

PERSONALITY/PERSONAL ABILITIES

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

RAGGED DICK

Dick's appearance as he stood beside the box was rather peculiar. His pants were torn in several places, and had apparently belonged in the first instance to a boy two sizes larger than himself. He wore a vest, all the buttons of which were gone except two, out of which peeped a shirt which looked as if it had been worn a month.

Washing the face and hands is usually considered proper in commencing the day, but Dick was above such refinement. He had no particular dislike to dirt, and did not think it necessary to remove several dark streaks on his face and hands. But in spite of his dirt and rags there was something about Dick that was attractive. It was easy to see that if he had been clean and well dressed he would have been decidedly good-looking. Dick had a frank, straight-forward manner that made him a favourite.

(Ragged Dick by Horatio Alger, jr.)

- commence – to begin
 - rags – clothes that are old, torn and dirty
1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
 2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
 3. What is your point of view?

PERSONALITY/PERSONAL ABILITIES

MONOLOGUE

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ASTRID DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANY MORE...

Swedish author Astrid Lindgren spent her whole life refusing to grow up... In fact, most of her books were based on her childhood in Smaland in the second decade of the 20th century. It was at Vimmerby that Astrid, Stina and Ingegerd "almost played themselves to death" and it was there that Astrid became known as "the monkey" for her tree-climbing

exploits. This is also where the hollow Owl Tree which served as a model for Pippi Longstocking's Soda Pop Tree still stands.

Astrid was never comfortable with the image of herself as a world famous children's story teller. In fact she wrote over 100 books and received hundreds of awards, including three honorary doctorates, but all the fame simply didn't interest her.

When the Russian Academy of Sciences named a stellar constellation after her in 1995, she was clearly delighted and dubbed herself "Asteroid" Lindgren.

(Scanorama, June 2002)

- stellar constellation – a group of stars in the sky
- 1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
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- 3. What is your point of view?

PERSONALITY/PERSONAL ABILITIES

C1

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

CARMEN KASS – ESTONIAN COVERGIRL GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

"World-famous Estonian model Carmen Kass (23) is starring in a Hollywood action movie "Welcome to America" which will be shot mainly in Estonia at the beginning of this summer," says Eesti Päevaleht.

Kass plays the role of an FBI agent, her partner is the renowned Michael Madsen, who at present is busy with the shooting of the 20th episode of James Bond in London.

Carmen Kass has admitted that she has taken courses on acting and that she has always been interested in movies. "I think it's a great skill to regard yourself as another person. It needs courage and self-cognition, for the one on the screen isn't you," said Kass in an interview in September 2000. "The job of a model and the job of an actress are somewhat comparable. You have to control your mimics and body, you have to find a role and perform it cogently."

(Tallinn Airport Magazine, 2002)

- cogently – reasonably and sensibly
- 1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
- 2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
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FAMILY AND HOME

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

LIFE ON WHEELS. MOBILE HOMES IN AMERICA

If the saying “A man’s home is his castle” is really true, then one out of every 15 Americans lives in a castle about 12 metres long, built of aluminium, with wheels: in short, a mobile home.

Mobile homes are like miniature houses on wheels and are furnished with kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms. The largest and most sophisticated has to be moved for you, usually towed by a large truck for a large fee. You yourself can hitch up the slightly smaller ones, called travel trailers, to your pickup truck when you want to move. There are tanks which hold fresh water and gas, for heating and cooking. And trailer parks supply electrical hook-ups, where you “plug in” to run your TV and microwave oven.

They are a symbol of America. They symbolize their need to move, their will to change and their ability to adapt to new environments.

(Current, September 1994)

- tow – to pull a vehicle by fixing it to another vehicle
 - hook up – to connect two pieces of electrical or electronic equipment together
1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
 2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
 3. What is your point of view?

FAMILY AND HOME

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

AROUND THE WORLD ON THE WINGS OF FATHERLY LOVE

The great sportsman is no longer a brutal macho figure who cares only for fight and victory and the company of men. These days, he is also a soft, loving human being – even if he is captain of the Australian rugby team.

George Gregan took time off to undertake a 21,400-mile journey to witness the birth of his daughter. In a dizzy period of less than a hundred hours, Gregan flew after the match

against Ireland from Dublin to London via Sydney, getting back to England in time for a press conference.

His method was to stay on London time throughout, eating and sleeping in a London pattern. He had sleeping pills of varying potency, which he took according to a rigid programme of anti-acclimatisation worked out by the team's doctor.

It could all have been so much better organised. But love itself has wings: and love laughs at the air-miles.

(The Times, November 14, 2002)

- potency – the strength of a medicine, drug or chemical
- rigid – not easily changed

1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
3. What is your point of view?

FAMILY AND HOME

C2

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

COULD THIS BE MR AND MRS RIGHT?

Over 30 years, the number of marriages in England and Wales has halved, while the rate of divorce has trebled. According to forecasts, if present trends continue, the proportion of adults who have never been married will rise from 32 per cent of males and 24 per cent of females in 1996 to 41 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women by 2021. The number of cohabiting couples is likely to double to nearly three million.

Cohabitation carries a far higher risk of break-up than marriage. One in two children born of cohabiting couples sees the parents separate before the child reaches its fifth birthday, compared with one in four children born in wedlock.

Yet studies show creating a happy, stable family with long-term commitment remains the goal of most. Research tells us that those in successful long-term partnerships are healthier, wealthier, more confident and better able to manage the insecurities of our age.

(The Observer, 5 January 2003)

- treble – if something trebles, it becomes three times bigger than it was before
- cohabit – to live together without being married
- wedlock – the state of being married

1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
3. What is your point of view?

FRIENDS AND OTHER SOCIAL RELATIONS

A3

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

DEAF GIRL AND BLIND DOG HELP EACH OTHER BEAT THE ODDS

Kerry Halpin and her dog Fox are perfect partners – one's a seeing-eye kid and the other's a hearing-aid pooch. That's because Kerry was born deaf and the white Samoyed has been blind since she was a puppy. "I'm her eyes and she's my ears. I don't know what I'd do without her," said Kerry.

When they're out walking Kerry steers faithful Fox around obstacles with special commands. And Fox warns Kerry of approaching vehicles she can't hear by sitting down and refusing to move until Kerry spots the danger. "She's my best friend," added Kerry. "I look out for her and she listens out for me."

Kerry has taught Fox commands – 'steps up', 'steps down', 'right', 'left' and 'stop' – to help her negotiate hazards when she takes Fox for a walk. "Fox has brought her real happiness," added Kerry's mom Fionna, who lives with her husband and five children on a farm in Wales they've transformed into a sanctuary for unwanted pets. (162 words)

(National Enquirer: April 18, 2000)

- pooch – *informal* a dog
- 1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
- 2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
- 3. What is your point of view?

FRIENDS AND OTHER SOCIAL RELATIONS

B3

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

WHY I DON'T WANT TO TRACE MY BIRTH PARENTS?

One day my daddy was walking along the road and a lady came up to him with a baby. She said she couldn't look after the baby, so would he like to have the baby? And there I was! When my father told four-year-old me this little story, it made me smile. I didn't need to know any more about the lady.

Two years ago, shortly before my father's death, he asked if I was interested in tracing my real parents. "No," I replied feeling horrified and guilty. I resented the fact that he'd suffered pain by asking me. It is a huge surprise to everyone I don't want to trace the birth parents. Don't I want to know, where I came from, they ask? I know who I am – the child of the people who raised me – and I don't need ghosts from the past to take them away.

(Cosmopolitan, spring 2003)

1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
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FRIENDS AND OTHER SOCIAL RELATIONS

C3

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

100,000 CHILDREN ARE HOMELESS, SHELTER REPORT SAYS

Around 100,000 children were homeless last year, causing educational and behavioural problems and sickness, a new report by Shelter reveals.

The number of children forced to live in temporary housing in the 12 months to July 2002 was uncovered by analysing government figures on homeless families.

Researchers also studied 50 children in 21 families and found that the lack of permanent accommodation severely affected almost every aspect of their lives, from schooling to health. The Shelter study found that children in two-fifths of the families were forced to move schools when they became homeless, and over half of those were bullied for having no friends. Many missed out on school altogether or fell behind because they had nowhere to do their homework.

Their health also suffered from insanitary conditions and overcrowding – one family of six shared a single room – and from a poor diet due to lack of cooking facilities. (152 words)

(Guardian, September 19, 2002)

1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
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ENVIRONMENT (NATURAL, CULTURAL, SOCIAL)

A4

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

POLLUTION TEST ON RIVER AFTER A CHEMICALS LEAK

A Welsh river was tested yesterday for pollution after more than 200,000 litres of chemicals from a waste treatment plant spilled into it.

The river Dee is one of the most closely regulated rivers in Europe, providing drinking water for homes across north-east Wales. Janet Williams, a member of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales, said there had been concerns about the plant for several years.

Water agencies which use water from the Dee were informed by the environment agency immediately after the leak and told to put precautions in place.

Martin Watkins, a spokesman for the agency said: "No one knows whether the chemicals have settled in the sediment, or will get into the food chain, and a lot of wildlife lives along the banks of the brook, so it is impossible for anyone to say that there will be no long term effects."

(The Guardian, September 24, 2002)

- precaution – something done to protect people or things against possible harm or trouble
- sediment – a layer of sand, stones, etc that becomes a layer of rock

1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
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ENVIRONMENT (NATURAL, CULTURAL, SOCIAL)

B4

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

WHATEVER'S HAPPENED TO THE WEATHER?

Evidence that Europe is entering a new climatic age characterised by unforgiving downpours and flooding has become compelling. Last year the continent buckled under its worst storms in 2,000 years. Two of central Europe's architectural gems – Prague and Dresden – suffered massive flood damage in the summer after the entire rainfall of a typical August fell in 36 hours.

Scientists agree that mankind is partly to blame for the floods. Massive quantities of carbon dioxide are spewed into the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels like oil and from the emissions of millions of vehicles.

These emissions act as a giant insulation blanket suspended above the earth's surface. Warmth, in effect, cannot escape, heating up the atmosphere through the so-called "greenhouse effect" and increasing its moisture-carrying capability.

Scientists warn that the damage already done to the environment by greenhouse gas emissions will affect us for the next 1,000 years.

(The Observer, 5 January 2003)

- spew – to flow out or make something flow out
- suspend – to hang something from something else

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ENVIRONMENT (NATURAL, CULTURAL, SOCIAL)

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

WESTWARD, LOOK THE LAND IS BRIGHT

The European Union is now formally embarking upon enlargement. In December the EU is due to finish negotiations with ten hopeful members which, save Cyprus and Malta were all former satellite states of the Soviet Union. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and the three Baltic states will – perhaps by 2004 – at last take their places as full members of Europe's top club. History, you might say, is coming to happy end.

Eastern Europe was mostly a concept of the cold war. Despite attempts to progress, Bulgaria and Romania remain firmly in the East. By contrast, Slovenia looks little different from its rich neighbour Austria, and is essentially western. The Baltics are tiny; besides, Estonia is practically Nordic in all but income. The admission of these new countries and reintegration with the rest of Europe is long overdue.

(The Economist, October 26th-November 1st 2002)

- embark upon – to start a new project or activity
- overdue – something that should have been done before now

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ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

A NICE CUP OF TEA

Tea, to the average English man or woman, usually means Indian tea. It is served with milk and sugar and the folklore surrounding its preparation is prodigious. First the teapot has to be heated. The tea, once made, has to be left to "stand" and "brew" – but not so long that it becomes "stewed". Cold milk is poured into the bottom of each cup and then tea is added either with the addition of water or, more normally, "just as it comes" – neat and strong.

Among the upper classes, China tea is considered smarter. Preparation rituals are similar, but milk is always added after the tea if it is taken at all. A slice of lemon is often substituted. Sugar goes in last.

In great English institutions tea brewed in vast urns like Russian samovars still often comes with milk and sugar already added.

(Antony Miall, Xenophobe's guide to the English, 1993)

- prodigious – very great or impressive
- brew – if tea is brewing, you have made it and left it to develop a stronger flavour

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ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

PUEBLO INDIANS

Pueblo Indian life is based on the fundamental religious conviction that people must live in harmony with the natural world around them. So strong is this belief that it is not possible to separate religion from everyday life. The religious ceremonies that are held throughout the year are enactments of this philosophy.

Societies, headed by priests, within each pueblo are responsible for maintaining harmony with the supernatural world. Properly conducted ceremonies control the weather, effect cures, bring rain, mature crops, lead to success in hunting, and generally ensure that the cycle of life continues.

Harmony must also be maintained within the pueblo – family, clan, and society relationships require specific behaviour of the individual, and children are reared to accept these duties.

Life in the pueblos is neither ideal nor idyllic, but it obviously holds a greater attraction and greater satisfaction for most of these people than an existence in the mainstream of American life.

(Southwestern Indian Tribes: 1997)

- conviction – a strong belief or opinion about something
 - enactment – making a proposal into a law
 - pueblo – a small town, especially in parts of the USA that are near Mexico
1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
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ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRIES

C5

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

"IGNORANT" PUBLIC PUTTING NATIONAL HERITAGE AT RISK

England's cultural heritage is under increasing threat from an ignorant public. A number of ancient monuments and landscapes are at risk.

English Heritage has identified 1,398 listed buildings at acute risk with thousands more requiring urgent action to preserve them. Its chief executive, Dr Simon Thurley, told the Observer: "We are in danger of expunging the great thing that makes this country a desirable place to live and visit. The enemy is the ignorance and thoughtlessness of people."

A number of conservation areas have lost the special character that justified their designation while a number of buildings no longer have protected status. Elton John's Windsor mansion was delisted four years ago because the star's changes had robbed the building of its historic value. One of Liverpool's most prominent waterfront buildings – the Tobacco Warehouse – is threatened with complete destruction if a buyer cannot be found.

(The Observer, 24 November 2002)

- expunge – to remove something completely, especially from a written record
 - designation – the act of choosing something for a particular purpose
 - delist – to take something off the list
1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
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EVERYDAY LIFE

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

HAVE A CHIP... BUT DON'T FORGET THE SALAD

There is a ring of truth in that well-known saying: "A man is what he eats". Food is a form of fuel. It gives you energy, helps you to grow, resist disease and form strong teeth and bones. It often tastes good, too! There are so many kinds of food – fast food, snacks, junk food – you may find it difficult to follow a healthy diet.

Some fast foods are fairly healthy, like pizza and Chinese meals. But others, such as chips and sausage rolls, contain a great deal of fat. It's better not to eat fast foods too often. Remember to eat a mixed diet that includes salads, and fruit and vegetables.

You need to eat a wide variety of foods as your body needs protein (found in beans, milk and fish), fat (from oils, margarine and butter), carbohydrates (from bread and potatoes), fibre (through bran and vegetables), as well as vitamins and minerals.

(Guardian Education, September 9, 1997)

- diet – the food that a person or animal usually eats
- bran – the outside of the grain of a cereal such as wheat or oats

1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
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EVERYDAY LIFE

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

BREAST CANCER DANGER IN A DAILY GLASS OF WINE

Just one alcoholic drink a day increases a woman's chances of getting breast cancer by 6 per cent. But smoking does not add to the risk at all.

Leading cancer experts have discovered that alcohol is responsible for 2,000 extra cases of breast cancer in Britain every year, and that a woman who has five drinks a day is 30 per cent more at risk than a teetotaler.

Moderate drinking also has benefits, including reducing the risk of heart disease. But women are less prone to heart disease than men, so working out the exact balance of advantage is difficult.

The reason why drinking affects breast cancer risk is unknown, but there are strong suggestions that alcohol affects the levels of the sex hormones.

Julia Anderson of the breast Cancer Campaign said: "We should always urge women to exercise moderation when drinking alcohol." (143 words)

(The Times, November 13, 2002)

- teetotaller – someone who never drinks alcohol
 - prone – likely to do something or be affected by something
 - urge – to advise someone very strongly about what action or attitude they should take
1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
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EVERYDAY LIFE

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

IF YOU BUY A PAIR OF NEW SUNGLASSES...

If you buy a pair of new sunglasses, wherever you are in the world, there's a pretty big chance they were made in Italy. If you've bought a quality product, that is. The country produces 80 per cent of the world's sunglasses, and practically all of them come from the same valley north of Venice.

Why Italy? Well, the explanation goes all the way back to the 13th century Venice, where the first regular glasses were most likely made, catering to weary eyed monks who spent much of their time reading in bad lighting. As for shades they were introduced in the 18th century with bottle green glass, followed by blue glass in the 1880's.

Traditionally, Italian industry tends to concentrate on a single product. So it's not surprising that practically all of Italy's sunglasses come from Agordo, the same valley in the little province of Belluno in northern Veneto.

(Scanorama 2002)

- weary – very tired
1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
 2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
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EDUCATION AND JOBS

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

DISTANCE LEARNING

C6

A7

Knowledge and information have become the driving forces in our societies. Helping citizens to access training and develop their skills has become a priority. Nowadays, people are looking for ways to learn "where, when and how" they want. And so the use of new technologies will enable people to engage in lifelong learning. The learning process will no longer end with school, but will start much earlier and carry on in the workplace and in private life.

E-learning, the new method of distance learning using the new information and communication technologies (such as the Internet), is a fairly recent phenomenon that is set to change radically the way we work, live and learn. Its advantage is that it provides access for everyone to information around the clock and from any location. New technologies should be used to support creative training and self-training, taking advantage of the three major benefits of open learning: temporal, spatial and methodological flexibility. (157 words)

(Leonardo da Vinci Series: Good Practices, Distance learning, 2002)

- temporal – relating to time
 - spatial – relating to the size, shape and position of things
1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
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EDUCATION AND JOBS

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

THE KEYBOARD AND THE LUMBERJACK

Lumberjacks have been around for as long as people can remember. But these days, the life of a lumberjack bears practically no resemblance to the woodsman of the past – except for the worksite. Today, they don't even need muscles. But they do need to have computer skills – and it helps if they are not afraid of the dark.

To fully understand the impact of change over the past few decades, you have to take a hike deep into the forests. But forget the silent, dark forests with birds singing. Instead, picture a huge machine conquering the wood with a lion's roar.

At a felling speed of 80-100 trees per hour, it is an amazing sight. And everything inside this harvester is computerized. The huge crane is operated with just two joysticks. It takes less than one minute to transform a majestic 120-year old spruce into logs.

(Scanorama, September 2001)

- lumberjack – someone whose job is to cut down trees for wood
- harvester – a machine or person that collects things that can be eaten or used
- joystick – an upright handle that you use to control objects on the screen of a computer

1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)

2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
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EDUCATION AND JOBS

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

UNIVERSITIES THREATEN TO GO PRIVATE

Britain's elite universities are threatening to lead a break-away from state-funded higher education if the Government waters down plans allowing them to charge top-up tuition fees worth thousands of pounds.

At the moment about half of the million students pay nothing for tuition, while those from better-off backgrounds pay about £1,000 a year towards the average £5,000 costs of their courses. Ms Morris, the ex-Education Secretary is thought to have agreed a sliding scale under which students whose parents earn less than £30,000 a year would pay no top-up fees while those earning more than £50,000 would have to meet the new charges in full.

Professor Greenaway said that if ministers did not confront the issue, leading universities could break away from the state system and effectively become private institutions charging market rates for their courses and forsaking public funds entirely.

(The Sunday Times, October 30, 2002)

- water down – to make something less offensive, powerful or detailed
- tuition – the work that a teacher does
- confront – to deal with a difficult situation
- forsake – to stop doing, using or having something

1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
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HOBBIES AND CULTURE

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

THE ENEMY IN THE LIVING ROOM

Most people agree that children should be protected from violence on television. But who should be responsible, parents or programme makers?

President Clinton promised to do something to protect children from sex and violence on television. He said he would introduce a system for rating television

programmes, which would show parents which programmes are suitable for children. He found support for his idea among the major television networks.

But no sooner had details been published than parents and industry watchdogs attacked the new system for being too vague. With American children watching an average of 22 hours of television a week, they say a more detailed guide to programme content is needed.

Kathy Craven, as a parent, is convinced that, no matter how sophisticated television rating systems become, they will never be able to guarantee that children will be totally protected from sex and violence on television.

(BBC English, March 1997)

- industry watchdog – group or organisation whose job it is to make sure that companies do not act illegally or irresponsibly
 1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
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HOBBIES AND CULTURE

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

MARCO, 54, RUNS A HOT FOUR MARATHONS

Marco Olmo, at 54, is earning athletic fame in the extreme sport of desert running. Last week Olmo won the 105-mile Desert Cup in Jordan for the third year in a row, leaving scores of younger men and women in his wake. Olmo ground on through the desert, by day and night and ran the distance in 18 hours and 35 minutes.

Desert racing is as difficult as it sounds. Apart from sunburn and exhaustion, a big challenge is keeping the sand out of running shoes: a few grains in a blister can mean the end of a competitor's race.

The Desert Cup is Olmo's favourite of the half-dozen events in which he competes each year. It is not the longest race but it is considered the toughest; between the long stretches of sand are scree-covered hillsides and gorges, and it is run non-stop rather than in stages.

(The Sunday Times, November 17, 2002)

- in sb's wake – after someone
- scree-covered – covered with small loose pieces of broken rock
- gorges – a deep valley with high straight sides where a river has cut through rock
 1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
 2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
 3. What is your point of view?

HOBBIES AND CULTURE

MONOLOGUE

Read the text and comment briefly on it. Use the questions below to help you plan your monologue. Speak for about 2-3 minutes. Do not re-tell the story in detail.

IN A WORLD OF VIDEO, WHY READ?

According to recent studies 13 per cent of all American 17-year-olds cannot read or write properly. Many blame the electronic media for this drop in standards.

Today's students can watch a movie in class without losing interest, but reading is boring. It requires an attention span that many of them don't have. It doesn't come with visual effects, and this generation has never developed the imagination to make it exciting.

Ironically, students can't read because they don't read. Reading is slow because they don't know the words in the books.

What can I say to parents who look at me sincerely and ask, "Why aren't our kids interested in reading?" Why should they be? They do fine without reading. Mom and Dad don't read much, either, and they get along all right.

(Drucilla James Mills, English in Context. Cornelsen, 1995)

- attention span – the length of time that you can pay attention to one thing without thinking about something else
1. What is the text about? (the topic and the source)
 2. Give a short summary (2-3 sentences). What is the message of the text, what is the author trying to say?
 3. What is your point of view?