



Cambridge O Level

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

1123/21

Paper 2 Reading

May/June 2021

INSERT

1 hour 45 minutes

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. Any blank pages are indicated.

Passage 1

Nutmeg

- 1 The earliest known use of the spice called nutmeg was 3500 years ago on Pulau Ai, one of the Banda Islands in Indonesia; we know this because traces of the spice were found there on a fragment of pottery dating from that time. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the Banda Islands were the only places in the world where nutmeg was grown. Before that, during the Middle Ages, Arab traders discovered nutmeg there and sold it to the Venetians. The Arabs did not divulge the exact location of their Asian source; the Venetians were unable to deduce it, and thus prices could be kept high. 5
- 2 In 1511, the Portuguese conquered Malacca, the hub of Asian trade. Portuguese sailors found the source of nutmeg by recruiting sailors from Malacca who knew where that source was. They spent about a month on the Banda Islands, buying and filling their ships with this precious commodity which they took back to sell more widely in Europe, not just in Venice. Demand for nutmeg spread because it became a prized spice in European societies; it was seen as a symbol of wealth, being used in elaborate cuisine, and was considered a cure for the plague. Later, Dutch ships arrived in the Banda Islands and took control of nutmeg production following a war with the local people. The Dutch East India Company constructed a comprehensive nutmeg trading system during the seventeenth century which included – as well as plantations – forts to defend the stores of spice. Nutmeg was a convenient product to trade because, as with other spices, it was small, easily transported and durable. 10 15
- 3 In time, the British were able to negotiate a monopoly of nutmeg on one of the Banda Islands by agreeing, in exchange, to protect the islanders from the Dutch. They later took control of all the Banda Islands and transported nutmeg trees, along with their soil, to Sri Lanka, Penang and Singapore in order to increase production. 20
- 4 Nutmeg continues to be a valuable commodity in modern times. It is used in the cooking of savoury dishes and crosses many cultural boundaries, being used in, for example, Indonesian, Indian and European cuisine such as potato and pasta dishes. Similarly, it has many uses in the cooking of sweet dishes and desserts in countries such as Malaysia and Brunei; a pinch of nutmeg added to rice pudding is delicious. In the Caribbean, a Barbados rum punch is sprinkled with nutmeg, which is also a traditional ingredient in mulled wine, showing that nutmeg finds its way not only into food but also into many drinks. 25
- 5 The seed of the nutmeg tree gives us not only the nutmeg spice, but the seed covering gives us mace, which has a more delicate flavour. Mace is preferable to nutmeg as it imparts a saffron-like hue to enhance the appearance of the dish. Essential nutmeg oil, so-called because it contains the essence of the plant's fragrance, is sometimes preferred in cooking because it leaves no particles in the food. 30
- 6 Nutmeg has a role in the industrial world. Nutmeg butter, a commodity produced by pressing nutmeg seeds, can be used as an industrial lubricant to reduce friction between surfaces in contact with one another. Our appearance and well-being can be enhanced through the use of nutmeg. A paste made with nutmeg and honey applied to the face definitely produces a clear and beautiful complexion and many cosmetics and perfumes are made with nutmeg oil. Because nutmeg helps to remove toxins from the body, it is used in some toothpastes to prevent bad breath. People might have been wrong to think that nutmeg could cure the plague, but now many people see medicinal benefits in it. Adding a pinch of it to a glass of warm milk is said to cure insomnia and grating nutmeg into soup may aid digestion; it has even been linked to reducing depression and helping concentration. However, as research shows, nutmeg should be taken in moderation as, when used in excess, it can cause hallucinations and other mental health disorders. 35 40 45

Passage 2

Tending The Olive Trees

- 1 Summer was approaching at a galloping pace. Every plant was showing early signs of wilting in the heat and for the next two months would need to be watered daily. My husband had a long-standing arrangement to work overseas and I felt sadness at his departure. Then our farm worker, Quashia, announced out of the blue that he had business to attend to elsewhere; he assured me that, if I needed anything, I only had to contact Rene, a good friend of his. 5
- 2 Unfortunately, it soon became clear that a fungal infection was spreading wildly through the olive trees. I phoned Rene, who told me that the sickness had to be treated with chemicals as soon as possible. 'Is there no other way?' I begged. I sensed his impatience at what he perceived as my naïve approach to farming; he knew spraying trees did not fit in with my idea of running the farm organically. 'Are you absolutely certain there is no natural cure we can come up with?' He shook his head solemnly and told me that there was another problem: olive trees are prey to flies during seasons of extreme heat, and these flies were particularly rife that year. 10
- 3 I stared at the trees in dismay; infected trees could jeopardise our status as olive farmers. I told Rene I had read of another system being tried out to combat those flies, using traps attached to the branches. 'It's not efficient,' he replied. 'Any farmer will back me up on this. Ninety per cent of the olives are attacked anyway, fall too soon and rot. Still, it's up to you if that is your approach.' Rene had an edge to his voice I had rarely heard before and I reluctantly agreed. 'Trust my expertise,' he said. 'I can do this, although I can't manage without assistance.' 15
- 4 This was reasonable; he was seventy-six years old, and there were almost eighty trees to treat over many terraces. Rene suggested bringing someone with him, one of his friends who would accept a reasonable daily rate, but nobody strong enough was available; they had all committed themselves elsewhere. It was understandable that, if Quashia had been there, he would have done most of the work. Rene reiterated that he could not accomplish the job alone, and so I suggested I could be his assistant. His immediate response was to guffaw 20 and then, to cover this rather impolite reaction, he muttered incomprehensible misgivings which I feared were no more than the fact that I was a woman. 'Is 7am tomorrow morning too early for you?' he asked with a hint of sarcasm. I realised that, to Rene's way of thinking, this was no job for a female and it would be difficult to convince him otherwise. 25
- 5 The next morning, we filled a huge plastic container with water, before adding the chemicals. Then we were ready to start spraying the trees from the spray-gun attached to a hosepipe. While Rene did the spraying, my job was to keep the hosepipe flexible, ensuring it didn't curl and make the flow of the chemical solution restricted. As there were no accessible driving routes in the terraced olive grove, it was necessary to walk, and haul the hosepipe. We also needed hundreds of metres of it. Rene told me it had been necessary for him to drive ten kilometres to borrow this hosepipe for us. We couldn't just buy our own, he said, as this one was very special. This sounded rather unlikely to me, as it looked like an ordinary hosepipe, but I acquiesced, silently plotting that the next time I was in the ironmonger's I would acquire a few hundred yards of the stuff. 30 35
- 6 'Switch on the machine,' Rene shouted bossily. He was some distance from me and staring up into a tall, gnarled old olive tree. The machine started to make a rather disgusting slurping sound. Beneath the tree, Rene stood no taller than a matchstick. The solution started to feed through, which sent the hosepipe into dancing gyrations. The further we went, the more hosepipe I had to lift, negotiate and release. I was sticky with perspiration but I didn't care. I felt sure that Rene must be just a little impressed with his female assistant. 40 45

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