reflective habits that once fostered genuine understanding. In this paradox lies the modern condition: abundance of information, scarcity of _____.

A. attention B. empathy C. precision D. invention

Task 5. Read the text and choose the correct option while answering the question

The Silent Revolution — The Rise of Print Culture in Early Modern Europe

When historians speak of revolutions, they tend to summon images of barricades, monarchs in flight, and the roar of crowds. Yet one of Europe's most transformative revolutions unfolded in near silence — the gradual but irreversible spread of print in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The printing press, perfected by Gutenberg around 1450, did not merely multiply books; it redefined the very nature of authority, knowledge, and truth.

Before print, knowledge was largely the preserve of the privileged — transmitted through fragile manuscripts, cloistered libraries, or the voices of clergy. With movable type, words became reproducible and portable, detached from the institutions that had long controlled them. Suddenly, readers could interpret texts independently of the Church or Crown, and this quiet act of reading became, paradoxically, a form of rebellion.

But the consequences were neither immediate nor uniform. In some regions, rulers harnessed print to consolidate control, flooding their realms with decrees and catechisms. Elsewhere, pamphleteers used it to ignite dissent, distributing polemics that questioned everything from indulgences to kingship. The same technology that amplified orthodoxy also weaponized heresy. By the time

Luther's theses spread across Europe, the old world of divine hierarchy had already begun to fracture.

Yet the "print revolution" was as much psychological as political. It trained people to see truth as something that could be verified, compared, or contested. Authority, once embodied in persons, began to reside in texts. The resulting explosion of literacy and debate would, in time, fuel both the Enlightenment and the modern idea of the individual.

Ironically, the age of print — once hailed as liberating — also sowed the anxieties of modernity. When every voice could be published, truth itself became unstable, forcing societies to navigate the tension between freedom of expression and the chaos of interpretation — a dilemma that, in our digital age, feels uncannily familiar.

21. **The author calls the rise of print a "silent revolution" mainly because**
 - A. it occurred gradually and without violence
 - B. it was unknown to most of Europe
 - C. it was immediately suppressed by rulers
 - D. it replaced speech with silence
22. **Before printing, access to knowledge depended primarily on**
 - A. individual wealth and literacy
 - B. oral transmission and institutional control
 - C. the patronage of printers
 - D. translation from Latin to vernacular languages
23. **The phrase "*detached from the institutions that had long controlled them*" suggests that print**
 - A. weakened traditional authorities' monopoly on information
 - B. led to widespread corruption in religious institutions
 - C. destroyed existing literary traditions
 - D. replaced religion with science
24. **According to the text, print initially served**
 - A. a purely educational function
 - B. both conservative and subversive purposes
 - C. mainly economic interests
 - D. only political propaganda
25. **The phrase "*weaponized heresy*" implies that**
 - A. heresy became a tool of intellectual resistance
 - B. printing presses were banned as dangerous weapons
 - C. heretical texts were destroyed en masse
 - D. literacy rates declined due to censorship
26. **The author implies that Luther's Reformation was**
 - A. a spontaneous act unrelated to printing
 - B. accelerated by the circulation of printed materials
 - C. an exclusively theological debate
 - D. confined to German-speaking regions
27. **The "psychological revolution" mentioned in the text refers to**
 - A. people's increasing dependence on authority
 - B. the rise of oral storytelling
 - C. a shift toward critical, individual reasoning
 - D. the suppression of creative expression

28. **The author's attitude toward the print revolution is best described as**
- A. idealistic but historically naïve
 - B. dismissive and cynical
 - C. analytical and ambivalent
 - D. nostalgic for the pre-print world
29. **The text's final paragraph implies that the digital era**
- A. perfectly replicates the harmony of the print age
 - B. inherits similar tensions about truth and information
 - C. has eliminated interpretive chaos
 - D. depends entirely on censorship to survive
30. **The overall argument of the text is that print culture**
- A. triggered purely positive intellectual liberation
 - B. established modern ideas but also modern insecurities
 - C. destroyed Europe's cultural unity
 - D. replaced religion with political ideology

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Writing Comprehension Test for 11th Form Students

1. Technology helps us to do lots of things we weren't able to do many years ago, but sometimes it can also be very frustrating. Write an article for your college magazine entitled "Why Technology Makes Me Angry." Include some examples in your article.
2. In today's job market it is far more important to have practical skills than theoretical knowledge. In the future, job applicants may not need any formal qualifications. To what extent do you agree or disagree?
3. Andy Warhol was a famous American artist whose parents were emigrants from Slovakia. He once said "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes". What do you think about the obsession with today's celebrity culture? Why do you think we sometimes spend too much attention on famous people in the media such as music, movie, television, and sports stars? Describe a person in the public eye to whom you think too much notice is paid to.

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Writing Comprehension Test for 10th Form Students

1. Write an essay in answer to the following question. "The fashion industry is an expensive waste of time and effort." How far do you agree?
2. Many cultures believe in harmony and balance between humans and nature. Do you think humans and nature are in balance? Explain why or why not. Can you think of any examples in your own life? What can humans do to help restore the balance with nature?
3. "You learn more from failure than from success". Do you agree with this quote? Why or why not? Explain a situation where you failed at reaching a goal, but learned something new as a result. What would you tell another person who lets failure stop them from doing things in their life?

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1. You see the following notice on a website about recycling: "Many people today prefer to buy a lot of new things and throw their old things away. What are the negative effects of this, and how can people be discouraged from consuming more than they need?" Write a blog entry for the website giving your views and suggestions in response to the notice.
2. "Travelling to different countries broadens your mind". Consider this quote and write an article for a newsletter.
3. What do you think about zoos? Are they good things or should they be banned? Write an essay about the pros and cons of keeping animals in zoos.