Chapter 8 — Listening

Transcripts for the *Practice* Section

Extract 1 Text for Question 1 and 26

M: I need to buy a present, Sheena - for my aunt. She's been so good to our family and this year she has been helping me with my studies. Can you give me any advice? I have no idea what to buy her.

F: Was she the lady who greeted you last week, Tom, when we were on our way home?

M: That's Aunt Nora — she teaches at that primary school. I just don't know what someone her age would like.

F: What does she do in her spare time? You know, in her life outside school? Does she go to the cinema often or does she read books or magazines?

M: Actually, she was talking the other day about improvements she might make to her apartment. She'd like some hints on interior design, she said.

F: I've got it! Why don't you buy her a magazine subscription to one of those interior design magazines?

M: That might be better than a new cookbook. I'll do that. Thanks, Sheena!

Extract 2 Text for Questions 3 and 4

(male and female radio presenters)

F Why do you think May East was chosen to play the role of Candy in the new Martin Brothers film?

M I think the directors wanted quite a mature actress for the role. The script suggests that Candy is a character with a lot of stage presence — charisma, if you like.

F But that's my problem. Surely May East is too thin and willowy? In most of her parts she plays a downtrodden character who is rescued by the hero.

M Yes, I see that. But why does the hero want to rescue her? She is very attractive and has a devastating smile. She's also full of energy.

F I still find it hard to see her as Candy, a character in control from the start — even though the male characters don't quite realise that.

M That's more or less right — I just think May will achieve that — but perhaps more subtly than you expect.

F We'll have to see how she fares when the film is released!

Extract 3 Text for Questions 5 and 6

Traditional Chinese and Indian music, while sounding very different, have similar features. One of the two main styles of Indian music, Carnatic music, is based on historical developments that can be traced back five or six hundred years. It is melodic with improvised variations and the main emphasis is on the vocals as most compositions are written to be sung. Even when played on instruments, the compositions are performed in a singing style. Traditional Chinese music is melodic and it is thought that Chinese vocal music probably developed from poems that were sung, as well as verses with music. Instrumental pieces played on an *erhu* or *dizi* are popular, and are often available outside of China, but the *pipa* and *gu zheng* are more traditional, and more popular in China itself. Traditional music in China is played on solo instruments or in small ensembles of plucked and bowed stringed instruments, flutes, and various cymbals, gongs, and drums.

Extract 4 Text for Questions 7 - 12

Speaker 1 **F**

I've thought long and hard about this because going to university means it'll be years before I'm earning money to help look after our family. I'd like to study literature but I don't want to be a teacher and there isn't much else you can do, so I think I'll choose something that's very practical to maximise my chances of getting a job, like Business Administration.

Speaker 2 **M**

I can't remember a day when I wasn't fascinated by numbers, although I must admit I like constructing things too. However, I just love Mathematics in all the forms that I've met, so the choice of subject has been clear to me although I do think it may be difficult for me to earn big money because it is the abstract side of playing with numbers that fascinates me. That concerns me somewhat.

Speaker 3 **M**

My father has always encouraged me to study medicine, but I'm going to apply for IT. He's a neurosurgeon and I admire what he does. I think he'll be disappointed if I choose another career but I think I'm not good at interpersonal skills. I'm much more at home developing computer programs — it's a more fulfilling task than poking around inside the human body.

Speaker 4 **F**

I really find it hard to decide which university course to apply for. In the end, I expect I'll apply for Law. My parents are always telling me I should. I can speak well and I'm the captain of my school's debating team. I'm also good at details. I suppose my friends are probably right and as two of them are definitely applying for Law, I'll probably follow them. I suppose there will be good job opportunities when I graduate.

Speaker 5 **M**

I suppose I'm good at Mathematics and that might be a fallback for me but I'd like to continue with music. I already play the piano and also the saxophone to a high standard. Music is my life, really. I live for practising and for listening to virtuosos. My parents are behind me on this. The problem is the keen competition for places on the music course. Have I got what it takes?

Speaker 6 **F**

My friends think I'm weird, but I can't help it. When I was a small girl I liked building things. I used my older brother's LEGO more than he did. I just love to see how things fit together and how things work. I help my father look after a vintage car that he owns. He enjoys showing me how it works. So I'm definitely applying for Engineering. I just can't wait.

Extract 5 Text for Question 13

Now for those of you who are intending to go abroad for study, here are some words of advice. In large cities and towns, it is probably wise not to travel on your own – other places may not be as safe as Singapore for the young person on her (or his) own. Be wary of anyone approaching you with offers, however good they might seem. When you feel homesick – and you will! - be aware that this is why you are feeling low – and don't do anything you would regret. Homesickness is natural and you will survive it! Be alert not only while you are away, but when you are travelling home. Never, for any reason, bring anything in your bags or luggage for a friend, however well you think you know that friend. It would be too late if you arrived back with drugs you knew nothing about. But don't let these words put you off – studying abroad can be a great experience, so long as you stay focussed and alert.

Extract 6 Text for Questions 14 – 21

Hello everyone and thank you for inviting me to your class. My name's Dinesh and I'm going to tell you why I think that the human race should increase its research into space travel.

I know there are the doubters, those, for instance, who argue that it is a waste of money that could be better spent elsewhere or those who think we could just use robots. I know that robots are cheaper, better and faster. You don't have to bring them down. And if something does go wrong, the only cost is money. But they can't do everything – there are times when only humans can do something.

I am not in this for the dream. That is a common argument, of course. People argue that we should go into space because we want to dream, to soar, and to be inspired.

What intrigues me about space flight is all the possibilities — everything that can be done for humanity. I'd like to take inspiration too from something that President John F. Kennedy said: "We choose to go to the moon, and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

In tackling hard things in space, my view is that we will benefit mankind here on earth to an extent that cannot be achieved in any other way. Exploration within space has already spawned many new inventions including non-stick frying pans and Velcro.

Travel to other worlds for an extended period of time will require technology in the field of medicine. The long flights and shortage of space will require equipment and know-how that can repair bone damage, strengthen and reinforce muscles, properly distribute necessary bodily fluids, replace irreparably damaged organs, and defend the astronauts from radiation. Think of how useful that technology could be, and will be, back here on our planet.

Then there are the problems in the area of energy. If astronauts can use highly portable power grids and self-sustaining habitats, why can't we apply the same technology, after it has been proven, to build smarter, more efficient cities with smaller energy footprints and fewer energy demands?

You see, when something new is tried out, it is usually tried out in isolation. But in space projects, lots of things have to be tried out together and that opens up marvellous opportunities. Missions beyond our world offer us a rare chance to assemble and try out many new technologies and new ideas all at once. Imagine having all the experts and labs involved working together at the same time.

Projects with the potential to revolutionise infrastructure, communication, and medicine can be trialled faster, on a smaller and much more affordable scale than in massive case studies taking many years. Instead of approaching those in charge of hospitals, cities, and national affairs with proposals to try out something brand new, you could approach them with already proven and tested technology that's far more likely to be adopted and tested for much larger application.

There are other possibilities, of course. Perhaps there is a planet, far off, that grows plants that can cure horrible diseases. Or perhaps there is a planet and its moons suitable for human life, in case the Earth becomes uninhabitable. Perhaps we shall encounter a new race that is more advanced in technology than humans, and would be willing to help. And there are all the discoveries out there that we shall know nothing about unless we explore! Anything is possible. I think we should know what is out there, for the benefit of mankind here on Earth.

(599 words)

Extract 7 Text for Question 22

In today's lesson, I want to move on from our study of tropical trees to consider an evergreen tree. We are going to learn about one of the most famous species of trees in the world, famous mainly because of its size and age. The suh-koi-ya [spelt sequoia] is officially known as *Sequoiadendron giganteum* but you are more likely to meet it by one of its more common names such as the giant sequoia, the giant redwood or Wellingtonia. It is the only example of the genus – Sequoiadendron – left in existence. It is also remarkable for being one of only

three species of conifers known as “'redwoods”. The “sequoia” is a rare tree in that it can be found naturally these days only on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California in the United States.

As I said, the reason we are studying giant sequoias is that they are the largest trees you will see anywhere in the world. They normally reach heights of 50 to 85 metres and can be as much as eight metres in diameter – wider than some classrooms. Some sequoias are even bigger, with the record books stating that the biggest ever was 94.8 metres in height and over 17 metres in diameter. That’s roughly the height of the Shaw Centre in Scotts Road. On the subject of age, experts counting the rings inside the trunk of the tree found one giant sequoia that they calculated to be 3,500 years old — that’s quite something, isn’t it?

The bark of the sequoia can itself be very thick and tough — fibrous. This gives the tree protection against the fires that sometimes rage in the hills where the sequoia is found.

The leaves are short and rather prickly. Arranged spirally on the shoots, they overlap and are green because they contain chlorophyll.

The giant sequoia renews itself by seed, with young trees starting to produce cones from about the age of twelve years. The seed cones are 4 to 7 centimetres in length. While they mature in 18 to 20 months, they often remain green and closed for up to twenty years. A cone has 30 to 50 scales, arranged spirally. Each scale may contain several seeds, with an average of 230 seeds in each cone. How do the seeds fall to the ground? Well, some are shed during hot weather in late summer when the scales of the cone shrink in the heat, but most are released in the heat of a forest fire or when damaged by insects.

There are normally around 11,000 cones on a giant sequoia tree, most of them in the upper part of the crown of the tree. Lower parts of the tree contain fewer cones. It has been estimated that a sequoia may scatter around 400,000 seeds in a year and they may end up as far as 180 metres from the parent tree.

Lower branches die quite often through lack of sunlight, but trees less than 100 years old keep most of their dead branches. Eventually, trees standing among many other sequoias lose the lower branches, with many having no branches lower than a height of 20–50 metres, but a giant sequoia standing alone will retain its low branches.

I hope you found some of those facts about the sequoia particularly interesting. Next week, we’ll turn our attention to an example of a deciduous tree.