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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/13**

Paper 1 Reading **May/June 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.

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

Text A: *Octopuses*

Octopuses have blue blood, three hearts and a doughnut-shaped brain. But these aren't even the most unusual things about them! No, it's their remarkable intelligence that still puzzles scientists, uncertain how the trait evolved.

To demonstrate how seriously smart octopuses can be, fans point to videos on social media. One shows an octopus pulling two halves of a coconut shell together to hide inside, then rolling off to escape a predator!

Later, it stacks the shells together, stowing them away. 'The octopus retains these tools because it understands they may be useful in future,' comments marine scientist, Dr Eva Lanver. Octopuses certainly behave in ways that suggest they're highly intelligent. One, named Inky, made a notorious escape overnight from a national aquarium, exiting his enclosure after keepers went home and slithering down a drainpipe, apparently out to sea.

'None of this is atypical behaviour,' confirms Dr Lanver. 'I've known octopuses escape sealed observation containers; some – like one octopus in Bermuda – escape multiple times to eat the inhabitants of nearby aquariums.' How do they figure out what to do? Dr Lanver explains that octopuses are known to use suckers on their tentacles to explore, learning quickly where their food is coming in from. Their soft, boneless bodies mean they can squeeze through small openings.

But how smart are they? Recent studies have detected significant activity in key areas of the octopus brain, which shows that they can change their behaviour when necessary. This might be proof that they, like us, have the ability to adapt continuously and solve problems. Octopuses recognise human faces too. In one case, an octopus took a dislike to a member of staff. Every time she passed the tank, the octopus squirted water at her with its beak.

Octopuses evolved in marine environments, shaping their brains uniquely. Their decentralised nervous system, with many of their neurons located in their arms, enables octopuses to control each arm independently and perform complex tasks simultaneously. However, their brain functions do not extend to complex reasoning (where humans have an advantage). The abstract thinking we enjoy is also unlikely. Another difference is in communication. While humans have developed complex language systems, octopuses rely on a combination of visual displays and body patterns to send messages to other octopuses.

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

Text B: *Best friends with an octopus!*

Diving in the sea one morning, an aspiring filmmaker noticed an unusual mound of seashells artfully stuck together. Suddenly, the shells tumbled apart and a maroon octopus shot out of their midst – the perfect footage!

Enthralled, the filmmaker documented the octopus's many remarkable behaviours every day for the following year. His own life wasn't going well, and this new 'friend' provided welcome distraction. At first, the octopus was wary, rarely allowing him to get close, but gradually it seemed to trust him, eventually even riding to the surface on his hand.

Watching this romanticised film, it's tempting to perceive these interactions as genuine companionship – an impression encouraged by lingering close-ups and swelling music designed to draw in audiences. However, conclusions about the creature's feelings are based entirely on human interpretations: what looks to us like tenderness could be mere curiosity.

It's easy to understand how humans can form bonds with some animals – species we've domesticated over time which don't live at the bottom of the sea – though real friendship is exclusively human, surely? Anyway, octopuses have long been regarded as naturally reclusive, antisocial creatures. It's rare to see more than one adult octopus simultaneously in the wild and chance encounters often result in 16-armed brawls, or cannibalism. Hardly best-friend material.

Admittedly, recent reports detail octopuses gathering in large groups on the seafloor, sharing dens and forming cooperative hunting parties for fish. Yet it is mainly in captivity, where octopuses are presented with artificial opportunities for interactions with other species, that there are claims of sociability. Octopus admirers enthusiastically present their cherished companions as highly individualistic animals that enjoy social contact. 'The more time you spend with them, the more you see their personality and feel a connection,' says one. Not all experts are convinced that these soft-bodied, eight-limbed molluscs could be our friends though since they are so fundamentally different in biology from us.

A little more is known about octopuses today than years ago, but they still retain an essential mystery. There's no translation service for 'octopus language', if it even exists. Instead, we can only exchange uncertain gestures across what could be an unbridgeable abyss.

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

Text C: *Marcellus*

This text is about Cameron who is working his first nightshift at a popular aquarium on the coast of the Pacific Ocean.

Cameron rubs his throbbing head and gives the busted stepladder a vengeful kick.

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‘I think you know where I’m going and what I need to do,’ she says.

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