

Practice Comprehension # 6- Nuclear Landscape

- 1 We head north and west from Kiev, making for the town of Narodichi. It's 60 km due west of Chernobyl, two of whose reactors, our guide reminds us, are still operational.
 - 2 We are passing through woodlands of pine and oak scrub interspersed with harvested fields and cherry and almond orchards. After a while the woodland gives way to a wide and fertile agricultural plain. The first indication that this abundance is tainted comes as quite a shock. It's a sign, set in brambles and long grass, which reads, 'Warning: It is forbidden for cattle to graze, and for anybody to gather mushrooms, strawberries and medicinal herbs,
 - 3 We stop here and put on our yellow badges, which register radiation levels, and which will be sent back to England for analysis after our three-hour visit. Armed with these and a radiation detector, we enter Narodichi where people have lived with radiation for over five years. It's a neat, proud little town with a chestnut-lined main street and a silver-painted Lenin in front of the town headquarters.
 - 4 In the municipal gardens the grass is uncut but a fountain still plays. There are several memorials. One is a scorched tree with a cross on it - local people think that the forest protected them from the worst of the blast. Beside the tree are three large boulders, one of which commemorates four villages and 548 people evacuated in 1986, another fifteen villages and 3264 people evacuated in 1990. Twenty-two more villages and a further 11 000 people will be going soon. An inscription reads: 'In memory of the villages and human destinies of the Narodichi region burnt down by radiation.'
 - 5 One of the most polluted areas is the children's playground, with 13 to 17 times normal radiation levels. The red metal chairs hang down from the roundabout and blue steel boats swing gently in the breeze, but no one is allowed to play here any more. Ivan, the local schoolmaster, is short and
-

podgy and his face is an unhealthy grey. Two of his pupils pass by on bicycles and he grabs them and introduces us. The boys, just back from a Pioneer camp in Poland, look bored, and reply in monosyllables. He smiles proudly and a little desperately. I ask if the children's work has been affected by their proximity to Chernobyl. He sighs and nods.

- 6 'There is not a single healthy child here.'
- 7 As we drive out of Narodichi, Ivan talks proudly of the history of his town, interspersing this with casually chilling present-day observations.
- 8 'This is the bridge over the Oush River. It is an area of the highest pollution.'
- 9 We come to a village which was evacuated last year. There are no ruins, there is no devastation or destruction. Wooden cottages with painted windowframes stand in their orderly rows. Flowers are in bloom and grasshoppers dart around in lush overgrown gardens. It is a hot, soft, gentle summer's day. Yet scientists who have visited the area say it could be 700 years before this place comes back to life. It is hard to know what to believe, for whatever curse lies over these villages is the more frightening for being invisible. It is how one has heard the countryside would be after a nuclear war - benign, smiling, deadly.
- 10 A year's exposure to the weather has not yet dissipated a faint smell of disinfectant in a small, deserted maternity hospital. A poster on the wall depicts the American space shuttle spinning round the earth. There is a book on breastfeeding, its leaves nibbled by mice, an examination chair, medical records still in files, and a portrait of Lenin which has fallen out of its frame and lies in a corner beneath a scattering of glass slides and syringes.
- 11 1Conscious of the limited time we have been advised to spend here we move on through the village. I catch sight of two figures down a lane to one side of the main street. One is a very old lady, whose name is Heema, and the other her nephew. Heema is 90 years old and has refused to be moved from the village. She says she has been moved five times since the disaster and now she is too old and ill. Her one wish is to die in the house in which
-

she was born, but that is now cordoned off with barbed wire, so she will remain here with her daughter. They are the only inhabitants of the village.

12 Further along the road, at the next village, the radiation detector beeps for the first time.

13 'Pay attention, please,' says Ivan, 'the radiation is very high here.'

14 This is one of the villages evacuated in 1986, immediately after the explosion and fire, and the village shop is now almost submerged in the undergrowth. Inside it is a mess of broken shelves, abandoned goods, smashed bottles.

15 'There was a panic here, our guide explains, unnecessarily.

16 We drive back through Narodichi, where, as in over 40 villages in this region alone, the grass will soon grow around doors that will never be opened again, and anyone who comes here will be informed of the dangers and the risks which those who lived here were not told about until it was too late.

Question 1

- a) What sort of countryside is being described in the second paragraph? (1)
 - b) Why is the writer shocked by the sign he sees in the countryside? (1)
 - c) Suggest why you think the radiations "will be sent back to London"? (1)
 - d) "There are several memorials", name two different memories these monuments carry? (1)
 - e) Paragraph 4 reads: "but no one is allowed to play here anymore." Explain, in your own words, why this is the case? (2)
 - f) Explain using your own words, what the text means by, "the schoolmaster is short and podgy" (Paragraph 5) (2)
 - g) In paragraph 9, explain in your own words why the writer finds it difficult to believe that no one will be able to live in the village for 700 years. (2)
-

- h) In paragraph 11, who is actual the second inhabitant of the village with Heema? Her nephew or her daughter? (1) Explain why you think it's not the other. (1)
- i) Paragraph 16 reads, "doors that will never be opened again". What is something in the text that is contrary to this point? (1)
- j) Explain, using your own words, the different feelings of Ivan, the local schoolmaster, during the writer's visit. Give three details from the text to support your answer. (3)

Question 2

- a) What effect does the writer want to create by describing Narodichi as a 'neat, proud little town'? (Paragraph 3) (1)
- b) Explain why the writer uses 'benign' at the end of paragraph 9? (1)
- c) What does the writer mean when he says that Heema's house has been 'cordoned off with barbed wire'? (Paragraph 11) (1)
- d) In the village, what does the writer wants to suggest to the reader by calling the guide's explanation of 'a panic here unnecessary'? (Paragraph 15) (1)
- e) In the last paragraph, what two impressions does the writer want to convey to the reader about the place, "and anyone who comes here will be informed of the dangers and the risks which those who lived here were not told about until it was too late"? (2)
- f) Identify one example of how the writer uses language effectively to convey details about the area. "It is a hot, soft, gentle summer's day. Yet scientists who have visited the area say it could be 700 years before this place comes back to life. It is hard to know what to believe, for whatever curse lies over these villages is the more frightening for being invisible. It is how one has heard the countryside would be after a nuclear war – benign, smiling, deadly." Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified. (3)

Marks Obtained: [/25]