

Reading Articles for Comprehension

Cloze

Article 1: Koalas Facing Decline in Australia

Koalas in the wild may be placed on the endangered list after a plunge in their population in Australia. Some studies estimate that there are **fewer** than 80,000 koalas left. It was reported there is a drop in their fertility rate as they have been stricken by a disease. In addition, they are suffering from the impact of the destruction of their habitat and changes in the climate.

According **to** the local media, the Australian Minister for the Environment is expected to list koalas in Queensland as ‘endangered’ and **those** in New South Wales as ‘vulnerable’. This means restrictions would be placed on mining projects, logging operations and housing developments within their habitats in these areas. However, environmental groups say such restrictions are not impactful enough. These restrictions ought to cover a wider area in Australia in order to manage the decline in koala population.

Research done in a koala habitat near Sydney **has** shown that the population of koalas has **decreased** by 75% since 1993. David Paul, an ecological expert who did the study, attributed the dwindling koala **population** in that area to the drought and hot weather recorded in the last decade.

“A lot of koalas were suffering **due** to the lack of water sources and I think perhaps it might be an early sign of climate change,” said Paul. Paul also added that koalas in other parts of Australia suffer from habitat **loss**, which is caused mainly by new housing developments. Environmentalists have recommended that the koala should be considered as a vulnerable animal in those states where **there** is a significant decline in the koala population.

“The Environment Minister should not delay his decision any further. The koala is vulnerable and actions must be taken at once to strengthen the national environmental law by listing the koalas as ‘endangered,’” a Senator said in an interview. The Environment Minister who has been considering this decision is scheduled to make an announcement based on advice from the National Threatened Species Scientific Committee soon. Environmentalists are keeping their fingers crossed that the koalas will soon have a chance to regain their lost habitats.

Article 2: How to Apologise Sincerely

All of us have our moments when we become angry with someone. **In our fit of anger**, we might **lose our patience** and hurt someone we care about with our words or actions. Even if it is unintentional, the **best course of action** is to apologise. However, making an apology is often **easier said than done**. Thankfully, it can be learned.

First of all, the apology **must** be sincere. A half-hearted one could do more damage **than none at all**. To show sincerity, you need to **take responsibility for** your actions. Find an appropriate time to explain to the other person exactly what happened and how **much** you regret it.

After you have said your piece, give that person a chance to speak **without** interrupting. You might hear unpleasant things said about you **out of frustration** and be tempted to defend **yourself**, but what you might not know **is** that this is part of the healing process — your active listening recognises the hurt that person is experiencing. It brings about relief and makes it easier for that person to forgive you.

Lastly, you offer to make amends. **Actions speak louder than words** so if you have damaged someone's property, have it **repaired** or replaced.

Even though an effective and sincere apology can often strengthen a relationship, forgiveness may not necessarily come immediately. You could liken the forgiveness journey **to** how a bruise heals — it could take days or even years. What you can do is to keep your heart open for reconciliation one day.

Article 3: Reading

I am passionate about reading. Although I have **several** hobbies such as watching movies and hiking, reading books is my **favourite** pastime. There are a few reasons why I love reading. The first reason is that books **rejuvenate** me. Reading a book always **transports** me to faraway lands where I can let my imagination soar. This brings me **much** joy.

The second reason is that reading makes my mind sharp. It is a known **fact** that reading widely has many advantages. The knowledge I gain **from** reading enables me to know more about the world. I am also secretly pleased by the fact that whenever I utter a clever **quote** from a book, everyone around me **would** be dumbfounded.

While most people find reading to be an **uphill** task, reading is a source **of** enjoyment for me. I **have** made it a habit to read at least a chapter before my bedtime daily. Reading may be a chore for others, but definitely not for me!

Article 4: Skating

Looking for a fun and engaging way to stay fit? Skating on wheels is a sport which attracts people of **different** ages and backgrounds, from young children to the elderly. It helps you stay active and keep your body **in** shape.

Skating engages various muscle groups, **especially** those in the legs and core. It is a great aerobic exercise that **keeps** your heart pumping and boosts blood circulation. Skating regularly can contribute to a healthier circulatory system, cutting down the **risk** of heart disease.

Skating also challenges your body awareness and stability by requiring you to maintain balance and coordination **while** in motion. It involves a range of motions **like** bending, twisting, and flexing the joints, which promotes joint flexibility and mobility as you glide and manoeuvre on skates. As a low-impact exercise, skating puts less stress on your joints **than** running or jumping. This makes it an **enjoyable** exercise for individuals with joint pain, providing a workout without excessive joint strain.

Besides its physical advantages, skating is **also** good for your mental health. The concentration **required** to maintain the continuous motion during skating helps clear your mind and promote relaxation.

Whether you are enjoying skating **either** at a rink or outdoors on suitable pavements, remember to wear appropriate **skating** gear, such as helmets, knee pads and elbow pads, to protect **yourself** from injuries. Additionally, start with a warm-up routine before skating to prepare your muscles for activity and prevent strains or pulls.

Overall, skating offers an extensive **range** of health benefits. So, take up skating if you have not tried this fun activity!



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(<https://www.articulate.com.sg>)

Article 5: Bowen Beckman

While most are still in dreamland, Bowen Beckman wakes up at five in the morning every Tuesday to fulfil another kind of dream. He **takes** the lift to the top floor of his condominium block and collects recycling bags laid out for him at the various doorsteps. Once he has four bags in hand and can no **longer** pick up anymore, he throws them into a bin which his father wheels behind him. Bowen is only six years old but already making a big **impact** on the environment.

He completes his **collection** of bags and newspaper stacks an hour later. He sorts the items and puts them into different bins for paper, metal and plastics before getting **himself** ready for breakfast and pre-school. These items **are** then picked up by a waste collection company.

“I **used** to find it difficult to wake up, but what I am doing is good for the earth and I have already made it a habit now,” Bowen shared in a recent interview. Bowen decided to start the recycling service after **watching** a documentary in June. He was disturbed to find out that polar bears are losing **their** homes when ice caps melt because of the excessive use **of** fossil fuels. He spent a day crafting letters to send to the housing management, asking for their **permission** to take his neighbours’ recyclable trash downstairs. The management board gave the **green** light and many households **signed** up for his service after he went around to distribute flyers and seek support.

After three months, his idea attracted the **attention** of other children in the condominium. The children then **started** their own collection service in the other blocks. As a result, the waste management initiative quickly expanded throughout the community.

Article 6: Lightning Experience

I was playing golf with my friends on a Friday afternoon. We had almost **reached** the end of the game when the downpour **started** and we ran quickly for shelter.

We were standing under the shelter and while waiting, we started **rowdy** joking and teasing one another. It was then that we noticed that the air had a strange and **awkward** smell to it.

In that moment, a lightning bolt hit. When it happened, there **was** red flashing lights. Then, there were the loudest noise I had ever heard. I was **completely** frozen.

Oddly, I was feeling a cold sensation, and it was like nothing I had ever felt before.

At the same time, my body was feeling burning hot too. It was as though I had been **slammed** between two huge trucks. My limbs were heavy, and every part of my body was **in** pain. The pain was both **severe** dull and sharp. It was like a severe headache with the sensation of millions of needles piercing my **entire** body.

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The lightning bolt had **struck** a tree next to the shelter and bounced off to us.

We were left speechless and stunned. Fortunately, all of us survived the ordeal. It was a miracle.

Article 7: Skydiving

Your heart is thumping and your mind is racing with a million thoughts. **Anticipation** slowly fills you as you take a step closer to the edge. Then, in one graceful swoop, you are free-falling 4,000 metres from the ground in a giant leap of faith, with adrenaline rushing through the body.

People choose to skydive for an **array** of reasons. Some people try skydiving **to pursue** a new experience or a casual activity while others pursuing skydiving as a sport.

Jumping out of an aeroplane that high above the ground can be an **exhilarating** experience. Every single one of us **has** dreamt of being able to fly. Most skydivers liken the **sensation** of freefall to that of flying or floating on a **cushion** of air. It also gives you the perfect opportunity to enjoy the **picturesque** scenery from a unique vantage point – from up in the sky!

Also, many people are unaware that this activity is extremely beneficial to **health**. This **thrilling** activity can be a great way to escape from reality for a few minutes, help burn calories and **relieve** stress. So, why wait? Take that leap now!

Article 8: Food Waste in Singapore

Food waste is created in Singapore every single day from our food cycle — production, distribution, retail to consumption. This wastage is **due** to several reasons, such as food spoilage, improper storage or handling, edible food thrown away or leftovers when we cannot **finish** our food.

Food waste is produced by a wide range of **sources**, including farms, food manufacturers, restaurants, and households. Shockingly, last year Singapore threw **away** roughly 0.68 million tonnes of food waste, and only 10% of it was recycled. This indicates that, on **average**, each person in Singapore generated about 130kg of food waste per year.

The recycling rate for food waste has unfortunately plummeted in the recent years. If the National Environment Agency (NEA) does not **launch** campaigns to reduce or recycle food waste, the recycling rate for food waste is likely to remain low over the next few years. Consequently, NEA may fail to **reach** its target of a 30% recycling rate for food waste.

The National Environment Agency (NEA) has only released Singapore's food waste output of 0.68 million tonnes as an official **figure**. Regrettably, this figure doesn't provide any insight **into** the composition of food waste and its sources. Furthermore, supermarkets, food

manufacturers, and food outlets are **unwilling** to disclose the amount of food waste they generate.

Despite the difficulty of getting food waste data in Singapore, three journalism students from the Nanyang Technological University managed to shed **light** on the problem of food wastage in Singapore. The students **found** that six in ten survey respondents would buy more than what they **needed** when shopping at supermarkets. This could lead to overstocking of food at home and the food could end **up** not being consumed. The survey also shows 70% would throw away food that has slightly gone past its expiry date.

Article 9: Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the way we live, work, and play. AI refers to the ability of machines to **do** tasks that usually require human intelligence. For example, voice assistants like Siri and Alexa can answer **questions**, set reminders, and even tell jokes. AI is also used in driverless cars, which can drive **without** a human behind the wheel.

Furthermore, AI is transforming education and the way students **learn** in schools. AI-powered learning applications enhance learning as they can design lessons to suit **each** student's need. Similarly, AI can suggest what movies to watch or what groceries to buy **based** on our habits. Some people even use AI-powered devices to **control** lights and electrical appliances remotely.

The benefits of AI go **beyond** homes and schools. In healthcare, doctors can use AI to detect diseases early and **save** lives. In factories, AI-powered robots help to manufacture **products**, thus saving time. However, there are still concerns about how AI might impact people's livelihood, as machines could **replace** workers in certain industries, taking over their jobs.

Despite these challenges, many believe that AI has the potential to improve our lives. Scientists are working on new AI technologies to help manage problems **linked** to climate change. At the same time, some worry that AI could be **dangerous** if it is not used responsibly. Therefore, it is important to understand how AI works so we can make informed **decisions** about its use.

Article 10: Chanting Story

The chanting was suffocating. I felt as though the walls were closing **in** on me. I tried shutting my eyes, yet every **repetition** of "just do it" grew louder.

I was never the popular student in class. My classmates usually spoke of me as "quiet" or "reserved". As the days passed, it **became** ingrained in me that I would spend the rest of my school days being almost invisible. Gradually, feelings of **inadequacy** brewed in me. I wondered **what** it would take for me to stand out **amidst** my popular peers.

The **opportunity** arose that day when the **infamous** gang of my class approached me during recess with an idea.

“Oh, I don’t know...” I replied as I **quivered**. I wanted to become popular, but the thought of breaking the rules was unnerving.

“It’s just skipping school for the day! This isn’t the **worst** we’ve done...yet,” the gang leader winked.

The group started chanting, “Just do it!”

Article 11: Rome Was Not Built in a Day

We all want to get things quickly. We feel that the **sooner** we get them, the better it is for us, because waiting makes us feel impatient. This **often** happens when we want others to do things for us. But if we do these things ourselves, we will find that delays are **unavoidable**.

When something great is achieved, we only see the success **that** makes it special. We do not think about the many years or **even** centuries of hard work that led to it. We forget the many failures and the patient effort put in before the **completion** of the great work.

Rome became a powerful empire, and its capital city was one of the most famous places in the ancient **world**. Even today, it is a well-known city. It is **said** to have been built by Remus and Romulus. So many generations helped build the city that by the **time** it became rich and powerful, people had forgotten who these brothers were.

This is not only true for Rome but **also** for all of mankind’s achievements. When we see a finished product, we may think it is amazing. However, a **detailed** study of all parts of it shows us that there was a lot of patient effort **behind** it. Poetry or music may seem like it came from sudden inspiration, but a poet needs to observe life and a singer has to train his **voice**. A painter and a sculptor also need to work hard on their art pieces.

When we look at the Taj Mahal, we may say it is a dream made of marble. But it was not **built** in a day. It took twenty long years to build it, and thousands of workers were **involved** in its construction.

So, let’s always put effort in everything we do, and never be too impatient when we are working towards our goals.

Article 12: The Coin Story

I was spring-cleaning one morning and my son was helping. As he rummaged through boxes and bags, he came across a knotted handkerchief with an old, dark brown coin nestled inside.

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“Mum, can I have this?” I took one look and was immediately **transported** to another time. “You can play with all your coins, but not this one,” I said slowly. “This one’s special. I will never see the woman who gave this to me again.”

As I fingered the coin **gently**, a wave of **nostalgia** swept over me. “This coin is worth much more than its monetary value.” My son looked at me strangely and I explained.

I went on a trip to Nigeria in 1991 and my wallet was pickpocketed on the very first day. With not much cash left, I had to be careful with my **spending**. One day, an old woman beggar approached me and **thrust** her hand in my face. I snapped and vented my frustration on her, screaming at the top of my lungs that my money had been stolen.

The woman listened attentively and pondered through my words. Then her face **crumbled** into a toothless grin as she reached into the folds of her dress. “Then I will give you money,” she announced. Kindly, she placed an old, dark brown coin in my palm. I was dumbfounded.

Article 13: Childhood Games

Nowadays, modern entertainment revolves around screens and social media. **In** my own childhood was shaped with simple, **traditional** games. These were moments **with** unfiltered joy, spent to the company of neighbours who gradually **became** lifelong friends.

Among the many games we played, five stones stood out for its **deceptive** simplicity. What began as a casual pastime quickly became a contest of skill and precision. I remember spending countless afternoons practising the art of tossing and catching those bean bags, **determined** to master every level.

Another game was zero point that **required** agility, timing, and a fair amount of courage. As the elastic rope rose higher with each round, so did the stakes – **failure** was met with good-natured teasing, and victory with loud cheers.

In **hindsight**, those games did more than occupy our time. They nurtured **resilience**, cooperation, and a sense of community. These are the qualities that no digital game can ever truly replicate.

Article 14: The Beggar Story

“Thank you, Sir. I appreciate your help!” the old beggar exclaimed in clear American English as I shoved a ten-peso coin into his container. I was **walking** to a service at a park one hot February day when I chanced **upon** the kindly old man, charming passers-by for donations **with** his toothless smile and sunny disposition.

Minutes **later**, as I sat comfortably in the shade with my friends, the memory of the old man lingered in my **mind**. I got up from my seat, excused myself and went back to the **place** where I left him, but he was gone. **About** to give up, I saw him a few metres away, cooling himself under a tree.

I offered to take him to the meeting, hoping that the preacher's words would somehow **give** him some solace from the hard life I assumed he was having. His arthritis had been giving him a lot of trouble, he said, so he would **rather** stay put.

Instead, I decided to sit with him for a while. A group of passing teenagers stared at us, no doubt **wondering** why a well-dressed young man would be chatting with an old, dirty derelict. I learnt that his name was James Moreno and that he was eighty years old. "I've been here since Mt Pinatubo erupted. It is generous hearts like you that **keep** me alive," he said. Owning nothing more than the clothes he was wearing and a few mementos from his past, he roamed the park every day.

When it rained, he would **take** shelter under the trees and concrete structures that dotted the park. When I probed **further**, James told me that he used to entertain American soldiers in Olongapo City. That was where he **picked** up his American accent. He went on and shared his interesting experiences with me.

Article 15: Rice

Have you ever stopped to think about where your bowl of rice comes from? As ordinary as it may seem, rice is one of the **most** important food crops in the world. It feeds more than half of the world's population every day.

Rice is believed to have been first **cultivated** in China over 9,000 years ago. Since its cultivation, it has spread **across** Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Today, it is grown in more than one hundred countries **including** India, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Rice plants are typically grown in wet, muddy fields called paddies, **which** allow them to thrive.

There are many different **types** of rice, but they generally fall into two categories — long grain and short grain. Basmati rice from India and Jasmine rice from Thailand are long-grain types. They are **known** for their fragrant aroma. On the other hand, Japanese sushi rice is short-grain and becomes sticky when cooked.

Rice has **many** uses. In Asia, it is often steamed and served with meat or vegetables. In Spain, rice is cooked **with** seafood over a huge pan and in Japan, it is shaped into sushi. Even in desserts, rice **plays** a key role in dishes like rice pudding or sweet glutinous rice cakes.

Aside from being a source of carbohydrates, rice also provides protein and essential vitamins. Brown rice is often considered **healthier** than white rice as it has not been polished and is higher in minerals and fibers. **However**, both are great sources of energy.

Rice is more than just food — it is a **major** part of many cultures and traditions. In weddings across Asia, rice may be thrown to wish the couple prosperity. During **celebrations**, special rice dishes are prepared to honour ancestors and celebrate harvests.

The next time you see a bowl of rice, remember that it is not **just** a simple grain. It feeds billions and connects cultures across the globe.

Article 16: Snakes

The word 'snake' is often used to describe someone sneaky or harmful. However, this description is unfair to these intelligent and complex **creatures**. Despite their reputation, most snakes are **not** dangerous villains. They also do not want to cause harm. In fact, most snakes are not venomous, and only a **small** number can hurt humans. Their venom is used for hunting prey, not to hurt us.

Snakes may not look adorable, but that does not **mean** their lives are not important. The real danger to their existence comes from humans, whether through fear, violence, or being exploited for profit.

Few people know the many **challenges** snakes face just to survive. Every year, many are taken from their natural **habitats** and kept in uncomfortable environments, like cages, before being used to make fashion **items** like bags, shoes, and belts.

The rampant demand for snake skins to create luxury goods has resulted in treatment of snakes that is **far** from kind. Thankfully, more people are now choosing animal-friendly fashion. The British Fashion Council has even **banned** the use of wild-animal skins in its fashion shows. With many cruelty-free **alternatives** to choose from instead of leather, fashion can now be both stylish and kind to animals.

Ultimately, snakes deserve our attention and respect. We should make more effort to treat them with kindness and care.

Article 17: Eddie Chang

Eddie Chang is a concierge - a hospitality professional who typically provides personalised services to hotel guests. His services include making restaurant **reservations**, and **recommending** local tours and activities.

Eddie also goes beyond the typical responsibilities of a concierge by **leading** the RunWestin programme, where he takes guests on runs around the city, starting and ending at the hotel.

The sky was still dark when I arrived at the lobby of The Westin Singapore **to** meet Eddie. I half-regretted suggesting a run at an ungodly hour of 7am but **still** had made that appointment in order to understand Eddie's **perspective** as the premium hotel's first and only "run concierge", the unusual job he had held for over **a decade**.

Eddie is a passionate **advocate** for personal fitness and it is easy to see his enthusiasm for the programme. I look forward to more runs with him.

Article 18: John the YouTuber

John is one of the most popular YouTubers in the world. He began making YouTube videos **when** he was just 13 years old. Initially, he did not have good video-making equipment. However, **despite** not achieving much success, he kept going because he loved creating content.

John worked tirelessly **on** his content creation. He spent hours studying how YouTube worked and watched his own videos repeatedly to learn what he could do better. Sometimes, he even **pulled** all-nighters, editing his videos. He failed many times but **carried** on. Over time, more people started noticing his videos.

Now, John has over 300 million subscribers on his YouTube channel. He became **famous** for doing bizarre challenges and giving away attractive prizes. He once counted to 100,000 in a single video! He has also given away houses, cars and even millions of dollars to strangers. He uses the **money** he earns to help others and make his next videos even better.

Although he is successful, John faced health problems like stress and Crohn's disease, **which** gave him stomach pain. It was hard for him. **However**, there was a lot of pressure to keep making amazing videos. Hence, he formed a strong team to help him **cope** with the demands of his work.

Article 19: The Kite

It was a breezy Saturday afternoon, perfect for flying kites. Amir and Ben, best friends from **since** they were five, had built a giant red kite together. At first, the boys were **proud** of how magnificent their kite looked. However, just as they reached the field, they had an **argument** over who should fly it first.

"It was my idea!" Amir shouted. "**No, it wasn't!**"

"But I helped build it!" Ben snapped.

Their voices grew so loud that a group of children nearby stared at them, making Ben feel **embarrassed**. Finally, Ben walked away, leaving Amir to fly the kite alone. As Amir watched it soar, a strong gust suddenly pulled hard at the string. This caused the kite to crash into a tree and it tore **apart**. The fun afternoon was **ruined**.

Later that evening, Amir sat alone, thinking. He realised friendship was **far** greater importance than being right.

The next day, Amir knocked on Ben's door with tape, string and an apology. Together, they **happily** repaired the kite. As they worked, a mischievous grin spread across Ben's face. "Next time, **you're not** flying it first!" he joked, bursting into peals of laughter. "Not a chance!" Amir replied.

Article 20: Amazon Rainforest

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Article 21: Kopi Luwak

Kopi luwak, or civet coffee, is considered an exotic and expensive drink. A unique **and intriguing** beverage, it is brewed from coffee beans extracted from the faeces of the Asian palm civet, a small animal native **to** Southeast Asia.

The civets selectively eat ripe coffee cherries, digesting the fruity pulp while **leaving** the coffee beans intact. These then **pass** through the civet's digestive system, **which** supposedly enhances their flavour by reducing bitterness and acidity while **also** imparting a unique aromatic scent.

After being excreted, the beans are collected, thoroughly washed, and then **carefully** roasted to perfection. Despite its unusual production method, kopi luwak enthusiasts **still** love its flavour. It is **noticeably** not bitter and has a complex flavour that is smooth, **rich**, earthy and sweet with the hint of chocolate.

Due to the popularity of kopi luwak, several **commercial** plantation farms raise palm civets, sometimes in unfavourable conditions. As such, **much** controversy surrounds the production of kopi luwak, with some producers **confine** civets in cramped cages. Despite this unethical practice, kopi luwak remains a popular beverage.

Article 22: Adaptations

Adaptations are like nature's survival kit, equipped with tools and tricks that help plants and animals thrive in their environments. These specialised traits help organisms obtain food, avoid predators and **cope** with changing conditions, ensuring their continued existence in the natural world. **Without** adaptations, organisms would certainly face a higher risk of extinction as they struggle to compete **for** resources.

Consider the humble moth, for **example**. Its wings are adorned with patterns that **resemble** the eyes of larger predators to scare off would-be attackers and keep **itself** safe from harm. If an insect looks like a leaf, it is not easily **noticed** by hungry birds. This explains why numerous insects **have** evolved to look like leaves over the last several thousand years.

Another animal, the chameleon, has an incredible **ability** to change its colour to match the surroundings. This clever camouflage helps it blend in with tree bark or leaves, making it nearly invisible to predators and allowing it to sneak **up** on unsuspecting prey. In fact, certain prey species have bright-coloured or distinctive markings on their bodies to keep predators away.

Like animals, adaptations in plants are just as **important** for their survival in diverse environments. Cacti adapt to survive in arid environments by storing water in their thick stems. **Apart** from their stems, their shallow but wide-reaching root systems **allow** them to quickly absorb water from rain or dew. The spines of the cacti also help them to **reduce** water loss. These features help them to survive in deserts.

As plants and animals adapt to their environment, they can protect **themselves** and ensure their continuity. Those that cannot will become extinct.

Article 23: Grandfather's House

I lived with my family in my grandfather's wooden house built on stilts during my childhood days.

The house was **situated** on a big piece of land that was fenced. The rusty gate of the entrance was always locked. It **towered** over me like a giant watching over the property.

I used to sit on a big swing in the garden with my dog, Fluffy. She seemed to smile **whenever** I made the swing go higher. I would pretend it was a bus and 'drive' the kids in the neighbourhood to a make-believe **destination**.

On some **occasions**, I cycled along the compound with a long umbrella in one hand. My grandfather's flock of geese had a habit of **pinching** my legs with their sharp beaks. Therefore, the umbrella was actually an **imaginary** sword to chase the nasty creatures away.

From my parents' bedroom window, I could **simply** reach out to the tree to pluck rambutans. That **convenience** came at a price. I was bitten by fierce red ants several times **in** the process.

The house was demolished soon after we moved. Today, I can only recall with fondness that house on stilts.

Article 24: Fireworks

New Year celebration is never complete without fireworks. Imagine seeing colourful lights bursting in the night sky to usher in the first day of the **year**. A fireworks display has always attracted **both** young and old. Thousands will flock to venues near the display area to get the best **view** of the fireworks. Countries around the **world** go to great lengths to put on the best show.

Do you know that fireworks were actually developed **in** China? The first natural 'firecrackers' were **made** of bamboo stalks. When thrown into a fire, the air pockets in the bamboo stalks would cause them to explode. The Chinese **believed** that such loud explosion would ward off evil spirits. Later, bamboo stalks were filled with gunpowder which would explode when ignited. That was **how** the first man-made fireworks was invented.

Soon fireworks gained **popularity** in many countries. In Europe, they were widely used for religious festivals and entertainment. The Europeans eventually began to manufacture their own fireworks. They even **gave** the Americans their first taste of fireworks when they settled in America. As interest in them grew, the use of fireworks **became** widespread. Many countries

began to include them as **part** of a celebration. In this modern day, fireworks displays can be seen during special events **such** as Christmas and the New Year.

The anticipation of the boom **that** comes after the lights usually makes us happy. We are drawn to the suspense **they** create. No one ever complains after a fireworks display as it sparks joy, lifts our spirits and brings back happy memories.

Article 25: Head Prefect Speech

Good morning! I am Daryl, your Head Prefect. I am thrilled to share with you a meaningful project that could really benefit from your **involvement**. Collaborating **with** the Computer Club, the prefects will be organising a two-day computer **literacy** workshop for the elderly folks in our neighbourhood. This **initiative** is our first **major** outreach effort to bridge the digital divide **between** the young and old generations. Thus, we **are** inviting committed and **empathetic** student volunteers to guide the elderly participants.

It is easy for us to take such a skill set for granted **because** for someone **who** did not grow up with digital technology, **these** can be rather intimidating. Do you know how lonely it can be when you can't connect to the digital world around us? By **sharing** your knowledge and **applying** your skills, you'll not only empower our seniors, but **also** sharpen your **communication** and coaching skills. If you're ready to step up and give back, sign up at the booth just outside the General Office today. We look forward to **seeing** you at the workshop! Thank you.

Article 26: Museum of Toys

The Museum of Toys is nestled in the heart of our city. Driven by his passion for design and art, Marcus, an enthusiastic toy **collector**, often imagined a space where visitors from all **walks** of life could rediscover the past, and rekindle childhood memories of playing with favourite figurines and stuffed toys. His dream finally came true in 2007 when he successfully set up this museum, **housing** his personal collection from more than forty countries.

Offering a fascinating journey through time, the museum displays toys from the 1840s. Toys **like** action figures, wind-up robots and miniature cars awe children and adults **alike**. These toys were carefully designed to move or make sounds when **wound** up with a key in the winding slot, showing the creativity of the toy designers. **One** of the highlights of the museum is the mechanical toy, which can be powered by winding a key, **pressing** a button, or pushing a lever, **instead** of relying on batteries.

"These toys were not mere ornaments. In fact, they were companions during our childhood days," said the museum owner, his **voice** carrying a note of nostalgia. He hoped that the place

would provide visitors with a holistic experience, educating them about the stories behind each toy and how toys had gradually evolved **over** the years. This emotional connection to the past can foster feelings of elation and warmth, and at the same time offer a sense of continuity between generations.

It is indeed amazing to note **that** these toy characters were part of the children's playtime **before** technology took over. Central to the museum's mission of learning and discovery, the place offers an educational experience which helps visitors **connect** to the past in an entertaining and informative way. Truly, the Museum of Toys is a magical place where toys come to **life**. Today, it continues to promote that belief.

Article 27: Expressing Gratitude

Expressing appreciation is a simple yet powerful way to strengthen relationships. Many overlook the kindness they receive daily. On one hand, it is easy to take things for granted. **However**, making the effort to be grateful can brighten someone's day and create a positive atmosphere. Even in the midst of responsibilities, taking time to acknowledge kindness can make an improvement in **how** we connect with others.

Building gratitude **starts** with recognising the good in our lives. First think about the times when people have helped us. This reminds us to be appreciative. Next instead of focusing on **what** we lack, we should value what we already have. **According** to studies, grateful individuals are happier and have a clearer **idea** of purpose in life. Choosing appreciation over negativity helps in personal growth.

Actions matter as much as words. Being committed to gratitude means giving **back** or paying it forward. Acknowledging those who have helped us recover from hardships strengthens relationships. Expressing thanks does **not** require big gestures—small actions like kind words and helpful deeds build connections **with** friends and the community. These simple acts create lasting bonds.

As we grow older, we see the deeper impact of gratitude. Its value becomes clearer later on in **life**, especially when we reflect on meaningful relationships. People who insist on appreciating others tend to **build** strong friendships.

Those who stay open-hearted and compassionate have **many** good friends and relied on support during challenges, experiencing the true **meaning** of gratitude. Learning to see the value **of** kindness, gratitude and generosity can ultimately lead **to** a more fulfilling life. Let us try to show more appreciation in our lives.

Article 28: Artificial Intelligence

In today's world, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing how students learn and interact with information. Imagine having a super-smart assistant that can lend a **hand** when you need help with your homework, answer questions or even suggest books that **suit** your reading level and interests.

With tools like smart tutoring systems and learning apps, AI can analyse students' **strengths** and weaknesses, providing personalised exercises to help improve specific skills. As a result, students can **understand** difficult topics more easily and learn at their own **pace**.

Furthermore, AI makes learning more accessible. With just a click, students can tap **into** online resources, no matter where they are – truly breaking **down** the barriers to education.

On top of that, AI inspires creativity by pushing students to **think** outside the box and take creative risks. Whether it is bringing ideas to **life** through digital art or composing music, students can express their talents in new ways. AI writing assistants can also start the ball **rolling** by offering prompts, correcting grammar and recommending words to enhance writing.

Still, there are **two** sides to every coin. AI is not as **perfect** as it seems because there are instances where it might give wrong information. **Relying** too much on technology might make some students less motivated to think for **themselves**. Too much screen time can also be **detrimental** to students' well-being, as it often results in reduced physical activity and weakens their ability to build real-life social skills.

While AI offers many exciting ways to learn, it is important to use it wisely.

Article 29: Making Friends

Making new friends can feel challenging at first, but it often starts with one simple step: being open to meeting new people. Sometimes, all it takes is **saying** hello to your peer's friends and **expanding** your circle through those connections. With a little effort and a friendly **attitude**, you will soon find others who are just as kind and trustworthy.

When you pursue hobbies and interests you enjoy, you have a good chance of **meeting** people with similar passions. So sign up for a new activity or try out the **latest** fitness craze — every event is an **opportunity** to make like-minded friends. No matter how you connect with others, always remember to smile. There **is** a lot of truth in the maxim, 'When you're smiling, the whole world smiles with you'. People are more attuned **to** positive emotions when forming new relationships. A smile is free and it is a friendly **gesture** that shows you are looking for a connection. Friendships, like all relationships, require **maintenance**. Do not retreat to your safe haven and lose touch. A simple message goes a long way. Your friends will appreciate it.

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Some avoid **arguments** to keep the peace, but managing conflicts can actually **strengthen** friendship. Talk things through and learn to accept each other's differences without judgement.

Article 30: Singapore Hawker Culture

The sound of clattering dishes, a sizzling grill, and the blast of a wok furnace often signal the start of a busy day at a hawker centre. Combined with the aroma of fragrant spices, barbecue marinades and steaming hot soup **wafting** through the morning air, these sensations have become synonymous **with** Singapore's hawker culture. Whether it is a plate of chicken rice **or** a bowl of curry noodles, each dish is skilfully **prepared** with practised hands, honed through daily experience to bring out the unique flavours.

Singapore's hawker culture can be **dated** back to the 1800s, when early immigrants from China, India and the Malay Archipelago began selling food in our country. Though these meals were simple, their authentic taste has **remained** unchanged since then, when prepared on the spot using traditional recipes.

Hawker centres **provide** a clean and organised environment to their customers, with designated stalls and walkways where customers can move around with ease. Every morning, elderly patrons who have been **regular** customers for years meet with friends at the same table to enjoy their usual drinks and read the newspaper together. These gatherings offer comfort and connection to the community. Many Singaporeans are also willing to queue for a long time **just** to get a taste of their favourite hawker dishes. These familiar community spaces have long been **part** of Singapore's identity. More than just places to eat, hawker centres hold a special **place** in the hearts of Singaporeans.

Food plays a key role not only in satisfying hunger **but** also in building bonds among communities. Many experienced vendors run their businesses **at** the same designated spot for decades, serving loyal customers. **Despite** challenges like rising costs and changing demographics, this culture thrives today through steady community support. Every individual hawker centre has **its** own unique character and charm that keeps customers coming back.

Article 31: Museum Visit (Editing)

It was the first day of Sarah's vacation. With enthusiasm bubbling inside her, she planned her day — a visit to the art museum and a local café.

By midday, Sarah wandered around the museum, amazed by its intricate exhibits with detailed carvings and tiny moving parts. Noticing her interest, a guide offered her a complimentary tour. He explained, "This guided tour is free and no reservations are needed." They then began uncovering the museum's hidden treasures.

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The guide started telling Sarah stories behind the exhibits which made each piece of artwork come alive. Sarah felt a fervent fondness for the beautiful artworks as she listened closely to the guide, amazed by the passion and effort the artists had put into each piece. The guide shared how many of the artworks were created from scratch, often involving weeks or months of work. It took a lot of patience and persistence to strengthen their skills and complete each masterpiece.

That evening, she relaxed in a cozy café, holding her warm coffee and watching the glowing sunset. A sense of accomplishment filled her. Smiling gently, she knew this vacation was more than just a break.

Article 32: Trekking in the Mountains (Cloze)

Most people can only share stories about trekking based on what they have seen in books or movies. However, only a few people have actually experienced what it is really like to hike through tall, snowy mountains and see the amazing views for themselves.

Trekking in the mountains is certainly a task that is not for everyone as it can be dangerous and difficult. To the faint-hearted, having to trek mountainous terrains and staying overnight in tents where one is vulnerable to sudden changes in weather is considered an ordeal. For those who appreciate it, it is a test of strength and being able to enjoy the beauty of nature along the way makes facing all the challenges easier.

One of the greatest trekking expeditions of all was that of Tenzing Norgay's, a legendary mountaineering guide who made history by bravely reaching the summit of Mount Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary. This groundbreaking achievement made him famous all around the world. On one expedition, Tenzing and his team had to change their plans because the weather got worse, forcing them to find a new route. Tenzing kept going despite the conditions getting harsher. Along the way, he chanced upon a hidden part of the mountains with colourful wildflowers. This discovery revealed a part of the Himalayas so untouched that it had never been documented before.

Trekking helps one become more adaptable and allows one to stay resilient during challenging times. When hikers are prepared for the challenges that lie ahead, the mountains actually offer a journey that is both deeply rewarding and unforgettable. Overcoming these challenges with determination can help one learn, grow and create lasting memories.

Article 33: Mandai Wildlife Reserve (Editing)

Mandai Wildlife Reserve has already earned its stripes as a go-to spot for nature lovers. When I heard there was a new animal park in Mandai, I jumped at the chance to visit. Having been wowed by Bird Paradise two years ago, I set off with my best walking shoes, feeling exhilarated.

Stepping in, it is clear that Rainforest Wild Asia offered an immersive, sensory, thrilling and very compelling rainforest experience, unlike any other park we have seen in Singapore. Picture an expansive space with over 7000 trees, 36 animal species, winding trails, and a selection of fun and memorable activities. I tried many of the activities and found them irresistible.

Another thing that immediately stands out is the park's versatility. Each of the eight zones features paths of varying levels of difficulty that allow everyone to explore the reserve at their preferred pace. Choose your adventure: from a leisurely stroll to a more rugged hike on the wilder side. There are accessible walkways available for strollers and wheelchair users too. Visit Mandai Wildlife Reserve!

Based on my experience, it is worth making the trip!

Article 34: About Social Media (Cloze)

Social media is not just for fun and games. It can also support learning in meaningful ways. With its engaging features and bite-sized content, students are drawn to social media as a popular tool for study. Many students watch educational videos that explain difficult concepts online. These videos are often easier to understand than thick textbooks, which can be confusing or hard to follow. The interactive format keeps them interested in learning even after a long day at school.

However, students must be cautious when using social media as a learning platform. Not everything online is trustworthy. Anyone can post content, whether it is true or not. Some accounts may seem convincing but they may be misleading. To avoid being misled, students should always check the source of the content. Information from teachers, schools, or experts is usually more trustworthy and safe to use. By comparing information from different websites, students can ensure they are learning facts instead of false or incomplete ideas. Therefore, it is extremely important for students to use social media responsibly.

When used wisely, social media encourages student learning. Students do not always have to rely on teachers or parents to provide all the information they need. They can also explore and learn at their own pace. Used with care and purpose, social media can open new doors to knowledge for young minds. Its potential in education is limitless.

Article 35: E-Payments in Schools

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E-payment is becoming increasingly common in schools across Singapore, with over 230 000 pupils using such a system to buy their food and drinks. This system has helped speed up transactions. This cuts down queueing time at stalls during recess. During a short 30-minute recess, pupils can now make quick payments by tapping their smartcards against the payment terminal. This makes it faster for pupils to purchase their meals as compared to cash transactions, which require counting and giving change. In addition, faster transactions give pupils more time to eat and socialise while also minimising congestion at stalls.

Canteen vendors also benefit from e-payments. Since most meals are sold within the first 10 minutes of recess, digital transactions help them serve more pupils efficiently. Instead of just selecting from a set menu, pupils get to customise their meals according to their specific preferences. For example, a pupil might choose to add extra toppings or opt for a different type of bread. Vendors can immediately input the pupils' unique meal choices and the total price is calculated instantly, removing the need for manual calculations, which would otherwise be time-consuming and prone to error.

The move towards e-payments is part of the POSB Smart Buddy programme, first launched in 2017 in 19 primary schools. It then expanded in 2022 because of a partnership between the Ministry of Education (MOE) and POSB, aiming to reach all primary schools by 2025. Many schools have already implemented the system with ongoing plans to extend it further.

Besides the Smart Buddy system, pupils can use school smartcards or EZ-link cards to pay for their meals. This integration allows them to track their transport and meal expenses through detailed transaction records. This helps them monitor their spending habits and makes it easier to use one card for both travel and food.

However, there are challenges. Vendors may have delays in receiving payments, affecting their money in hand. Additionally, some pupils may overspend early in the week when their cards are topped up and have little left for the remaining days. To address this problem, POSB is offering lessons on managing money to thousands of primary and pre-school pupils. The adoption of e-payments in schools continues to grow as schools recognise the benefits of digital payments, supporting the shift towards a cashless society.

Article 36: Bouldering

The other day, I was looking around my room. My climbing shoes, gathering dust in the corner, caught my attention. Two years ago, I became interested in bouldering, a type of rock climbing, after my friends introduced me to it. The exhilaration of reaching the top kept me engaged. However, after some time, I reached a standstill. Despite all my hard work, I could not progress past a certain level.

I spent hours trying different climbing routes, persevering without any progress. It was clear that the time I had invested was not enough to improve my skills.

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The excitement I once felt began to fade. I found myself stuck, unable to move forward while others seemed to be making continuous progress. Occasionally, I would think back to when I first started and feel frustrated that I had not improved. I realised I had become too focused on mastering the activity rather than enjoying it for the experience. Now, I am just trying to have fun.