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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/12**

Paper 1 Reading **February/March 2026**

INSERT **2 hours**

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INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading texts.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.

This document has **8** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

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Read **Text A**, and then answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** on the question paper.

Text A: ***Giraffes, the climate and us***

Climate change is expected to cause widespread decline in wildlife populations in the next 20 years. But little was previously known about the combined effects of climate change and human activity on the survival rates of giraffes until researchers undertaking a decade-long study looked at a giraffe population in a thousand-square-kilometre area of Tanzania.

'Studying long-living animals like giraffes requires monitoring them over a lengthy time period and a large area,' explains the scientist in charge of the research, 'enough to capture both immediate and delayed effects on survival. We obtained data on local rainfall, vegetation greenness and temperature during Tanzania's short rains, long rains and dry season, looking for patterns emerging over the years.'

Her team initially hypothesised that higher temperatures would have a detrimental impact on adult giraffes due to their large body size, which could potentially lead to overheating. Contrary to expectations, they discovered a positive effect. However, rainier wet seasons had an unexpectedly negative effect on adult and calf survival.

Researchers suggested their findings could be attributed to a potential rise in parasites during rainy seasons compared to dry seasons. Instances of heavy flooding have led to severe outbreaks of diseases which are known to cause mortality in giraffes. Higher vegetation greenness was associated with reduced survival of adult giraffes, perhaps due to its faster growth potentially diminishing the nutrient quality of the leaves.

Worse still, it seems that the world's tallest, most iconic animal, despite its image being commonplace in films and fashion, is under severe pressure. Though regularly showcased on safaris and in zoos, these popular, majestic animals are undergoing a silent extinction. The world's been worrying about dwindling populations of elephants and rhinos, yet giraffe numbers have plummeted by almost 40 per cent in recent years, unnoticed, placing them amongst the most threatened species on our planet. A population collapse of this nature could conceivably be driven by myths about how wild animal parts used in food and medicine can improve health or happiness. In this case, as well as the now-familiar threat of habitat loss coupled with human population growth, illegal hunting appears mainly to blame.

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Read **Text B**, and then answer **Question 1(f)** on the question paper.

Text B: ***Who or what is Sophie the giraffe?***

Before my daughter was even born, my parents (who lived in Europe at that time) started sending presents for her. The first one to arrive was a 'Sophie the Giraffe' – a friendly-looking giraffe toy.

Although that's the first time I remember seeing Sophie, suddenly I saw 17-centimetre giraffes everywhere – lovingly held by the little hands they were especially designed for. There seemed to be 'Sophies' in every shop I walked into and all over social media. I had to admit her visual appeal, though, and when my daughter was born, she seemed to agree: Sophie became her companion on many adventures and three years later still goes everywhere with her.

When I discovered that Sophie's story began in the heart of Paris, France, my curiosity as a journalist was piqued. A man known now only as Mr Rambeau created her on 25 May 1961. Rambeau worked for a company which made a range of animal toys for children. At that time, these were based on domesticated animals, so a wild giraffe was something new and novel.

To learn more about Sophie, I spoke with the co-founder of the company responsible for exporting this fashionable toy around the world to over 75 different countries. 'Did you know that each year in France, more Sophies are sold than there are babies born?' she asked me. 'Sophie's milestone birthdays are big events in France, with her celebrity fans and even royalty in attendance.'

If you received a Sophie for a gift, or purchased one yourself, it's likely that you didn't read all the packaging. I certainly didn't, so I didn't know that (delightfully) Sophie is made in the same small French factory she started in, or that (reassuringly) she is painted with food-grade paint. Made from natural rubber, still exclusively sourced from special trees in Malaysia, this little giraffe is completely biodegradable and sustainable, as the trees aren't harmed by rubber extraction.

Sophie is designed to engage all five senses: her contrasting dots and dark eyes are great for young babies. She's also fun to squeeze, with a rewarding squeak for little ears and a sweet vanilla smell that babies respond to.

There's now a range of Sophie products on offer, from clothing and nursery fabrics to various animal 'friends', but the classic vintage Sophie will likely always be parents' favourite, winning several awards for children's toys and even appearing in a movie!

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Read **Text C**, and then answer **Questions 2(a)–(d)** and **Question 3** on the question paper.

Text C: *Emil and the giraffes*

In this text, Emil is a science student working in the headquarters of a shipping company and is packing boxes during his long summer holiday. Emil has been unexpectedly summoned to the office of the person in charge.

'So you're the giraffe man, are you?' asks the shipping director, barely looking up as I'm ushered into his office.

'Yes, I'm studying blood flow in vertical creatures – humans and giraffes. My research has applications for astronauts,' I boast. 'The giraffe's thick skin is so tightly wrapped that designers want to imitate its qualities in anti-gravity spacesuits.'

'I see,' he says.

He doesn't.

'Are giraffes ferocious?' he asks, unexpectedly.

'No. Although a giraffe can kick out in any direction with force.' I know this only from my reading. Like him, I've never seen wild giraffes.

'Ever been to the sea?' he asks, flicking through papers on his desk.

'No, sir.'

'All the more exciting then. Let's see …' he reads, 'thirty-three giraffes, sailing in from Africa.'

He asks if I've heard of a town in a neighbouring country. I have. Rich people ski there.

'What we want from you, Emil, is to meet this shipment at the port, supervise the unloading, then travel with the cargo to ensure our client's property reaches that town's zoo in good order.'

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One hour later, I'm on the ship. I stare, dumbfounded. I've worked only with one living giraffe, an old zoo animal, weary, hunched. I've seen nothing like this. There are so many of them: wild and so impossibly stretched that they seem to scrape the sky. Tarpaulins cover their crates, so only their necks and shoulders are visible, like enormous hand-puppets. When they move, they flow as if underwater, or like slender trees swaying in a breeze. I take a step closer. The smell of the giraffes is pungent. I count thirty-two animals.

An aged sailor approaches. 'Cup your hands,' he says, pouring stale grain into them. 'Now try that one there. They call her Snowstorm.' I see why: her underbelly is a blizzard of white. Snowstorm slides her tongue out delicately towards me. It's the length of my arm and as dark as blood.

The sailor outlines the plan for unloading: each animal will be transferred onto a barge alongside the ship. I will go with the barge when it heads up the river tomorrow.

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That afternoon, I sit in the ship's library, sifting through documents estimating shipping costs, profit and loss, until I find the veterinary report. I make notes on the blood-pressure measurements recorded for one unfortunate giraffe before its voyage ended.

Next morning, unloading begins: each animal is harnessed and hoisted. Some giraffes panic at the sensation of flying, kicking out. Swinging precariously, they're lowered towards the barge and stare desperately back out to sea, shimmering hot with fear. Squawking gulls hover overhead, mocking the new arrivals as they descend, legs flailing. The sailor stands beside me. 'Let them walk on air: they'll never walk on their continent again,' he says sadly.

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Days later, I'm journeying onwards to the zoo in a lorry carrying four of the giraffes, including Snowstorm. Bemused schoolchildren on buses catch sight of the giraffes and wave. The woods we pass are increasingly dense, not the vast, open woodlands giraffes dream of. We rattle along bumpy back roads, avoiding bridges, turning north towards the mountains along the border. 'Slower,' I tell the driver. The narrow window in the back of the cab seems to frame the giraffes' captivity. Their eyes are shut tight.

I step down from the lorry into a wintry, icy morning. The zoo manager strides up in his safari hat. 'Just lost one on the voyage, did you?' he sneers.

'I wasn't ...' I begin, but he's already talking loudly about 'this epic migration'. As if they'd choose to come here with this climate! I voice my misgivings about plans for the giraffes to spend their days outdoors in his 'safari park'.

'A free herd will attract tourists,' he shrugs.

'They were free,' I point out.

As I leave, Snowstorm's head raises even higher, straining to glimpse over the zoo's walls.

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