

- 1 Identify the ritual that is taking place in each picture. How common are ceremonies like these where you live? Give another example of ritual behaviour involving special food or drink.
- 2  Listen to a man talking about ritual family meals. What happens before the event and on the day itself? Describe a family gathering you have had to attend.

Reading

- 3 This extract is from the novel *Reef* by Romesh Gunesekera, a Sri Lankan author. Read it once to form an overall impression. What is the relationship between the narrator and Mister Salgado?



Before Miss Nili first came to our house on the *poya*-holiday of April 1969, Mister Salgado only said to me, 'A lady is coming to tea.' As if a lady came to tea every week. It had never happened before in his life, or mine, and yet he acted as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Luckily he gave me some warning. He was concerned to make sure there was plenty of time to prepare, even though he acted so nonchalant. I made everything – little coconut cakes, patties, egg sandwiches, ham sandwiches, cucumber sandwiches, even *love-cake* ... I made enough for a horse. It was just as well: she ate like a horse. I don't know where she put it; she was so skinny then. So hungry-looking. I expected her to bulge out as she ate, like a snake swallowing a bird. But she just sat there on the cane chair, one leg coiled under her, her back straight and her face floating happily in the warm afternoon haze while huge chunks of the richest, juiciest *love-cake* disappeared into her as into a cavern.

'You like cake?' he asked her stupidly. She made a lowing sound between bites. It made him happy, and although I didn't approve of her being quite so uninhibited so soon in our house, I was touched too.

'Where did you get this, this cake?' Her lips glistened with my butter, and one corner of her mouth had a line of golden semolina crumbs which smudged into a dimple as she spoke.

'Triton made it,' my Mister Salgado said. *Triton made it*. It was the one phrase he would say with my name again and again like a refrain through those months, giving me such happiness. *Triton made it*. Clear, pure and unstinting. His voice at those moments would be a channel cut from heaven to earth right through the petrified morass of all our lives, releasing a blessing like water springing from a river-head, from a god's head. It was bliss. My coming of age.

'Your cook? He makes a lovely cake,' she said, endearing herself to me for the rest of my life.

After tea she said she had to go. I went to get a taxi for her. She stayed with him alone in the house while I went up to the main road. It didn't take long. A black tortoise of a taxi with a butter-coloured top came along, and I rode in it like a prince back to the house.

The driver croaked the old horn warning them of our approach. We rolled in right up to the porch. I got out and held the door open while Mister Salgado helped her in. 'Bye-bye,' she said to him and then turned to me. 'That cake was *really* good.'

The taxi rolled down to the gate and veered to the left. The wheels

wobbled, making the whitewalls around the rim go fuzzy. Mister Salgado watched the vehicle slowly disappear.

'The lady ate well,' I said brightly.

'Yes.'

'Sir, the *love-cake* was good? *Really* good?'

'Yes.'

'And the patties also she liked?'

'They were good.'

They were more than good. I knew, because I can feel it inside me when I get it right. It's a kind of energy that revitalises every cell in my body. Suddenly everything becomes possible and the whole world, that before seemed slowly to be coming apart at the seams, pulls together. But however confident I was about the perfection of what I produced, like everybody else, I needed praise. I needed his praise and I needed her praise. I felt stupid to need it, but I did.

She came again the following *poya*-day and then regularly almost every weekend after that for months. I made mutton patties and a small cake every time, and she always said how wonderful they were. Mister Salgado ate nothing: he watched her eat as if he were feeding an exotic bird. He drank tea. He always drank lots of tea: estate-fresh, up-country broken orange pekoe tip-top tea. He looked completely content when she was there. His face would be bright, his mouth slightly open with the tips of his teeth just showing. It was as if he couldn't believe his eyes, seeing Nili sitting there in front of him. I would bring the patties in four at a time, fried only after she arrived to ensure they came fresh and hot-hot, straight from the pan. When she finished the last of the first batch, I would wait a minute before bringing in a second plate. 'Nice and hot-hot, Missy,' I would say, and she would murmur her approval. After she finished a couple of the new patties, I would come again with fresh tea. 'More patties?' She would shake her head – I would always ask when her mouth was full. This allowed Mister Salgado to speak on her behalf. 'No, bring the cake now.' It was our little ritual. I would nod, she would smile and he would look longingly. I would

give her enough time to savour the aftertaste of the patties and feel the glow of coriander inside her. Let the tea slip down to cleanse her palate and subdue the nerves that had been excited by the spice and fattened by the meat, and only then bring out the cake on a small salver for Mister Salgado to cut.

Exam spot

In Paper 1, Part 5, you should not only read the text thoroughly but the questions too. Wrong answers are often very close to the text in meaning.

4 Now read the text carefully to answer questions 1–6.

- 1 What was Mister Salgado's state of mind before his first tea-party with Miss Nili?
 - A He felt confident, as it was a role he was accustomed to performing.
 - B He appeared relaxed, but inwardly, he was worrying about the event.
 - C He wished he had told his cook about the visit more in advance.
 - D He became nervous about his cook's obvious lack of experience.
- 2 What effect did Miss Nili's large appetite have on the narrator?
 - A He felt rather sorry for her because she was so hungry.
 - B He suspected that she was hiding some of the food.
 - C He had mixed feelings about her unconventional way of eating.
 - D He thought she should take more care when she ate.
- 3 Why did the narrator derive so much satisfaction when he heard the phrase 'Triton made it'?
 - A It gave him a sense of purpose in his life.
 - B Mister Salgado said the phrase so rarely.
 - C Miss Nili didn't believe the cake was home-made.
 - D The words improved the atmosphere at the tea-party.
- 4 How did the narrator feel about his taxi ride back to the house?
 - A He was annoyed that it was such a slow vehicle.
 - B He was concerned about Miss Nili during his absence.
 - C He appreciated being helped out of the taxi.
 - D He enjoyed the relative luxury of the experience.
- 5 What do we learn about the narrator in the penultimate paragraph?
 - A His successes in the kitchen dictated his general mood.
 - B He thought it reasonable to expect praise for his cooking.
 - C He knew he would benefit from some help in preparing the food.
 - D His feelings had been hurt by Nili and Mister Salgado.
- 6 Which phrase best describes Mister Salgado's behaviour at subsequent tea-parties?
 - A feverishly eating and drinking
 - B full of praise for Triton's wonderful efforts
 - C slightly incredulous at Nili's regular presence
 - D nervously monitoring the supply of food

Style extra

- The first part of the text associates certain animals with Miss Nili. Find these references and explain their effect.
- Triton describes the taxi as having a *butter-coloured* top. Why has the writer used this adjective instead of *yellow*? How does it tie in with Triton?

Vocabulary

Collocations

5 Explain the precise meaning of the words in *italics* below.

I would give her enough time to *savour* the *aftertaste* of the patties ...

Savour is a verb that is commonly used in other contexts apart from food.

Underline the nouns or noun phrases that collocate with this verb in a–e.

EXAMPLE: At 37, the Oscar-nominated actress is savouring every moment of her new status.

- a After years in the wilderness, the band were finally savouring success.
 - b His father, Pat, should have been savouring freedom alongside them, but had died in prison.
 - c She has decided to retire at 33 and savour the memories of her career.
 - d Its more recent past can be savoured just by wandering aimlessly through the streets.
 - e Laurence was now savouring every word quite as much as the wine.
- 6 Identify the collocations by matching each verb to two nouns from the box. Write a sentence for each one.

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| a consume | c relish |
| b devour | d swallow |

books	challenge	equivalent
news	pill	pride
quantity	thought	time

EXAMPLE *consume* + *equivalent*

Each of us consumes the equivalent of two trees a year in paper use alone.