



Cambridge O Level

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

1123/11

Paper 1 Reading

May/June 2025

INSERT

2 hours

INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading passages.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.



This document has **4** pages.

Read Text A and answer Question 1 and Question 2 on the question paper.

Text A: Our family restaurant

In this extract Hassan looks back at the beginnings of his career as a chef.

- 1 It was my grandmother's idea to sell snacks to the rush-hour crush outside the busy train station from a string of food stalls on bicycles. They sold sweets made of nuts and honey, but mostly they sold 'bhelpuri', paper cones of puffed rice with chutney, vegetables and herbs, slathered with spices. Delicious. Milky tea was equally popular. Unsurprisingly, the snack bicycles became a commercial success. 5

- 2 Greatly encouraged by their good fortune, my grandparents cleared Wasteland nearby to erect a basic roadside restaurant with seating and my parents joined the business. Grandmother also employed Bappu, a cook from a southern village. To her northern repertoire she added dishes like Bappu's traditional 'spicy prawns'. News of our family kitchen soon spread. 10

- 3 My mother had a remarkable talent - I cannot give her enough credit for what became of me. There's no dish finer than her 'pearl spot', a fish she dusted, wrapped in a banana leaf and tawa-grilled with a spot of coconut oil – robust yet refined. Everything I've ever cooked since, I measure against this benchmark. Mother possessed that capacity required of professional chefs to multitask. I grew up watching her tiny figure darting barefoot across the earthen kitchen floor, chopping, dipping, frying, then passing me a taste to keep me occupied. The point of all this is that our restaurant quickly established itself. 20

- 4 The kitchen used to be the heart and soul of the old family business – always so full of life back then, filled with constant comings and goings. It was here, in the heat of the afternoon after school, that I would find Mother working. I'd scramble atop a crate for a hot-faced sniff of her spicy fish soup, and we'd chat about my day at school before she passed over to me the stirring of the cauldron. I remember this as if it were yesterday: stirring and stirring to the city's beat, the magic trance that has ever since taken me when I cook. 25

- 5 If you stepped out of the immediate safety of our family compound, you entered a shanty town. But on the other side of us was a different India. Towering above, cranes and newly built high-rise apartments contrasted with the sea of roof scraps atop the shacks of the notorious shanty town. As I grew up, so too did my country. The affluent seemed to suddenly spring from the ground. My father talked of software engineers and umbrella manufacturers, millionaires - a world away from the hazy air thick with the roar of roosters. Keen to outplay potential competitors, Father moved fast. 35

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- 6 Our cosy restaurant was transformed into the 365-seat 'Fabulous Nights Restaurant'. In went an over-size stone fountain. Over the centre of the dining room, Father hung a huge glitter-ball made of mirrors, which revolved over a tiny dance floor. He had the walls painted gold, before smothering them with multitudes of signed photographs of film stars, just like he'd seen in pictures of famous restaurants. 40
- 7 The restaurant reverberated with laughter and the thump of the disco as Father waddled around like some fancy film director, yelling orders, greeting guests. 'Come on!' he cried to the servers. 'Why so slow?' Mother, by contrast, was the much-needed brake, always ready to calm Father down with a serving of common sense. I recall her sitting coolly in a corner working on the accounts before dispatching Bappu to the market. 45
- 8 One of my favourite holiday pastimes was accompanying Bappu at Mother's suggestion. I went because he would buy me deep-fried 'jalebi', drenched in sugary syrup, but without realising, I picked up a valuable skill for a chef: the art of selecting fresh produce. We started at the fruit and vegetable stalls; baskets were stacked high between narrow walkways. Fruiterers delicately built pomegranate towers, a bed of purple tissue fanning out below them in the shape of lotus flowers; baskets filled with coconuts and mangoes rose vertically, creating sweet-smelling sculptures of expensive fruit hand-polished to a waxy gloss. 50
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- 9 One afternoon, I found myself in the back of the restaurant as my parents scrutinised the sales records to determine which dishes had not been popular. Bappu sat opposite them in a stiff-backed chair, like in a court of law, nervously stroking his moustache. This was a weekly ritual, a constant pushing of Bappu to improve the old recipes. It was like that. Do better. You can always do better. 60
- 10 The offending item stood between them - a copper bowl of chicken masala. Drawn by its fiery fumes, I reached over, dipping my fingers into the rich rustic sauce and sucked them greedily. The gloopy masala trickled slowly down my throat, a heavy, oily paste of red chilli. 'Only three orders last week. We fix it now or I drop it from the menu,' Father yelled. He spooned a slop of the sauce onto a plate. 'Could be better. You agree?' 'Wah?' said Bappu. 'Do this, do that. Maybe I'll work somewhere else!' 65
70
- 11 'Make it drier,' I said, thoughtfully licking my lips. 'A little crunchy.' 'Wah? Now I take orders from the boy?' Let him speak,' said Mother. 'Bappu uses butter - it's better to dry-fry; more modern, healthier.' Bappu straightened his chef's hat, repositioning his dignity, and took a sip of tea.
- 12 Bappu followed my suggestion - a hint of my future career. The chicken dish became one of our best-sellers, renamed, by Mother, Hassan's Dry Chicken. 75

Read **Text B** and answer **Question 3** on the question paper.

Text B: Swimming pools

- 1 I learnt to swim as a young child in the late 1980s – a skill that would save my life years later. Back then, I took for granted weekend mornings with friends at the public swimming pools, summers spent splashing around in the lake on my grandparents' farm as well as my lessons in the school pool.
- 2 Forty-five years on, my relationship with water is changing. My work takes me to a lot of countries and, if I'm lucky, near where I'm staying there might be a public pool, often reasonably priced compared to other forms of exercise, or more rarely, equally clean open water such as a river or lake for that all-body workout. Like many tourists, I would always choose holiday accommodation with a pool to relax in and am tempted by the health benefits for the family of having one at home. However, the prediction that by 2030 almost 50 per cent of the global population could be facing water scarcity makes it hard not to see private swimming pools as anything besides a luxury indulgence. 5
- 3 Furthermore, the high levels of chlorine in some pools cause swimmers' skins to become dry and turn swimmers' hair green. Though the option of being able to swim all year round in an indoor pool will still attract many, other swimmers no longer want to use chlorine or chemically-cleaned pools. 10
- 4 Some argue that 'sustainable', more eco-friendly swimming pools are the answer. Others disagree that any kind of man-made pool can ever be truly good for the environment. In the meantime, sales of eco-pools are booming. Certainly, they offer a chemical-free and relatively low-tech alternative to conventional swimming pools. To build eco-pools, gravel and clay are used in place of concrete and fiberglass. Chlorine and mechanical filtering systems can be expensive to run – another benefit of natural purification used in eco-pools. These pools use aquatic plants that enrich the pool with oxygen, support beneficial bacteria, and provide a natural habitat for aquatic life – good for wildlife as well as for humans. 20
- 5 Meanwhile, those with conventional pools are also looking to find alternatives to the use of chemicals for pool cleaning. Natural forms of cleaning agents are being researched; these reduce water consumption as there is less frequent need to clean the pool by emptying and re-filling it. And there's nothing new about using solar heating in swimming pools. 25
- 6 Covering a pool when it's not in use can significantly reduce evaporation and help to retain heat, making a notable difference to the energy it uses and saving on costs. And finally to sharing. While owning a private pool may be a status symbol for many, there's a growing movement of sharing that sees neighbours lend everything from cars to books; this could easily embrace the shared swimming pool too. 'I love having our own private swimming pool in our garden,' explains model, Mario Angeles, 'but it's a real nuisance having to monitor the chlorine level each day to ensure safe and clean water. That said, I'm also aware that water is a precious resource and not everyone can afford to heat so much water. Since it was installed last month, I've offered free swims to local families and two have already accepted. Our nearest neighbour, Ted, flatly refused, though, muttering something about "caring too much about the environment" to use our swimming pool.' 30
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