Reading: advanced level  Stereotypes

Develop your reading skills. Read the following text about culture and stereotypes. Then answer the comprehension questions.

A stereotype is a fixed idea that people have about what specific social groups or individuals are like, especially an idea that is wrong. Other terms that are associated with the term stereotype are prejudice and cliché. The term has a Greek origin: stereos means solid or firm and typos mean blow, impression, engraved or mark. The term was first used in the printing business. The first modern English use of the term was in 1850, meaning “image perpetuated without change.” Because stereotypes are standardized and simplified ideas of groups, based on some prejudices, they are not derived from objective facts, but rather subjective and often unverifiable ideas. As Sociologist Charles E. Hurst states* "One reason for stereotypes is the lack of personal, concrete familiarity that individuals have with persons in other racial or ethnic groups. Lack of familiarity encourages the lumping together of unknown individuals’.

The existence of stereotypes may be explained by the need of groups of people to view themselves as more normal or more superior than other groups. Consequently, stereotypes may be used to justify ill-founded prejudices or ignorance and prevent people of stereotyped groups from entering or succeeding in various activities or fields. The stereotyping group are, generally, reluctant to reconsider their attitudes and behaviour towards stereotyped group.

Stereotypes may affect people negatively. This includes forming inaccurate and distorted images and opinions of people. Stereotypes may also be used for making general erroneous judgments about people. Some stereotyping people may feel comfortable when they prevent themselves from emotional identification with the stereotyped group, which leads to xenophobic or racist behaviour. Finally another serious consequence of stereotypes is the feeling of inferiority that the stereotyped people may have and which may impair their performance.

Comprehension:

1. The word stereotype has:
   a.  a Greek origin.
   b.  an English origin.

2. Stereotypes are used to:
   a.  make generalizations about different groups of people.
   b.  have an accurate understanding of the stereotyped people.

3. If you label people in terms of stereotypes, you will probably:
   a.  be having an exact judgment of their worth.
   b.  be behaving in a discriminatory way.

Good luck!
Reading: upper-intermediate level

Mardi Gras Carnival!

Develop your reading skills. Read the following text about Mardi Gras Carnival. Then answer the comprehension questions.

Louisiana hosts one of the most well known celebrations - Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras is French for "Fat Tuesday". This holiday is sometimes called "Shrove Tuesday". People wear masks and costumes, overturn social conventions, dance, organize competitions and parades. Related popular practices were associated with celebrations before the fasting and religious obligations associated with the penitential season of Lent.

Today Mardi Gras is celebrated in many parts of the world - Brazil, Belgium, Italy, Panama. The American town which holds the biggest celebration is New Orleans, Louisiana. It was the French explorers who started this celebration on the Mississippi River in the late 17th century.

Parades are divided into organizations called "Krewe". These Krewes are responsible for all aspects of their parades. The parades go in the streets ruled by the "King and Queen." Beads, "doubloons" and cups are thrown to the throngs of spectators by the riders as souvenirs of Mardi Gras.

Comprehension:

1. The origin of Mardi Gras is
   a. Secular
   b. Religious

2. What does Mardi Gras mean?
   a. Happy New Year
   b. Fat Thursday
   c. Fat Tuesday

3. On this celebration "Kings and Queens" lead
   a. Kingdoms
   b. Parades

4. What are thrown from Mardi Gras floats in parades?
   a. large golf balls.
   b. popcorn.
   c. beads and doubloons.

Good luck!
Reading: intermediate level

Ramadan

Develop your reading skills. Read the following text about Ramadan. Then answer the comprehension questions.

**Ramadan** is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is the Islamic month of fasting, in which participating Muslims refrain from eating, drinking from dawn until sunset. Ramadan had been the name of the ninth month in Arabian culture long before the arrival of Islam. In the Qur'an it is said that "fasting has been written down (as obligatory) upon you, as it was upon those before you" which is a reference to the Jewish practice of fasting on Yom Kippur. Fasting is meant to teach the Muslim patience, modesty and spirituality.

Ramadan is a time for Muslims to fast for the sake of God and to offer more prayer than usual. During Ramadan, Muslims ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance and help in refraining from everyday evils, and try to purify themselves through self-restraint and good deeds.

As compared to the solar calendar, the dates of Ramadan vary, moving backwards about ten days each year as it is a moving holiday depending on the moon. Ramadan was the month in which the first verses of the Qur'an were said to be revealed to the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. That was during a night that Muslims call *Laylat al-Qadr* (the night of decree or measures.) The night is believed to be one of the 10 last days of the month.

Ramadan ends with *Eid ul-Fitr* on the first of Shawwal, with much celebration and feasting.

**Comprehension**

1. Ramadan was introduced after Islam had appeared.
   a. [ ] True
   b. [ ] False

2. Ramadan comes on a fixed date every year.
   a. [ ] True
   b. [ ] False

3. In Ramadan Muslims don't fast all day long.
   a. [ ] True
   b. [ ] False

4. Muslims believe that the Qur'an was revealed during the first nights of Ramadan.
   a. [ ] True
   b. [ ] False

Good luck!
World Water Day

Develop your reading skills. Read the following text about World Water Day and do the comprehension questions.

World Water Day is observed on March 22 since 1993. It was declared as such by the United Nations General Assembly. This day was first formally proposed in Agenda 21 of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Observance began in 1993 and has grown significantly ever since.

The UN and its member nations devote this day to implementing UN recommendations and promoting concrete activities within their countries regarding the world's water resources. Each year, one of various UN agencies involved in water issues takes the lead in promoting and coordinating international activities for World Water Day.

In addition to the UN member states, a number of NGOs promoting clean water and sustainable aquatic habitats have used World Day for Water as a time to focus public attention on the critical water issues of our era. Every three years since 1997, for instance, the World Water Council has drawn thousands to participate in its World Water Forum during the week of World Day for Water. Participating agencies and NGOs have highlighted issues such as a billion people being without access to safe water for drinking and the role of gender in family access to safe water.

Comprehension:

1. World Water Day was first proposed in 1993 in Rio de Janeiro.
   a. □ True
   b. □ False

2. Only UN member states are involved in the promoting World Water Day.
   a. □ True
   b. □ False

3. Not everybody has access to drinking water.
   a. □ True
   b. □ False

Good luck!
Reading: elementary level

**Good Manners**

Develop your reading skills. Read the following text about Good Manners.

Write the correct heading to each topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clothes</th>
<th>Food and drink</th>
<th>Greetings</th>
<th>Doing business</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

___________ How should you behave when you meet someone for the first time?

An American or Canadian shakes your hand firmly while looking you straight in the eyes.

In many parts of Asia, there is no physical contact at all. In Japan, you should bow, and the more respect you want to show, your respect. In Thailand, the greeting is made by pressing both hands together at the chest, as if you are praying, and bowing your head slightly. In both countries, eye contact is avoided as a sign of respect.

___________ Many countries have rules about what you should and shouldn't wear.

In Asian and Muslim countries, you shouldn't reveal the body, especially women.

In Japan, you should take off your shoes when entering a house or a restaurant. Remember to place them neatly together facing the door you came in. This is also true in China, Korea, Thailand, and Iran.

___________ In Italy, Spain, and Latin America, lunch is often the biggest meal of the day, and can last two or three hours. For this reason many people eat a light breakfast and a late dinner.

In Britain, you might have a business lunch and do business as you eat. Lunch is a time to relax and socialize, and the Japanese rarely drink alcohol at lunchtime. In Britain and the United States, it's not unusual to have a business meeting over breakfast, and in China it's common to have business banquets, but you shouldn't discuss business during the meal.

___________ In most countries, an exchange of business cards is essential for all introductions. You should include your company name and your position. If you are going to a country where your language is not widely spoken, you can get the reverse side of your card printed in the local language. In Japan, you must present your card with both hands, with the writing facing the person you are giving it to. In many countries, business hours are from 9.00 or 10.00 to 5.00 or 6.00. Japanese business people consider it their professional duty to go out after work with colleagues to restaurants, bars, or nightclubs. If you are invited, you shouldn't refuse, even if you don't feel like staying out late.

Good luck!