**Reading Comprehension 1**

**Text A**

I was very excited when Linda Bong invited me over to visit her family for the Chinese New Year. You see, Linda Bong is of Peranakan descent. I have never been to a Peranakan home so I eagerly accepted. The Peranakan or Baba Nyonya are the early descendents of the Chinese who came to the Malay Peninsula, settled down and assimilated into the local culture. ***5***

The Baba Nyonya culture is an interesting mix of the Chinese tradition, the Malay language and Chinese and Malay customs and cuisine. The Nyonyas are usually dressed in sarong and kebaya and the family converses mainly in Malay.

Linda explained that a long time ago, her great grandfather was very rich and an elite member of society like most of the other Babas. The Babas were arrogant as they ***10*** were proud of their luxurious lifestyle and their envied status in society. Unfortunately in the early 1930a, the Baba heritage started to decline. During the Depression, the Babas who owned large rubber estates suffered great losses. Then, during the Japanese occupation of Malaya, the Babas shared hardships and discrimination along with the non-Baba Chinese. The non-Baba Chinese who were accustomed ***15*** to hard work managed to recover. However, the rich Babas, born with silver spoons in their mouths, were unable to cope and went into a period of decline. They lost most of their property and wealth and became quite poor.

I listened in fascination as Linda’s mother described the Baba Nyonya traditional wedding ceremony. Matchmaking was a norm of the Baba Nyonya tradition. ***20*** People were proud to be matchmakers as these matchmakers were well rewarded with cash and other possessions. Engagement gifts usually varied. Linda’s mother received a bowl of glutinous rice balls in syrup, candles, meat, a wedding dress, shoes and two diamond rings. In return, her family had to give the groom a silver belt, a pair of men’s slippers embroidered by the bride and a fan to carry on the ***25*** wedding day. Their wedding was a lavish twelve-day affair. The bridal chamber was in the bride’s house and five days before the wedding, *a teenage boy was asked to roll back and forth from one end of the bed to the other, three times*. This boy had to be born in the year of the dragon and have both parents still alive. Sadly, these traditions have disappeared today. ***30***

Nevertheless, the Baba Nyonya dialect can be considered as one of the still surviving traditions today. The Baba Nyonya speak Baba Malay, which is a colloquial form of Malay. It borrows liberally from the Hokkien dialect. It is also a striking evidence of the Malay and the Chinese culture. Although those who speak Baba Malay may mispronounce certain words, their overall accent and intonation are definitely ***35*** more Malay than Chinese.

Another heritage that has survived is the Nyonya cuisine. Nyonya cuisine that is basically Chinese shows a strong Malay and Indian influence. Curries, condiments and belacan are part of the Nyonya cuisine. Also, the unique architecture of their homes and the designs of the furniture are a reflection of the Baba Nyonya culture.***40*** The Baba Nyonya remember their ancestors and pay respect to their ancestors. They hang portraits of their ancestors in their homes as part of their reverence for their ancestors. They also burn paper money and other paper representations of material possessions for their dead so that their dead may not want for anything in their afterlife. ***45***

**Answer the following questions.**

1. From Paragraph 1, who are the Babas?

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2. From Paragraph 2, what does the Baba Nyonya culture consist of?

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3. From Paragraph 3,

a) why were the early Babas proud and arrogant?

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b) list two factors that caused the downfall of the Babas.

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4. From Paragraph 4,

a) (i) why would people of the Peranakan culture want to be matchmakers?

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(ii) what was Linda’s father’s engagement gift?

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b) ‘… a teenage boy was asked to roll back and forth from one end of the bed to the other, three times.’ How was this teenage boy chosen?

5. Give two ways to illustrate how the Baba Nyonya pay respect to their ancestors.

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**Text B**

A wedding is a ceremony in which two people are united in marriage. Wedding traditions vary greatly between cultures, ethnic groups, religions, countries and social classes. Most weddings involve an exchange of wedding vows by the couple and a public proclamation of marriage by a religious leader. Special wedding gowns are worn and the ceremony is usually followed by a wedding reception. People all over the world practise numerous wedding customs that have been passed on through many generations. Although each has a long history and significance, many seem strange and out of place today.

A rather interesting German tradition involves the shattering of a large number of dishes before the wedding and having the bride and groom clean the mess up. It is believed that having the bride and groom collect all the broken pieces will bring good luck and help the couple prepare for their new life together. It may be a little destructive but everyone enjoys themselves. Another German custom that tests the couple’s physical skills is ‘log-sawing’. After the couple is married, a log is placed between two saw horses and both the newlyweds must saw the log in half. This is supposedly a sign of how they will handle things together once they are married.

The French have an interesting after-wedding tradition known as ‘Chiverie’. Friends and family of the newly-married couple gather in the evening and clang pots and pans, ring bells, and blow horns intended to startle and disturb the couple. Upon hearing all the noise the newlyweds are to come out and ***provide their tormentor with various refreshments***.

In Italy, it was customary for the groom to carry a talisman, a piece of iron, in his pocket on the day of his wedding. The talisman was believed to ward off misfortune and protect him. The bride wore a veil which was believed to protect her from evil spirits. In the early days of arranged marriages, the bride and groom often never saw each other at all before the wedding. Even when couples were well acquainted before marriage, it was still considered bad luck for the groom to glimpse the bride before the wedding. After the wedding the newlyweds would shatter a vase or glass into many pieces. The number of pieces represented the expected number of years they would be happily married.

In Ireland, newlyweds celebrate the month after the wedding by drinking ‘mead’ – a drink made of fermented honey. Following the wedding, the bride and groom were given a sufficient amount of mead along with special goblets so they could share their unique brew for one full moon or a month after the wedding. It is believed that this delicate and potent drink was the best way to ensure a good beginning to a new marriage. Incidentally, the word ‘honeymoon’ may have originated from this tradition.

Eggs which represent fertility and righteousness in many Muslim cultures are often given to guests as symbolic gifts. Also the bride and groom may be showered with rice, sweets and flowers as they exit the wedding reception. In Indonesia, the groom steps on an egg to show his approval of the marriage. In Morocco, an egg is broken during the reception because the egg white signifies light and luck for the couple. Moroccan weddings can last up to seven days. The first three days are spent preparing for the wedding. On the fourth day, a sheikh unites the couple. On the fifth and sixth day there will be parties and feasts. On the seventh day, friends and family place the bride in the arms of the groom, signaling the end of the ceremony. The couple depart in a shower of figs and raisins. Once the bride arrives at her new home, she has to circle it three times to establish ownership before she can enter.

In Korea, the groom gives the bride’s mother a wild goose. Traditionally, a live goose was presented but today a wooden goose is often used. Wild geese are true to their mates and thus this gift is a promise that he will care for her daughter for the rest of his life. The traditional Korean wedding is held at the bride’s home. Vows are taken in a ceremony called ‘Kunbere’. The bride and groom bow to each other and seal their vows by sipping a special drink poured into a gourd grown by the bride’s mother. Korean wedding banquets are very simple. Noodles boiled in beef soup is the only required dish. Long noodles symbolize a wish for a long and happy life.

**Answer the following questions.**

1. From paragraph 1, how would you define a wedding?

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2. From paragraph 2,

a) i. what are two unique German customs?

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ii. what do they signify?

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3. From paragraph 3,

a) i. what was the French tradition called?

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ii. ‘… provide their tormentors with various refreshments’. Who were the tormentors?

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b) When do the tormentors gather?

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4. From paragraph 5, which word means ***strong***?

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5. From paragraph 7, what do the following signify?

a) The gift of the wild goose

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b) Noodles

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