

Tip

In this type of text the multiple-choice questions often focus on the writer's implied meaning. Read the question carefully to find words that ask for this kind of interpretation.

- You are going to read an extract from a novel set in Botswana called *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* by Alexander McCall Smith. The main character, Mma Ramotswe, has set up a detective agency in Botswana with the money she inherited from her father. Before you read the extract, answer these questions.
 - Identify these countries on the map: Botswana, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia.
 - What image does Botswana conjure up in your mind?
- Now read the text. How similar was your image of Botswana to that in the text?

Exam practice

- For questions 1–6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.
 - What is the writer implying in the first paragraph?
 - Memories need to be recalled to make sure they do not disappear.
 - We have no control over our memories but they are a part of us.
 - Few people are interested in the lives of ordinary people.
 - Obed Ramotswe was a most unfortunate man.
 - What is suggested about the local boys?
 - They often tried to rob the people.
 - The railway employees had little control over how they behaved.
 - They were reluctant to get too close to the railway track.
 - The passengers were rather irritated by their presence.
 - When talking about Mahalapye, Obed paints a picture of
 - a group of houses reflecting a social divide.
 - a village which was arranged neatly around the railway line.
 - children receiving an education which was inadequate.
 - local children who were encouraged to pursue their own culture.
 - What point is Obed making in paragraph F?
 - The doctor was reluctant to tell him any bad news.
 - He refuses to despair when hearing bad news.
 - People react to bad news in very similar ways.
 - Bad news is never as bad as it seems.
 - What does Obed imply in the last paragraph?
 - He would like to see more of his only child.
 - His life has been a hard struggle to make ends meet.
 - He has found living in Africa a solitary experience.
 - Despite problems, his achievements have been praiseworthy.
 - The overall impression Obed gives of life in Africa in his day is that it was a land where
 - the problems of everyday life could easily be forgotten.
 - there were opportunities for people to take advantage of.
 - the geography had a profound effect on people's character.
 - strong family ties and loyalties were paramount.

Text analysis 4 Work through a–f, referring to paragraphs A–G in the text.

- How effective is the simile that the writer uses? (A)
- What device does the writer use to engage the reader in the narrative? (A)
- What surprises the reader at the beginning of the second paragraph? (B)
- Why do you think Obed compares the passengers on the train to ghosts? (C)
- How does the writer create an impression of what Africa was like in the past? (E)
- How does Obed effectively convey the atmosphere of Africa? (G)

All those years ago

A We don't forget, thought Mma Ramotswe. Our heads may be small, but they are as full of memories as the sky may sometimes be full of swarming bees, thousands and thousands of memories, of smells, of places, of little things that happened to us and which
5 come back, unexpectedly, to remind us of who we are. And who am I? I am Precious Ramotswe, citizen of Botswana, daughter of Obed Ramotswe who died because he had been a miner and could no longer breathe. His life was unrecorded; who is there to write down the lives of ordinary people?

B I am Obed Ramotswe, and I was born near Mahalapye in 1930. Mahalapye is halfway between Gaborone and Francistown, on that road that seems to go on forever. It was a dirt road in those days, of course, and the railway line was much more important. The track came down from Bulawayo, crossed into Botswana at
15 Plumtree, and then headed south down the side of the country all the way to Mafikeng, on the other side.

C As a boy, I used to watch the trains as they drew up at the siding. They let out great clouds of steam, and we would dare one another to run as close as we could to it. The stoker would shout
20 at us, and the station master would blow his whistle, but they never managed to get rid of us. We hid behind plants and boxes and dashed out to ask for coins from the closed windows of the trains. We saw the white people look out of their windows, like ghosts, and sometimes they would toss us one of their Rhodesian
25 pennies – large copper coins with a hole in the middle – or, if we were lucky, a tiny silver coin we called a ticky, which could buy us a small tin of syrup.

D Mahalapye was a straggling village of huts made of brown, sun-baked mud bricks and a few tin-roofed buildings. These belonged
30 to the Government or the Railways, and they seemed to us to represent distant, unattainable luxury. There was a school run by an old Anglican priest and a white woman whose face had been half-destroyed by the sun. They both spoke Setswana, which was unusual, but they taught us in English, insisting on the pain of a
35 thrashing that we left our own language outside in the playground.

E On the other side of the road was the beginning of the plain that stretched out into the Kalahari. It was a featureless land, cluttered with low thorn trees, on the branches of which there
40 perched the hornbills and the fluttering molopes, with their long trailing tail-feathers. It was a world that seemed to have no end, and that, I think, is what made Africa in those days so different. There was no end to it. A man could walk, or ride, forever, and he would never get anywhere.

F I am sixty now, and I do not think God wants me to live much
45 longer. Perhaps there will be a few years more, but I doubt it; I saw Dr Moffat at the Dutch Reformed Hospital in Mochudi who



listened to my chest. He could tell that I had been a miner, just by listening, and he shook his head and said that the mines have many different ways of hurting a man. As he spoke, I remembered
50 a song the Sotho miners used to sing. They sang: 'The mines eat men. Even when you have left them, the mines may still be eating you.' We all knew this was true. You could be killed by falling rock or you could be killed years later, when underground was just a memory, or even a bad dream that visited you at night. The mines
55 would come back for their payment, just as they were coming back for me now. So I was not surprised by what Dr Moffat said. Some people cannot bear news like that. They think they must live forever, and they cry and wail when they realize that their time is coming. I do not feel like that, and I do not weep at the
60 news the doctor gave me. The only thing that makes me sad is that I shall be leaving Africa when I die. I love Africa, which is my mother and my father. When I am dead I shall miss the smell of Africa, because they say that where you go, wherever that may be, there is no smell or taste.

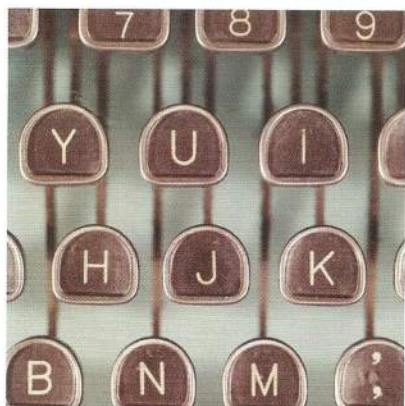
G But I can look back over my sixty years and think of everything that I have seen and of how I started with nothing and ended up with almost two hundred cattle. And I have a good daughter, a loyal daughter, who looks after me well and makes me tea while I
65 sit here in the sun and look out to the hills in the distance. When you see the hills from a distance, they are blue; as all the distances in the country are. We are far from the sea here, with Angola and Namibia between us and the coast, and yet we have this great empty ocean of blue above and around us. No sailor could be lonelier than a man standing in the middle of our land, with miles
70 and miles of blue about him.

From *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* by Alexander McCall Smith

Vocabulary

- Word knowledge: get**
- 5 The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* lists 26 meanings for the verb *get*. Look at this extract from the text on page 13. What does *get* mean here?
A man could walk, or ride, forever, and he would never get anywhere.
- 6 What is the meaning of *get* in a–j? How could each use be paraphrased?
- Just to get to meet him was a thrill, but I got to work with him, too!
 - I get the impression that he doesn't like me very much.
 - He couldn't get the car to start this morning and was late again.
 - I shall quite enjoy getting used to this lifestyle.
 - We had a bite to eat and got talking.
 - You get all sorts in here, from accountants to film stars.
 - I can't go out. I've only just got in.
 - What gets me is how we have to pay through the nose for petrol.
 - It's far from ideal but we're getting there.
 - I just don't get it – why on earth would you want to go there?
- 7 Write sentences with *get* that are true for you. For each sentence, try to use the word *get* in a different way.

Collocations: memory



- 8 Divide these adjectives which collocate with *memory* into the four categories a–d below. Some words might fit more than one category.

vivid distant short-term long-term dreadful faded cherished nostalgic fuzzy precious treasured bitter-sweet haunting vague disturbing bitter traumatic lingering fleeting

- duration
 - clarity
 - positive
 - negative
- 9 Which of these verbs which collocate with *memory* do you think have a negative meaning?
- bury erase bring back evoke rekindle push aside push away spark stir (up) trigger conjure up block (out) blot out hold come flooding back fade*
- 10 Talk to a partner about memories. Try to use some of the vocabulary in 8 and 9.
- Your views**
- 11 Look back at the text on page 13. Would you be interested in reading the rest of the book? Why/Why not?

Grammar *See notes page 149*

- Past tenses**
- 12 Complete a–j with a suitable past tense of the verbs in brackets. Where more than one tense is possible, does it create a difference in meaning?
- When I lived abroad, my mother (always/phone) me at dinner time.
 - After the railway (disappear), life in the town changed dramatically.
 - I (hope) to take a really long holiday last year but it didn't work out.
 - When I (do) all the housework, I sat down and had a nice cup of tea.
 - I (visit) the island at least three times a year.
 - We all stood up and left the room when John (sing) his latest song.
 - I (study) French in Paris when I first met Marc.
 - I got the job because I (have) a good knowledge of the surrounding area.
 - I (have) dinner with my boss last night and he (say) that things are looking up for the company.
 - As soon as he (open) the present, his face lit up.

Past verb forms with present or future meaning

- 13 What effect do the past tenses have in each of the sentences in a–g?
- a Supposing we didn't go on holiday next year, what would we do instead?
 - b I'd rather you didn't come tomorrow as I'm quite busy today.
 - c I know you love me, but would you follow me wherever I went?
 - d I think it's time we left for the airport.
 - e I thought you might like to know that I passed all my exams.
 - f Did you want to come round and see us tonight?
 - g I was hoping we could get this sorted out this week.


Word knowledge: would

- 14 Read this extract from the text on page 13. What meaning is the writer trying to convey with the use of *would*? Is there any difference between the use of *would* and *used to*?

... I used to watch the trains as they drew up at the siding. They let out great clouds of steam, and we would dare one another to run as close as we could to it. The stoker would shout at us, and the station master would blow his whistle, but they never managed to get rid of us.

- 15 What is the function and meaning of *would* in a–f?

- a When Susie first saw the house, she knew that one day she would live there.
- b She would happily get up at the crack of dawn to make the kids their breakfast.
- c I wanted Tim to start looking for another job but he wouldn't hear of it.
- d I would say that this would be a difficult place to settle down in.
- e Would you pop this in the post on your way to work?
- f Typical! You would tell him about the party!

- 16  1-02 When would you normally contract *would* in a–f above if they were spoken? Listen and check.

Personalization

- 17 Prepare a short paragraph about people and/or places from your past like the one in 14. Use the pictures below for some ideas. Then read it out to a partner.

