Reading Comprehension – Test 2

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ Score: / 20

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Read each text carefully and choose the best answer (A, B, C or D) for each question.

Part 1: Feature article

Read the article about roadside verges and answer questions 1–7.

The Untidy Revolution

For decades, the strip of grass between pavement and road has been treated as something to be kept in check. Councils mowed it every few weeks from spring to autumn, and residents who let their own front lawns grow shaggy risked a pointed note from a neighbour. Lately, however, a growing number of towns have begun to question the habit, and the results are proving both more colourful and more contentious than anyone expected.

The case for mowing less is, at first glance, straightforward. Verges cut short several times a season rarely allow wildflowers to set seed, and without flowers there is little to sustain the bees, moths and hoverflies on which so many crops and garden plants depend. Ecologists point out that, taken together, a country's road verges can cover an area larger than many of its national parks. Left alone for even a single summer, a strip of dull turf may produce oxeye daisies, clover and knapweed in quantities few people had suspected were lying dormant in the soil.

Yet the picture is not quite as simple as "stop cutting and nature will do the rest". Grass that is never cut tends, over time, to be overtaken by a handful of vigorous species such as nettles and coarse grasses, which crowd out the more delicate flowers. The most successful schemes therefore involve not abandoning maintenance but rethinking it: one or two cuts a year, timed after flowering, with the cuttings removed so that the soil does not become too rich. "People hear 'no mow' and imagine we've simply given up," says Amara Osei, a parks officer in a medium-sized town that adopted the approach five years ago. "In fact, it takes more planning than mowing ever did."

Public reaction has been mixed. Some residents welcome the return of colour and insects; others see long grass as a sign of neglect, or worry that it hides litter and blocks drivers' views at junctions. Several councils have responded by mowing a neat border along the edge of wilder areas, a small gesture that signals the untidiness is deliberate. Osei calls these borders "frames for the picture". Once people can see that someone is in charge, she says, complaints tend to fall away.

Cost is the other sticking point. Supporters often claim that mowing less saves money, but the savings can be modest once the expense of collecting cuttings and putting up signs is taken into account. The stronger argument, advocates suggest, is not financial at all. A verge alive with insects is a daily reminder that the natural world is not confined to distant reserves but begins, quite literally, at the end of the garden path.

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1. Which of the following would be the most suitable subtitle for the article?
   A Why councils should stop maintaining verges altogether
   B Wilder verges: a promising idea that needs careful handling
   C How mowing less has solved councils' budget problems
   D The residents fighting to keep their streets tidy
2. According to paragraph 2, why do verges that are mown several times a season support so few insects?
   A The mowing machines disturb insects' nests.
   B The grass grows too thickly for insects to move through.
   C The cut grass makes the soil too rich for insects.
   D Wildflowers are cut before they can produce seed.
3. As used in paragraph 2, the word 'dormant' means:
   A permanently damaged
   B inactive but able to grow later
   C deliberately planted
   D spreading rapidly
4. What point is Amara Osei making when she says, 'it takes more planning than mowing ever did'?
   A The scheme was abandoned because it was too complicated.
   B Her team would prefer to return to regular mowing.
   C Reduced mowing is a managed approach, not a lack of effort.
   D The public should be involved in planning the cuts.
5. Why have some councils started mowing a neat border along the edges of wilder areas?
   A To show residents that the long grass is intentional
   B To improve drivers' views at every junction
   C To stop nettles spreading into wildflower areas
   D To make it easier to collect litter
6. In paragraph 5, a 'sticking point' is:
   A a moment at which a project is stopped
   B an argument that everyone accepts
   C an issue that causes disagreement or difficulty
   D a minor detail that can safely be ignored
7. What does the writer suggest in the final paragraph?
   A Supporters have exaggerated the environmental benefits of the schemes.
   B Distant nature reserves are no longer necessary.
   C The financial savings alone justify the schemes.
   D The most convincing reason for wilder verges is that they bring nature into everyday life.

Part 2: Short story

Read the story and answer questions 8–14.

The Second Half

Ines Varga had tuned pianos for twenty-two years, and she had learned to read a house before she reached the instrument. Fresh flowers in the hall meant a recital was coming; a stack of unopened post meant the piano was an afterthought, inherited and resented. The house on Alder Row offered no clues at all. It was spotless, silent, and so sparsely furnished that her footsteps seemed to follow her from room to room.

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Mr Okafor led her into a back room where an upright piano stood against the wall, its lid closed, a lace runner laid across the top as carefully as a tablecloth set for guests. "It hasn't been touched in some time," he said, which Ines soon discovered was an understatement. Several keys stuck, and the middle register had drifted so far flat that a simple chord sounded like an argument. She told him, gently, that it would take two visits, perhaps three.

"Whatever it needs," he said, and withdrew to the kitchen.

She worked for most of the afternoon. Tuning is not, as people imagine, a matter of a good ear alone; it is a long negotiation between tension and patience, each string coaxed a fraction at a time towards a pitch it would rather not hold. Ines liked the solitude of it. Clients usually hovered at first and then lost interest, but Mr Okafor did not reappear once. Only the occasional clink of a cup told her he was still in the house.

When she had finished the rough tuning, she played a few scales to test the instrument. Then, almost without deciding to, she played the opening bars of a slow waltz she had learned as a girl. Behind her, the door creaked. Mr Okafor was standing in the doorway, one hand on the frame, as though he needed it.

"My wife used to play that," he said. "Not well. She always rushed the second half."

Ines stopped. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—"

"No." He shook his head. "Please. I haven't heard it in this house for nine years. I kept meaning to have the piano sold. Then I kept meaning to have it tuned. I think I was waiting to find out which I meant."

She did not ask which he had decided. She turned back to the keys and played the waltz through to the end, and when she reached the second half, she rushed it, just slightly, the way she imagined someone else once had.

He did not speak when she had finished. But before she left, he booked the second appointment, and the third, and wrote them both on the calendar by the door in careful capitals.

8. What does the first paragraph suggest about Ines?
   A She dislikes working in sparsely furnished houses.
   B She usually forms impressions of her clients from their homes.
   C She prefers to work for clients who perform in recitals.
   D She found the house on Alder Row untidy and unwelcoming.

9. What is meant by 'which Ines soon discovered was an understatement'?
   A Mr Okafor had secretly been playing the piano.
   B The piano needed less work than Ines had expected.
   C The piano was in a worse state than Mr Okafor's words implied.
   D Mr Okafor had exaggerated the piano's problems.

10. The description of tuning as 'a long negotiation between tension and patience' suggests that tuning...
    A involves gradual, careful adjustments over time.
    B depends mainly on having a naturally good ear.
    C often leads to disagreements with clients.
    D is stressful work that Ines finds unpleasant.

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11. Mr Okafor stands 'one hand on the frame, as though he needed it'. This suggests that he…
    A is annoyed that Ines played without asking permission.
    B is physically too weak to walk any further.
    C wants Ines to stop playing and leave.
    D is emotionally shaken by what he hears.
12. What does Mr Okafor mean when he says, 'I think I was waiting to find out which I meant'?
    A He had not been sure whether he wanted to part with the piano or keep it.
    B He had forgotten whether he had already arranged to sell the piano.
    C He wanted Ines to tell him how much the piano was worth.
    D He regretted not selling the piano years earlier.
13. Why does Ines rush the second half of the waltz?
    A Because the middle register is still out of tune
    B To recreate the way Mr Okafor's wife used to play it
    C Because she wants to finish quickly and leave
    D Because she never learned that section properly
14. What does the final paragraph imply?
    A Mr Okafor intends to learn to play the piano himself.
    B Ines has offered to buy the piano from Mr Okafor.
    C Mr Okafor was unhappy with Ines's work but felt obliged to continue.
    D Mr Okafor has decided to keep the piano.

Part 3: Exhibition review

Read the review and answer questions 15–20.

Exhibition review: The Edges of the Map

Exhibitions about maps face a peculiar problem. Their subject is, by definition, designed to be useful rather than beautiful, and visitors who have found their way to the gallery using a phone may wonder why anyone would linger over a chart of a coastline drawn three centuries ago. "The Edges of the Map", showing at the Riverside Gallery until the end of March, answers that question more convincingly than most, though not without the occasional misstep.

The premise is a clever one. Rather than presenting maps as triumphs of accuracy, the curators have chosen to focus on what each map leaves out, distorts or simply invents. The first room sets the tone: a series of early sea charts in which confidently drawn harbours give way, a few centimetres inland, to blank space, decorative creatures and the occasional optimistic guess at a mountain range. A wall caption notes, drily, that one of these imaginary ranges remained on published maps for almost a hundred years, copied faithfully from one atlas to the next by mapmakers who had never been anywhere near it.

It is in the second and third rooms that the exhibition really finds its voice. Here, the focus shifts from ignorance to choice. A pair of city plans drawn a decade apart show the same neighbourhood, but in the later version an entire district of small workshops has vanished. It was not demolished; the authority that commissioned the map simply no longer considered it worth recording. Nearby, a transport map is displayed beside a satellite image of the same area, revealing how much the familiar diagram stretches, straightens and simplifies in the interests of clarity. The effect is quietly unsettling. One leaves with the sense that every map, however neutral it appears, is an argument about what matters.

The final room is less successful. Devoted to digital mapping, it relies heavily on touchscreens and projections that feel rushed compared with the carefully paced galleries before it. A wall of screens showing real-time location data is striking for a moment, but the accompanying text gestures at questions of privacy without ever properly engaging with them. Given the thoughtfulness elsewhere, this is a missed opportunity rather than a fatal flaw.

These reservations aside, the exhibition is a genuine pleasure, and it rewards slow viewing. Visitors expecting a celebration of human ingenuity will certainly find one. They may also find themselves looking at the map on their phone a little differently on the way home.

15. According to the first paragraph, what 'peculiar problem' do exhibitions about maps face?
    A Old maps are too fragile to be displayed for long periods.
    B Visitors find historical maps too difficult to understand.
    C Maps are made to be practical, so visitors may not see them as worth looking at closely.
    D Digital maps have made galleries reluctant to show older ones.
16. Why does the reviewer mention the imaginary mountain range?
    A To show how mistakes could survive because mapmakers copied earlier work
    B To criticise the curators for including inaccurate maps
    C To suggest that early mapmakers deliberately misled their readers
    D To prove that early explorers travelled further inland than was believed
17. According to the review, why is the district of workshops missing from the later city plan?
    A It was demolished in the decade between the two plans.
    B The mapmaker made an error when copying the earlier plan.
    C It was replaced by a new transport network.
    D The people who commissioned the map no longer thought it important enough to include.
18. What does the reviewer mean by 'every map, however neutral it appears, is an argument about what matters'?
    A Maps are usually designed to persuade people to visit certain places.
    B Maps reflect decisions about what to show and what to leave out.
    C Modern maps are far more neutral than older ones.
    D People often argue about which maps are the most accurate.
19. The phrase 'gestures at questions of privacy' in paragraph 4 suggests that the text in the final room...
    A focuses too heavily on privacy issues.
    B uses images rather than words to discuss privacy.
    C mentions privacy issues without exploring them in depth.
    D argues strongly that location data should be banned.
20. Which best summarises the reviewer's overall opinion of the exhibition?
    A It is thoughtful and rewarding, despite a weaker final section.
    B It is technically impressive but lacks a clear central idea.
    C It will only be enjoyed by visitors with specialist knowledge.
    D It is let down so badly by the final room that it cannot be recommended.

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Answer key – Reading Comprehension – Test 2

1 B	2 D	3 B	4 C	5 A	6 C	7 D	8 B	9 C	10 A
11 D	12 A	13 B	14 D	15 C	16 A	17 D	18 B	19 C	20 A

Explanations

1. **B** – The article presents the benefits of mowing less but stresses planning, public reaction and cost as complications.
2. **D** – Frequent cutting rarely allows wildflowers to set seed, so there are few flowers to sustain insects.
3. **B** – The seeds were present in the soil but inactive until mowing stopped.
4. **C** – She is correcting the belief that 'no mow' means the council has 'simply given up'.
5. **A** – The text says the border 'signals the untidiness is deliberate'.
6. **C** – Cost is described as a problem on which supporters' claims are disputed.
7. **D** – The writer says the stronger argument 'is not financial' but about nature beginning at the garden path.
8. **B** – She has 'learned to read a house' from details such as flowers or unopened post.
9. **C** – The sticking keys and badly flat register show that 'some time' greatly understated the neglect.
10. **A** – Each string is 'coaxed a fraction at a time', which describes slow, careful adjustment.
11. **D** – Hearing his late wife's waltz affects him so deeply that he seems to need support.
12. **A** – He was undecided between selling and tuning, that is, between letting go and keeping it.
13. **B** – She plays it 'the way she imagined someone else once had', echoing his comment about his wife.
14. **D** – Booking further tuning appointments shows he has chosen to keep the piano rather than sell it.
15. **C** – Maps are 'designed to be useful rather than beautiful', so visitors may wonder why anyone would linger over them.
16. **A** – The range was 'copied faithfully from one atlas to the next' by mapmakers who had never seen the area.
17. **D** – The text says it was not demolished; the commissioning authority no longer considered it worth recording.
18. **B** – The examples in that paragraph show maps shaped by choices about what to record or simplify.
19. **C** – It touches on privacy 'without ever properly engaging with' the questions.
20. **A** – The reviewer calls it 'a genuine pleasure' and the final room 'a missed opportunity rather than a fatal flaw'.

Notes for teachers: Use the test as a timed assessment, or set one section per lesson as intensive reading practice. Many distractors are statements that are partly true or that repeat words from the text. These target learners who match vocabulary instead of following the writer's argument, or who take figurative language literally. For follow-up, ask students to underline the evidence for each answer, then discuss how the article, story and review each signal attitude differently.

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