

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER 1

PART B2

Reading Passages

8.30 am – 10.00 am (1½ hours)
(for both Parts A and B)

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

- (1) Refer to the General Instructions on Page 1 of the Reading Passages booklet for Part A.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PART B2

- (1) The Question-Answer Book for Part B2 is inserted in this Reading Passages booklet.
- (2) Candidates who choose Part B2 should attempt all questions in this part. Each question carries ONE mark unless otherwise stated.
- (3) Hand in only ONE Question-Answer Book for Part B, either B1 or B2, and fasten it with the Question-Answer Book for Part A using the green tag provided.

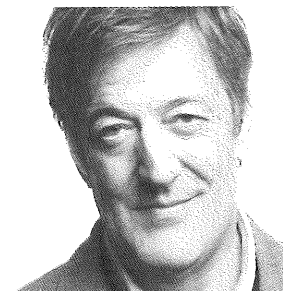
PART B2

Read Text 4 and answer questions 60-84 of the Question-Answer Book for Part B2.

Text 4

An excerpt from the autobiography of Stephen Fry, a well-loved British actor, writer and comedian.

Celebrity



5 [1] The morning after *The Cellar Tapes*¹ was aired on BBC2, I went for a walk along the King's Road. How ought I to treat those who approached me? I switched on a sweet gentle smile and practised a kind of 'Who?...me?' gesture that involved looking behind me and then pointing with questioning disbelief at my own undeserving chest. I made sure, before setting out, that there were pens in my pocket for autographs.

10 [2] The first people I passed as I made my way up Blacklands Terrace were an elderly couple who paid me no attention. Foreigners possibly, or the kind of Chelseaites² who thought it smart not to have a television. I walked twice around Sloane Square. Not one person stopped me. There was simply no reaction from anyone anywhere. I went into a newsagent and hung around the piles of television listings magazines. To pick up a *Radio Times* people had to ask me to step aside; obviously and by definition these persons must have been television watchers, but my features, by now set into a wild, despairing grin, meant nothing to them. This was most strange. Television, everybody in the world knew, conferred instant fame. Instead I had woken up to find myself anonymous. I was still nothing more than another face in the London crowd.

[3] I pulled a compensatory *BBC Micro* magazine from the shelf and left. As I was trailing disappointedly back to the flat I heard a voice behind me.

20 'Excuse me, excuse me!'
I turned to see an excited young girl. At last. 'Yes?'
'You forgot your change.'

25 [4] Ever since I can remember I had dreamt of being famous. I know how embarrassing an admission this is. From the first moment I was aware of such a class of person existing, I had wanted to be a celebrity. We are forever telling ourselves that we live in a celebrity-obsessed culture; many hands are daily wrung at the supremacy of appearance over achievement. To *desire* fame argues a shallow and delusional outlook. This much we all know. But if we clever ones can see so clearly that fame is a snare and a delusion, we can also see just as clearly that as each year passes a greater and greater proportion of the western world's youth is becoming entrapped in that snare and dazzled by that delusion.

30 [5] You may wonder how our culture can be so broken and so sick as to venerate a pack of talentless nobodies who offer no moral, spiritual or intellectual sustenance and no discernible gifts beyond unthreatening photogeneity. My counter-argument to this would be, firstly, the phenomenon simply is not as new as everyone thinks it is. Read any novel published in the early part of the twentieth century and you will find female uneducated characters who spend their spare moments dreaming of movie stars, tennis-players, explorers... The propensity to worship idols is not new. We humans are naturally disposed to worship gods and heroes. I would rather see that impulse directed into the adoration of daft singers than into the veneration of militant politicians.

[6] Secondly, is it not a rule in life that no one is quite as stupid as we would like them to be? If the social-networking services of the digital age teach us anything it is that only a fool would underestimate the intelligence, intuition and cognitive skills of the ‘masses’. I am talking about more than the ‘wisdom of crowds’ here. If you look beyond sillinesses like the puzzling inability of the majority to distinguish
40 between *your* and *you’re*, you will see that it is possible to be a fan of reality TV, talent shows and bubblegum pop and still have a brain. Which is all a way of questioning whether pop-culture hero worship is really so mentally damaging, so corrupting of the soul of mankind as we are so often told.

[7] Thirdly, look at the kind of people who most object to the childishness and cheapness of celebrity culture. Does one really want to side with such apoplectic bores? I should know, I often catch myself
45 being one, and it isn’t pretty. I will defend the absolute value of Mozart³ over Miley Cyrus⁴, of course I will, but we should be wary of false dichotomies. You do not have to choose between one or the other. You can have both. The human cultural jungle should be as varied as the Amazonian rainforest. We are all richer for biodiversity. We may decide that a puma is worth more to us than a caterpillar, but surely we can agree that the habitat is all the better for being able to sustain each. Monocultures are uninhabitably
50 dull and end as deserts.

[8] Against all that it might be said that the quarrel is not with harmless idolatry. The problem, some would argue, is not that everybody worships celebrity, but they *want it for themselves*. Online user-generated content and the rise of the talent show and reality TV have bred a generation for whom it is not enough to flick through fan magazines, they want their own shot at stardom. They want, moreover, to go
55 straight to fame and fortune, short-circuiting tedious considerations like hard work and talent.

[9] Work was coming in thick and fast. But I was not famous. A few invitations to film premieres and first nights began to trickle in, but I found that I could walk the red carpet entirely unmolested. I remember going to some event with Rowan Atkinson⁵, the press night of a new play, I think. To hear his name shouted out by photographers and see the crowd of fans pressing up against the crash barriers caused
60 the most intense excitement in me, combined with a sick flood of fury and resentment that no one, not one single person, recognized *me* or wanted *my* picture. Oh, Stephen. I have clicked on and selected that sentence, deleted it, restored it, deleted it and restored it again. A large part of me would rather not have you know that I am so futile, fatuous and feeble-minded, but an even larger part recognizes that this is our bargain. I cannot speak for others or presume to drag out their entrails for public inspection, but I can
65 speak for (and against) myself. Maybe, to put a kinder construction to it, I was living proof that you could want to be famous *and* want to do the work, you could relish the red carpet *and* relish working into the early hours cranking out articles, scripts, sketches and scenarios with a genuine sense of pleasure and fulfilment.

Notes

1. Stephen Fry’s first major television show
2. people who live in Chelsea, an affluent area in London
3. widely recognized as one of the greatest composers in the history of Classical music
4. a teen idol and pop singer
5. an English actor best known for his performance in the sitcom/movie *Mr Bean*

END OF READING PASSAGE

Sources of materials used in this paper will be acknowledged in the *Examination Report and Question Papers* published by the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority at a later stage.