

## SECTION A: Reading

You should spend about 40 minutes on this section.

Read the following passage carefully and then answer the questions which follow on page 3.



### Welcome to Australia

Because we know so little about it, perhaps a few facts would be in order.

Australia is the world's sixth largest country and its largest island. It is the only island that is also a continent, and the only continent that is also a country. It was the first continent conquered from the sea, and the last. It is the only nation that began as a prison.

It is the home of the largest living thing on earth, The Great Barrier Reef, and of the most famous and striking monolith, Ayers Rock (or Uluru to use its now official, more respectful Aboriginal name). It has more things that will kill you than anywhere else. Of the world's ten most poisonous snakes, all are Australian. Five of its creatures – the funnel-web spider, box jellyfish, blue-ringed octopus, paralysis tick and stonefish – are the most lethal of their type in the world. This is a country where even the fluffiest of caterpillars can paralyse you with a toxic nip, where seashells will not just sting you but actually sometimes *go* for you. Pick up an innocuous coneshell from a Queensland beach, as innocent tourists are all too eager to do, and you will discover that the little fellow inside is not just astoundingly swift and tasty, but exceedingly venomous. If you are not stung or pronged to death in some unexpected manner, you may be fatally chomped by sharks or crocodiles, or carried helplessly out to sea by irresistible currents, or left to stagger to an unhappy death in the baking outback. It's a tough place.

And it is old. For 60 million years, since the formation of the Great Dividing Range, Australia has been all but silent geologically, which has allowed it to preserve many of the oldest things ever found on earth – the most ancient rocks and fossils, the earliest animal tracks and riverbeds, the first faint signs of life itself. At some undetermined point in the great immensity of its past – perhaps 45,000 years ago, perhaps 60,000, but certainly before there were modern humans in the Americas or Europe – it was quietly invaded by a deeply inscrutable people, the Aborigines, who have no clearly evident racial or linguistic kinship to their neighbours in the region, and whose presence in Australia can be explained only by presuming that they invented and mastered ocean-going craft at least 30,000 years in advance of anyone else in order to undertake an exodus, and then forgot or abandoned nearly all that they had learned and scarcely ever bothered with the open sea again.

It is an accomplishment so singular and extraordinary that most histories breeze over it in a paragraph or two, then move on to the second, more explicable invasion – the one that begins with



the arrival of Captain James Cook and his doughty little ship HMS *Endeavour* in Botany Bay in 1770. Never mind that Captain Cook didn't discover Australia and that he wasn't even a captain at the time of his visit. For most people, including most Australians, this is where the story begins. 30

The world those first Englishmen found was famously inverted – its seasons back to front, its constellations upside down – and unlike anything that any of them had seen before, even in the near latitudes of the Pacific. Its creatures seem to have evolved as if they had misread the manual. The most characteristic of them didn't run or lope or canter, but *bounced* across the landscape, like 35  
dropped balls. The continent teemed with unlikely life. It contained a fish that could climb trees; a fox that flew (it was actually a very large bat); crustaceans so big that a grown man could climb inside their shells.

In short, there was no place in the world like it. There still isn't. Eighty per cent of all that lives in Australia, plant and animal, exists nowhere else. More than this, it exists in an abundance that seems 40  
incompatible with the harshness of the environment. Australia is the driest, flattest, hottest, most desiccated, infertile and climatically aggressive of all the inhabited continents. (Only Antarctica is more hostile to life.) This is a place so inert that even the soil is, technically speaking, a fossil. And yet it teems with life in numbers uncounted. For insects alone, scientists haven't the faintest idea 45  
whether the total number of species is 100,000 or more than twice that. As many as a third of those species remain entirely unknown to science. For spiders the proportion rises to 80 per cent.

You take my point again, I'm sure. This is a country that is at once staggeringly empty and yet packed with stuff. Interesting stuff, ancient stuff, stuff not readily explained. Stuff yet to be found.

Trust me, this is an interesting place.

1. Some of the creatures described in paragraph two are obviously dangerous while others appear harmless. Choose **two** creatures which appear to be harmless and show how they are presented as dangerous. (4)
2. Look again at lines 20 – 31 of *Welcome to Australia*. Explain, **in your own words**, what we learn about the Aborigines. (4)
3. How does the writer convince us that there is no place in the world like Australia?

In your answer you should write about:

- the language used by the writer
- the selection and presentation of information.

You should refer closely to the passage to support your answer. You may include **brief** quotations. (12)

**TOTAL FOR SECTION A: 20 MARKS**

