

S.5 Reading Comprehension

Topic: Nature should be revered

Week: 2nd Week (10-14 Feb)

Read Text 1 and then answer questions 1-10 of the Question-Answer Book.

Text 1

Nature should be revered—not feared

- 1 [1] Nothing—and I do mean nothing—on this earth gives me greater pleasure than spending time in the great outdoors. Nothing relaxes me like a leisurely swim in the ocean. Nothing charges me up like a brisk hike in the hills. And nothing excites me more than being surrounded by the wonderfully diverse flora and fauna of our great city.
- 5 [2] But I realized recently that not everyone in my family shares this enthusiasm. When I suggested to my 11-year-old grandson that he accompany me on a short hike along the MacLehose trail last month, he just looked at me in horror. Like many of his generation, it saddened me to admit, Danny seemed to suffer from an affliction that would have been unthinkable when I was a child: biophobia—literally, a fear of nature.
- 10 [3] I was fortunate enough to grow up in a farming village in Yuen Long. As a child, I had nature all around me. Recess at the small village school I attended was always spent outside, with us students seemingly in constant competition to return to class with the most impressive grass stains on our uniforms. After school and at weekends, I would help out in the fields, go fishing in a local pond, or just get into general mischief in the forest with my friends.
- 15 [4] Danny, on the other hand, lives in a flat on the 18th floor of a Sha Tin tower block, and goes to a school with almost a thousand students. If he manages to get outside at all for recess, it is only to spend a few minutes half-heartedly running around on a concrete basketball court. His evenings and weekends are spent primarily in tutorial classes, and what little free time he has, he spends at home with his games console, or in the mall with his friends. This lifestyle is typical of
20 many Hong Kong children, and clearly, it does not allow for very many close encounters with nature.
- [5] Having grown up with so little first-hand experience of the natural world, it is not surprising that many of these children are wary of the outdoors. They find it dirty, yucky, even frightening. Ask them to conjure up a forest and they imagine snakes hiding under every bush and disease-laden mosquitoes hovering constantly overhead, ready to launch their aerial attacks at the first
25 opportunity.
- [6] This attitude is often exacerbated by the parents, many of whom seem to take it almost for granted that even the most harmless outdoor adventure will result in their child getting seriously injured, or at the very least infected with some horrible disease. Ironically, however, attempting
30 to shelter children in a sterile environment may in fact be more injurious to their health. All children inevitably come into contact with harmful germs, no matter how sanitary their surroundings are. The less exposure children get to bacteria when they are young, the harder it is for them to build up the antibodies necessary to protect them when this happens.
- [7] Seen from a more positive perspective, there are major benefits to be gained from venturing
35 out into nature, or even from something as simple as handling a potted plant. Humans have an innate affinity for nature—it is where we grew up, evolutionarily speaking, and it is where we truly thrive. The feelings I described in my introduction are not unique to me. Studies have shown that, among many other benefits, spending time in nature helps ease stress, reduces anxiety, increases happiness levels, boosts concentration and stimulates positive brain activity,
40 particularly creativity. And this is not even taking into account the undisputed benefits of the physical exercise you get from walking in nature.

45 **[8]** So what, then, can be done to halt Hong Kong's biophobia epidemic? Well, the good news is that biophobia does not seem to be an incurable ailment, at least not the milder cases, such as my grandson's. After rather a prodigious amount of nagging, I finally managed to talk Danny into coming with me on that short hike. He was reluctant, of course, but he made the effort. And ... he hated it, just like he said he would.

50 **[9]** But I did not give up. The following weekend, I invited him out on another hike, with the added incentive that we would reward ourselves with hamburgers afterwards. As we walked, I made a point of drawing his attention to the black kites circling above us, the lizards slithering around in the undergrowth and the majestic banyan trees clinging to the hillsides, among other natural wonders. And gradually, Danny started to come alive to the world around him. The following Sunday, he called to ask me if I would take him on another walk, and it has been a weekly habit of ours ever since.

55 **[10]** My experience with Danny gives me hope for the future of our city, as does the recent emergence of a number of kindergartens with a healthily outdoorsy focus. Slowly but surely, more people in Hong Kong seem to be waking up to the dangers of sheltering children from nature, and to the benefits to be gained from the outdoors. Let's hope this awakening results in another epidemic—of biophilia.

End of Text 1