**City Olympiad 2024/2025**

Reading Comprehension Test

For 11th Form Students

Text 1: Adapted from “Jake and Alice” by ReadWorks

Glossary: **offspring** - a person’s child or children

**to latch onto** - to focus on; to give significant attention to

Jake and Alice are siblings. Alice was born in 1988, and Jake was born in 1992. Although there is a four-year difference in age, they get along well. Naturally, Jake and Alice don’t share all the same interests. Alice is fascinated with natural science and took all the advanced biology courses in high school. Jake is more interested in making things, like complicated recipes he finds in his collection of cookbooks.

Both siblings are medium height, with dark blonde hair and hazel eyes. Their mother, Rachel, has dark brown hair, and Pete, their father, is blonde. The whole family is lightly freckled. While they all love music, none are particularly excellent singers, and only Jake knows how to read music and play an instrument: the trumpet. Where do traits come from? When two organisms—in this case, those organisms would be Alice and Jake’s parents: Pete and Rachel—create a third organism through reproduction, many variables come into play. It’s a complex lottery in which an **offspring** of the first two organisms inherits a combination of their genetic material. The possible variations inherent in recombining the parents’ DNA are very, very broad. And that’s where we get so much variation.

Although Alice and Jake’s unique collection of traits is originally the product of chance, there are systems to which every freckle, hair, and skin tag can be traced. Let’s focus on the physical aspect of inherited traits. It would be very, very unlikely for two parents with identically coded chromosomes to reproduce. It’s in the best interest of our population that lots of different genes are mixed together in an evolutionary soup, so that many new variations on living organisms can be exposed to the environment. Another interesting variable that lets organism populations adapt to changing environments is mutation in genes. Sometimes, unpredictable changes in genetic code will appear within a new generation, not traceable back to a parental source.

A mutation can be as tiny as a freckle, or as conspicuous as an extra finger. As long as a trait has never appeared in an organism’s lineage before, it is a mutation. Jake, for example, has an oddly shaped toe in his left foot. It doesn’t hurt, and he’s never had an infection. If he has children someday, they may inherit this trait. But it didn’t come from Pete, his father, and it didn’t come from Rachel, his mother. It is a mutation. Mutation is a fascinating concept, so it’s not surprising that artists and writers have **latched onto** it as a metaphor. Creators of superheroes like the X-men and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles have used the idea of extreme mutation as a narrative device to provide commentary on racism. If a mutation pops up that happens to be advantageous for a particular organism within a population, that organism is more likely to survive and therefore more likely to procreate. So, who knows? Maybe Jake’s funny big toe will come in handy someday.

Statements 1 through 10 (Mark the statements TRUE or FALSE)

1. Mutations in genetic traits come from either the mother or the father.
2. Jake and Alice have the exact same genetic makeup because they are siblings.
3. In the sentence “as long as a trait has never appeared in an organism’s lineage before, it’s a mutation”, the word *lineage* includes one’s parents.
4. The X-men and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are examples of superheroes who use their mutations for their benefit.
5. It can be assumed that Jake and Alice received their freckles from their parents and not because of a mutation.
6. All mutations are harmful for the individual who has it.
7. The main idea of the text is how mutations affect our traits.
8. It can be inferred from the passage that new mutations in every generation are advantageous.
9. The author of the text would most likely agree that certain traits are inherited and certain traits are developed from the environment.
10. It can be inferred from the passage that two individuals with identical genetic makeup would be related to each other.

Text 2: Adapted from “The Battle of the Bagel” by ReadWorks

Glossary: **outraged** - to be very angry

**chewier** - tougher in consistency; more difficult to eat **doughnut** - a piece of sweet, fried dough that is often ring-shaped

In the summer of 1995, a bakery opened in Montreal, Canada and began to serve warm, New York- style bagels. Other cities across the world had been thrilled when New York bagels finally came to town, but the Montrealers were **outraged**. Bagelville, the new shop, went out of business and closed its doors in less than a year. Montreal has a unique bagel tradition that dates back to at least 1919. The Montreal bagel is **chewier**, smaller, and less dense, but has a much bigger hole than its American cousin. Boiled in honey water and then baked in a wood-burning oven, it’s a little sweet and has a harder exterior. It is hand-rolled in the shape of an oval hoop; you can wear one around your wrist like a bracelet. ...

People in both cities feel very strongly about their bagels, and there is something of an ongoing competition between them. Residents of Montreal insist their brand of bagel is better than the famous New York kind. The Montreal-born astronaut Greg Chamitoff even brought one-and-a-half dozen bagels, sprinkled with sesame seeds, with him when he boarded the International Space Station. New Yorkers, however, think the Montreal bagel is too sweet—more like a **doughnut** than a genuine bagel should be. They complain that Montreal bagels turn dry and hard less than a day after they’re baked. “I don’t think a Montreal bagel place would work in New York,” said Vince Morena, a co-owner of Montreal’s famous St. Viateur Bagel bakery. “New Yorkers love New York bagels. That’s how it is.”

So which bagel is better? The answer all depends on where you come from and what you are used to. The bagel wars are impossible to settle. In truth, there is no “superior bagel,” just citizens attached to the cultures and traditions of their own cities. That’s unlikely to keep people from debating about it, though. **Questions 11 through 15 (on your answer sheet circle the correct letter A, B, C, or D)**

1. The primary purpose of this text is to
2. discuss the delights of Canadian and American cuisine.
3. show the diversity and regional preferences of the bagel.
4. establish that Montreal bagels are inferior to New York bagels.
5. introduce the reader to international bagel competitions.
6. According to the text, which of the following is true of bagels?
7. Bagels are often seen a type of doughnut in Canada.
8. There is only one correct way to make a bagel.
9. Canadians do not enjoy bagels made in New York.
10. Bagel styles differ depending the country you’re in.
11. The author uses the word “competition” to emphasize that
12. there is a rivalry between the two cities concerning which city makes the best bagels.
13. the taste of bagels is irrelevant.
14. people are biased about what kind of bagels they like.
15. one country’s method of making bagels is superior.
16. The author shares that Montreal-born astronaut, Greg Chamitoff, brought bagels to space in order to
17. show how passionate some people are about their bagel preference.
18. establish bagels as the official food of Canada.
19. demonstrate the seriousness of the bagel wars between the U.S. and Canada.
20. mention that Canada has a space program.
21. From this text, we can infer that New York bagels are
22. savory and keep fresh longer.
23. the same as Montreal bagels.
24. drier and stale.
25. traditionally sprinkled with sesame seeds.

Text 3: Adapted from “As Time Flies By” by ReadWorks

Numerous films and science-fiction novels have used time travel to send their characters through time. Time travel technology, of course, does not exist. But if it did, how would it actually work? In 2009, a blogger and scientist who goes by the username “Shechner” wrote a detailed examination of time travel in the film *Back to the Future*. The hero of that story, Marty McFly, travels from the year 1985 to 1955 by driving a car that has a time travel device built into it. During an experiment at the Twin Pines Mall in Hill Valley, California, Marty videotapes the car as it accelerates to 88 miles per hour. Then it disappears in a burst of smoke and flames. One minute later, the car reappears precisely where it disappeared. It has traveled exactly one minute into the future.

Shechner did not question the movement of time, but if the vehicle end up in the exact same place that you left?

Astronomers have spent centuries charting the stars and tracking the movements of planets across space and time, and hundreds of years of research and observations have given us the very idea of time. A single day on Earth can be broken into daytime and nighttime. The passing of day and night is caused by the rotation of the planet. Every 24 hours, the earth makes one complete rotation on its axis. During this rotation, the parts of the earth that face toward the sun are in daytime. The parts of the earth facing away are in nighttime. Just as the earth is rotating on its axis, it’s also traveling through space. Our planet makes an orbit around the sun. The amount of time it takes for the earth to make one complete orbit is about 365 days. The way we measure years is based on how long it takes our planet to make it all the way around the sun.

Drawing on this knowledge about space and time, consider the case of Marty McFly. In the film *Back to the Future*, Marty watches the time machine travel one minute into the future and appear in the exact same spot. Taking into account the movements of the earth, this seems impossible. According to Shechner’s calculations, it moves precisely 1807.57 kilometers. This number measures the speed of Earth’s orbit around the sun and the speed of Earth’s rotation on its axis. It may not seem like it, but every human being on Earth travels over 1609.34 kilometers per minute through space, just by being on the planet. The only thing that stops us from flying off into the atmosphere is gravity. If a time-traveling car cruises one minute into the future, then it could reappear a thousand miles away on another place on the earth’s surface.

This puzzle isn’t enough to ruin *Back to the Future*, which is considered by some to be a classic of blockbuster films. And if time travel technology is invented someday, the scientists may rely on a theory of time that doesn’t depend on our current understanding of space. In the meantime, all of us on planet Earth will keep moving and experiencing the passing minutes and changing seasons.

Questions 16 through 20 (circle the correct letter A, B, C, or D)

1. Which of the following best describes the purpose of paragraph 3?
2. To dispute the claims made in paragraphs 1 and 2
3. To support the claims made in paragraphs 1 and 2
4. It provides scientific backing to the blogger’s argument.
5. To distract the reader from the main argument
6. The tone of the author is best described as
7. academic.
8. furious.
9. amused.
10. upset.
11. Which of the following explains why Marty McFly went to the Twin Pines Mall?
12. To buy accessories for his car
13. To capture time travel on film
14. To look at his future car
15. To experiment on how fast his car can travel
16. In the third paragraph, the word ‘cruises’ most likely means
17. sails.
18. explores.
19. searches.
20. travels.
21. It can be inferred from the text that the blogger *Shechner* believes
22. that *Back to the Future* is not a classic.
23. the science presented in *Back to the Future* is flawless.
24. the movie *Back to the Future* is scientifically inaccurate.
25. the movie *Back to the Future* should be avoided and the movie viewed skeptically.

Text 4: Adapted from “The Tea Ceremony”

Most of Julie’s friends’ parents drank coffee. Some of them liked tea, too but not like her parents did. Julie’s family had a whole cabinet dedicated to tea. No bags in boxes either; her parents drank loose-leaf tea only. “The real stuff,” her dad called it. The Tang’s collection included fragrant jasmine green tea; Longjing tea, a pan-fried green tea Julie preferred to call by its nickname, Dragon Well tea; roasted, curly-leaved oolong tea; lightly sweet white tea; and more. Every New Year—the Chinese New Year that is—her parents would have a traditional tea ceremony. Julie thought it was B-O-R-I-N-G. However, now that she was 13, Julie decided it was time to take an interest in her own family and cultural history once she realized she actually knew very little.

“Why do we have to do this tea ceremony every year?” Julie asked her mother. “I’m not in the mood for complaints,” her mother warned. “No, but I really want to know! What is the tea ceremony really all about, and why do you always say that drinking tea is part of your DNA?” “Well, the DNA thing is a figure of speech.” “I know that, Mom,” Julie sighed. “How old do you think I am? Ten?”

“Okay then. Legend has it that Shennong discovered tea way back in 2737 B.C. He liked his water boiled so it would be germ-free when he drank it. One day, a dead leaf dropped into the water. The emperor drank it and actually found it to be quite tasty. As tea became popular, so did tea shops. They continued to prosper during the Song Dynasty, and China’s tea culture started to spread to other lands as monks and Zen masters brought tea seeds, drink ware, and knowledge to Japan. However, Chinese rulers imposed a strict ban on tea exports during the Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties. The ban made it difficult for tea to grow popular around the world. Then, soon after the Qing Dynasty was established in the 17th century, the ban was officially lifted and merchants travelled to export tea. Many went almost 6437.38 kilometers, by horse, oxen, mules, and yaks. Just imagine!” Julie’s mother explain. “Whoa!” exclaimed Julie.

“Back in the Song Dynasty,” Julie’s mother continued, “the Chinese would take ground tea powder and whip it so it was frothy, almost like the top of a milkshake. They had special tea bowls to accommodate the whipping, many of which were black or blue, and looked beautiful against the light-green tea. During the Ming Dynasty, people started to transform green tea into black tea by heating the leaves. That’s when oolong came into the picture. They also began steeping whole tea leaves, which is the loose-leaf style you’re used to.” “And what about the ceremonies?” Julie asked. “Well, a Chinese tea ceremony is a way for families to connect, which is why it’s a wedding tradition. It’s also about cultivating peace, quiet, enjoyment, and strength. When you’re performing a ceremony, there are six things to keep in mind: attitude, tea selection, water selection, tea ware selection, ambiance, and technique. Let’s start with attitude.” Julie smiled. “Perfect. Now let me show you the rest...”

Questions 21 through 25 (circle the correct letter A, B, C, or D)

1. Which of the following best describes the purpose of this text?
2. To explain East Asian history
3. To teach people about the uniqueness of Japanese tea culture
4. To explain the importance of tea in the Chinese culture
5. To present a diary entry written by the main character, Julie
6. Which of the following best explains why Julie was so amazed by her mother’s story in paragraph three?
7. Julie was impressed by how far the tea traders traveled.
8. Julie was excited that China had mules.
9. Julie was shocked that tea was banned in the Qing Dynasty.
10. Julie thought that Zen masters were made up.
11. The author refers to “drinking tea is a part of your DNA,” in paragraph two primarily to highlight that
12. drinking tea is useful for your health.
13. tea drinking has changed the genetics of Julie and her family.
14. tea is bad for you.
15. drinking tea is an important part of Julie’s heritage.
16. Which statement best explains why merchants took tea around the world after the ban was lifted during the Qing Dynasty?
17. The merchants wanted to escape the oppressive ruler and used tea as an excuse to leave the country.
18. The Chinese wanted to share their tea culture with neighboring countries.
19. Emperor Song wanted to share his country’s tea to form alliances.
20. The Chinese had too much of it and didn’t know what else to do with it.
21. It can be inferred from the text that tea ceremonies are important because
22. they are fun and festive.
23. they hold significant meaning for the Korean culture.
24. they help families with fertility.
25. it is a way for families to spend time with one another.

Text 5: Adapted from “Saints, Snakes, and Pirates” by W. M. Akers

Glossary: **descendant** - a person or animal that comes from a specific ancestor

Each year on March 17, people around the globe gather to celebrate Ireland. The Irish and their **descendants**, dye rivers green, march in parades, and eat endless plates of cabbage and corned beef, all in the name of St. Patrick, the man credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland 1,500 years ago. Although he’s the patron saint of Ireland, Patrick wasn't born on the Emerald Isle. In fact, he was born in Britain, in 390 A.D. His family was well-off, owning an estate and townhouse. Patrick was taken prisoner at the age of sixteen by a gang of Irish pirates and sold into slavery across the Irish Sea. For six years, he served as a shepherd in a chilly, mountainous region in Northern Ireland. Life there was hard, and Patrick took refuge in religion, devoting himself to his faith.

Eventually, Patrick was able to escape with some of his fellow prisoners. They sailed across the Irish Sea, making landfall in the British wilderness, where Patrick wandered until he made it to his parents’ home. One night, he had a vision that seemed to come from Ireland. They were saying, "We beg you, holy boy, to come and walk again among us." He continued having these dreams and he finally decided that he would return to Ireland and become a missionary. Because of his fluency in the language, he was able to reach members of the Celtic community who could not understand other missionaries. Rather than tell the Irish that their ways were wrong, Patrick incorporated parts of their religion into Christianity. Legend has it that, because the Irish celebrated their gods with fire, Patrick added a bonfire to one Easter ritual. Because the Irish honored the sun, Patrick added a sun to the cross—creating what is now known as the "Celtic cross." These are good examples of how Patrick might have used local customs to explain a foreign religion.

Patrick had great success converting the Irish, but he also had his share of difficulties. British authorities frowned on his mission; the Irish nobility discouraged him from preaching to their subjects, and he was regularly beaten by robbers. It was said that others in the church had accused him of financial wrongdoing, such as taking money in exchange for services that should have been performed for free; Patrick vigorously denied this.

Patrick died on March 17, 461, in a town called Downpatrick in Northern Ireland. He was acclaimed as a saint soon after, but it was centuries before his legend grew to the point that he was named the country's patron saint. It wasn't until 1762 that his feast day was celebrated with a parade by the Irish in the American colonies as a way to honor their heritage. Because so little is known about him, most of the stories told about St. Patrick are myths and legends. The most famous is that he was responsible for driving the snakes out of Ireland. Although the holiday of St. Patrick's Day has little to do with the man it supposedly celebrates, there is no doubt that the saint who was captured by pirates deserves a few words of praise.

Questions 26 through 30 (circle the correct letter A, B, C, or D)

1. Which of the following most accurately describes why the Irish celebrate St. Patrick's Day every year?
2. To give thanks to the man that founded Ireland
3. To recognize the man who saved Ireland from the British invasion
4. To celebrate a man who contributed to Ireland and Irish history
5. To take part in sun ceremonies
6. Which of the following best describes the purpose of the snake legend in the final paragraph?
7. It explains why Irish people have a fear of snakes.
8. It was meant to distract from the rest of the passage.
9. It provides another reason why Patrick is important in Irish history.
10. It is to explain that Patrick did not care about Irish customs.
11. The tone of the author is best described as
12. inspired.
13. explanatory.
14. indifferent.
15. upset.
16. Why did Patrick decide to travel back to Ireland after escaping years prior?
17. He felt that his life’s purpose was there.
18. He wanted to get revenge on the Irish pirates that made him a slave.
19. He thought that he would get paid more money working there.
20. He wanted to practice the Celtic religion.
21. According to the text, which of these events is historically inaccurate?
22. Patrick created a well-known Irish symbol.
23. Patrick was sold when he was a teenager.
24. Patrick was often in physical danger.
25. Patrick drove snakes out of Ireland.