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Fire Ants: Invaders from the South

Ants can be found in every kind of environment—the frigid north, sweltering tropics, and dry deserts. For over 100 million years, ants have lived on Earth. They've survived earthquakes, floods, tornadoes and droughts. They can build nests, forage for food, and raise their young in diverse habitats, anywhere from the attic of a suburban house to the trunk of a primordial tree. Scientists have identified about 4,500 different species of ants. Some are so tiny they are hard to see; others measure over an inch long. All ants, however, live in complex, highly organized colonies where every member works for the good of the whole. Although ants can be pests, most species coexist with humans and other wildlife. Several species, however, have become harmful to the environment. One of these, the red imported fire ant, is especially annoying and destructive.

In the 1930s, the red imported fire ant accidentally entered the United States aboard shipped freight coming from South America. The species spread rapidly throughout the southwest. They established colonies from North Carolina to Central Texas. The ants, which measure about six millimeters in length, build two-foot-high dirt mounds. The mounds are so hard they can damage farm machinery. In some areas, there may be more than 200 mounds per acre. Hundreds of thousands of ants can inhabit each mound. The ants scavenge the area for food, inflicting damage on crops. They also hunt insects and small animals, which they kill with a venomous sting. If a person or animal disturbs a mound, the ants may swarm and attack. The sting creates an itchy bump that can become infected. People who are allergic to the venom may die if they do not receive medical care.

Fortunately, the red imported fire ant cannot survive in temperatures below 10 degrees Fahrenheit. This is the only reason they have not migrated all over the United States. In regions where fire ants are a problem, special insecticides are used to control them. However, the fire ants continue to be a nuisance.

One town, Marshall, Texas, decided that since they couldn't get rid of fire ants, they might as well have fun and make money off of them. Eighteen years ago, they established the Fire Ant Festival, which is held the second weekend in October. Marshall already had a successful spring festival called Stagecoach Days. When the publisher of the local newspaper suggested a fire ant festival, everyone laughed. However, the idea caught on, and today the festival attracts 25,000 people.

The weekend-long festival has events that are educational as well as pure fun. People can enter the junior or senior divisions of the Fire Ant Calling Contest. Contestants try to lure ants over a finish line with three different calls. (No, there is no scientific basis for this contest.) There's also the Fire Ant Roundup, where contestants are given a plastic jug and two hours. The object is to collect as many live fire ants as possible in the jug, without any dirt or sand. Protective clothing is allowed! Winners receive one hundred and fifty dollars and all the ants they want to carry home. Folks not crazy about rounding up ants can participate in the Tour de Fire Ant Bike Ride. They can also talk to Freddie, Baby Sugar, and Elvira Fire Ant, the festival mascots. There are also educational booths run by the Department of Agriculture. Pam Whisenant, Marshall's Tourism

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Director, hopes that people will enjoy the festival *and* learn something about the fire ant. The critter that was once just a visitor appears to be here to stay.

1. In this passage, what does the word coexist mean?

- **A** Conflict
- **B** Exist happily
- **C** Harmonize
- **D** Live together

2. After reading this passage, why do you think ants have continued to survive for millions of years?

- **A** They breed rapidly.
- **B** Scientists have not discovered an insecticide to kill them.
- **C** They live in hard mounds.
- **D** They can live in all kinds of environment.

3. The author's purpose for writing this passage is

- **A** to explain how the fire ant has spread throughout the southwest.
- **B** to inform the reader about the many species of ants.
- **C** to inform the reader about the fire ant's habits and what people are doing about the pest.
- **D** to entice readers to come to the Fire Ant Festival.

4. What are two ways the fire ants are most destructive?

- **A** Their mounds damage machinery and the ants eat crops.
- **B** They eat crops and other insects.
- **C** They sting humans and hunt small animals.
- **D** They build high mounds and live in complex colonies.

5. Why don't fire ants live in the northeastern United States?

- **A** They haven't had time to spread that far yet.
- **B** They need desert-like conditions to build their mounds.
- **C** They can't live where temperatures go below freezing.
- **D** They can't live where temperatures drop below 10 degrees Fahrenheit.

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6. The town of Marshall created the Fire Ant Festival

   A to have fun and make money off of the annoying insects.
   B to teach festival attendees how to kill fire ants.
   C to get rid of fire ants by collecting them in jugs.
   D to share with people from all over the interesting history of their town.

7. In the near future, what do you think will most likely happen to fire ants?

   A People will find a way to coexist with fire ants.
   B Scientists will discover an antigen for fire ant venom.
   C The fire ants will continue to spread to areas that aren't infested.
   D Scientists will make a product that wipes out all the fire ants.

8. Which statement below is a FACT mentioned in the passage?

   A The Fire Ant Festival in Marshall, Texas, is fun for everyone.
   B There are about 450 species of ants in the world.
   C Ants have lived on earth for over 100 million years.
   D The sting of the fire ant is the worst of all insect stings.

Albert Einstein

Who was the greatest mind of the twentieth century? For many, the answer to this question is a simple one—Albert Einstein. Born in 1879 in Germany, Albert Einstein decided by the age of twelve that he was going to solve the mysteries of the universe. By the time he was 26 years old, he had come fairly close. His theories about the way the world worked completely changed people's views at the time. Today, much of our understanding of the physical world can still be credited to Albert Einstein.

As a young student, Einstein was not successful in the traditional ways. In the late 1800s, schools in Germany were very strict. This style did not agree with Einstein, and as a result, he showed little academic ability. He did learn to play the violin, however, and eventually played quite well. With poor grades, Einstein left school before receiving a diploma. Fortunately, he was encouraged by two of his uncles. With their help, Einstein developed a keen interest in mathematics and science. He eventually returned to school, this time in Switzerland, and devoted himself to these areas of study.

After graduation, Einstein worked briefly as a math teacher. He then took a job as a patent clerk. Amazingly, Einstein did some of his most influential work in the area of physics in his spare time. By the end of 1905, Einstein had published several important papers, all while working at the patent office. In these papers Einstein explored light, energy, gravity, and the behavior of atoms, among other things. His work earned him a Ph.D. from the University of Zurich. This success was the result of many years of dedication. One of his theories actually came from an essay that he had written when he was only sixteen years old.

The general public did not appreciate or understand Einstein's work right away, but his fellow scientists did. Einstein earned a reputation as one

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of the greatest scientists in all of Europe. In order to share his knowledge, Einstein left his job at the patent office and went back to teaching. He taught at many different schools while continuing to work on his theories. By 1914, Einstein was able to concentrate mostly on his research.

While Einstein was busy solving the riddles of the world, the rest of Europe became involved in World War I. Einstein could not ignore the war, of course, and actually became a rather strong critic of military action. This new area of focus for Einstein, pacifism, grew stronger and stronger. His love of peace, though, could never be stronger than his love of physics. The war continued, and Einstein went on with his studies.

After the war, Einstein's reputation became even more impressive. A daring prediction of Einstein's, involving a solar eclipse, proved to be true. This gave support to his general theory of relativity. The theory was extremely complicated and influential. Einstein was no longer considered one of the greatest scientists in Europe. He was called the greatest genius on the earth.

Einstein did not like all the praise and attention. It interrupted his research. Despite his distaste for fame, he was awarded the 1921 Nobel Prize for Physics. He received word of this award while traveling the world lecturing about his theories. During his travels, Einstein discovered that he enjoyed life in America.

In 1933, Einstein accepted a teaching position at Princeton University in New Jersey. He spent the rest of his life there. He lived in a simple house and spent most of his time working on a new theory. In his leisure time, he went sailing and played violin. His unified field theory attempted to explain the basic laws that controlled everything in the universe. This work was never completed. Nevertheless, Albert Einstein helped us understand the universe more than anyone before him.

9. What does the word pacifism mean?

- **A** Disapproval of war and violence
- **B** The study of physics
- **C** Support of the activities of war
- **D** The process of solving riddles

10. What might you conclude after reading this passage?

- **A** If Albert Einstein had worked harder at it, he would have been able to put a stop to World War I.
- **B** Dedication and hard work can lead to great accomplishments.
- **C** Scientists from Germany have contributed more to an understanding of our universe than scientists from any other country.
- **D** Violin players are often geniuses.

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11. Put these four statements in the correct order:

1. Einstein receives the Nobel Prize for Physics
2. Einstein works as a patent clerk in Switzerland
3. Einstein accepts a position at Princeton University

Einstein receives a Ph.D. from the University of Zurich

A 1, 2, 3, 4
B 4, 3, 2, 1
C 2, 4, 3, 1
D 2, 4, 1, 3

12. The main idea of this passage is that

A Albert Einstein became a pacifist during World War I.
B Albert Einstein spent his early years in Germany.
C Albert Einstein studied music as a child and became a skilled violinist.
D Albert Einstein had a brilliant scientific career.

13. The passage explains that Albert Einstein did some of his best work "in his spare time" while holding a job at the patent office. This was probably true because

A he did not want to go back to being a math teacher.
B he hated his job at the patent office.
C he was passionate about physics.
D he had trouble sleeping at night.

14. Albert Einstein developed an interest in mathematics and science thanks to

A the strict methods in the German schools.
B the encouragement of his uncles.
C his schooling in Switzerland.
D his violin teacher.

15. Which of the following statements does NOT support the idea that Albert Einstein was a scientific genius?

A He earned a Ph.D. from the University of Zurich.
B He was admired by his fellow scientists.
C He was a critic of World War I.
D He won the Nobel Prize for Physics.

16. Which is a FACT in this passage?

A Albert Einstein always excelled as a student.
B Albert Einstein was the greatest mind of the twentieth century.
C Albert Einstein was awarded the 1921 Nobel Prize for Physics.
D Albert Einstein lived his entire life in Europe.

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Clear as Glass

Look out the window. What do you see? Of course that's a trick question. You see what is on the other side of the window. But do you see the window itself? Maybe not, if it is made of clear glass. That is the wonder of glass. It is there in hard crystal form, yet it doesn't seem to be there. Transparent yet solid, glass is a unique building and engineering material. Used in buildings and in fine glassware, in eyeglasses and in fiber optics, glass comes in many varieties. Still, the chemistry and manufacture of different glass types have many things in common.

Glass was first created somewhere in the area around the Mediterranean Sea. One Roman historian describes a legendary beginning: Phoenician sailors who were camped by the sea noticed that their fires had fused sand with soda ash from the wood. According to the legend, the result was a transparent, brittle substance that came to be known as glass.

The ancient world began manufacturing glass to use in making containers. Vases, bottles, and jewelry were all made from glass. Today, fragments of these ancient glass objects can be found in museums. Glass breaks easily, but it is also one of the most durable of all substances.

People in the ancient world immediately saw the value of glass. Egypt became a center for glass manufacturing. Later, the Greeks and Romans also developed glass-making techniques. Glassmakers from ancient times created mosaic glass, which was made up of pieces of glass cut to show off their colors. Later, glass makers learned how to mold glass. A great revolution in glassmaking occurred when Syrian glassmakers learned how to blow glass into difficult shapes using hollow pipes.

Glassmaking improved throughout the centuries. Glass was used to make colorful stained glass windows for Gothic churches, crystal glass in Venice, and leaded glass throughout Europe. The addition of lead to the glass mixture created a heavier, more solid glass.

The chemistry of glass is fairly simple. Silica (sand) is the main ingredient. It can be heated and turned into glass by itself. However, the melting point of sand is extremely high and requires a great deal of fuel to achieve. To lower the melting point, other materials, such as sodium carbonate, or soda ash, are added. To help make the glass stronger, calcium carbonate, or limestone, is also added. At this point, it is also possible to add colors to glass. The mixture is heated until it become viscous or watery. Then it is cooled carefully to become hard glass.

Glassmaking technology has improved vastly in the last two centuries. Before the 19th century, glass panes for windows were relatively small. They were either poured into molds or, more likely, spun out in "crowns" that were then cut down into pieces. With the industrial revolution, glassmaking underwent rapid transformation. In 1827, *pressed glass* was created. Soon, manufacturers had developed *plate glass* which offered smooth, even surfaces. Then a technique for floating large pools of glass on cool liquid was developed. This was called *float glass*.

Without these advances in glassmaking, modern architecture would not exist. By the twentieth century, it was possible to make enormous plates of glass that became the walls of skyscrapers. The term "glass curtain," meaning a large plate of glass forming the side of a building, signified a new concept in architecture. No longer would walls be made of opaque stone or wood. Now they could be invisible while still protecting inhabitants from the weather. Famous 20th century buildings such as the Sears Tower in Chicago and the Seagram's Building in New York are simply metal skeletons clad in sheets of glass.

Glass engineering continues to advance. Today we see glass products put to a variety of uses. Lenses in the Hubble Space Telescope, fiber optic cables that are strung across the sea, glass fibers that can be found in insulation, and special glasses used in

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photography or vacuum tubes are just a few examples. Invisible yet substantial, glass today seems as amazing and full of promise as it did to those legendary Phoenician sailors.

17. In the passage, brittle means

- **A** easily breakable.
- **B** flexible.
- **C** sticky.
- **D** strong.

18. Without materials to lower the melting point of sand, glass might be too

- **A** colorful.
- **B** expensive.
- **C** sandy.
- **D** watery.

19. The author probably wrote this passage to

- **A** teach people about glass.
- **B** argue for better glass technology.
- **C** explain the origin of stained glass.
- **D** describe float glass.

20. This passage is mainly about

- **A** the history of glass.
- **B** windows.
- **C** fiber optics.
- **D** stained glass.

21. New glass technologies allowed 20th century architects to invent

- **A** stained glass.
- **B** the glass curtain.
- **C** windows.
- **D** glassblowing.

22. The ability to add color to glass resulted in what product?

- **A** Glass curtain
- **B** Leaded glass
- **C** Stained glass
- **D** Hubble telescope

23. Glass is made of

- **A** fiber optics.
- **B** crystal and water.
- **C** plastic.
- **D** silica and soda ash.

24. Which of the following is a FACT from the passage?

- **A** Glass is a beautiful substance.
- **B** The Greeks had the best glass-making techniques.
- **C** The Seagram's Building is made of glass and metal.
- **D** Float glass is very expensive.

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Behind the Scenes in Clown Alley

Clowning is fun. Clowning is also serious business, and looking at what goes on behind the scenes at a circus proves it.

The art of clowning has an even longer history than circuses do. As early as 3000 B.C., clowns performed in Rome and Greece. Later, in the Middle Ages, jesters appeared. These men dressed in bright costumes with jingling bells and told amusing stories to kings. Jesters were called "king's fools", but many of them were intelligent men who used their stories to influence the king's decisions. Joseph Grimaldi created the first circus clown in London in 1805. The character he created was named Joey. Today, clowns are still called Joeys in honor of Grimaldi.

Circuses and clowns also became popular in America. The shows grew to be huge three-ring events, and it became difficult for audiences to hear the clowns' jokes. This fact led to the development of silent clowns, whose antics relied on body language, loud noises, and large props, such as giant lollipops, to make people laugh.

This long history of clowning has resulted in the modern circus clown. Many of today's performers are people who have gone to college to learn their art. Some have graduated from the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Clown College in Baraboo, Wisconsin, where students learn skills that will help them create unique routines. They learn juggling, acrobatics, and stilt walking. They also learn how to create costumes and apply clown make-up.

Being skillful with make-up is important because a clown's face make-up is his or her trademark. No clown would think of copying another's face. The job of applying make-up usually begins by applying a coat of clown white, which is a thick oily cream, to completely cover the face. Next, a stocking cap is put over the clown's hair. The clown then uses bright grease paints to draw around his or her lips and eyes. The clown also puts on a rubber or putty nose. A brightly-colored wig usually finishes the make-up. This make-up is very difficult to put on and take off. Therefore, clowns are the only circus performers who are allowed to come to meals in the cook tent with their make-up on.

The clown's costume is also an important part of the act. Clowns may change their costumes many times during a show. Their clothing might be bright and outlandish or baggy and torn. Because costumes and make-up are so important, clowns have their own dressing area, called Clown Alley. This place is crammed with rows of tables full of wigs, paint, silly hats, and props. During shows, the area is bustling with activity as clowns rush in and out to change their outfits and get ready for their next routines.

Not only do performances take a high level of energy, the life of a clown can also be demanding. Today's circuses may appear in 100 cities between spring and fall. Clowns and other performers have no time to settle into the communities where the circuses are performing. The performers become friends and family to each other. The Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus travels on its own train. Other circuses travel in caravans of twenty to fifty trucks, trailers, and motor homes. They bring with them everything they need to eat, sleep, and work. Young clowns and other performers spend several hours a day on schoolwork within their circus home. The rest of the day is used to develop and practice their routines so they are ready to do a show each evening and several performances every weekend.

There is a serious side to being a clown. However, clowns tend to be fun-loving people who enjoy the adventure of traveling with the circus and the thrill of making people forget their troubles and laugh for a couple of hours.

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25. In this passage, caravan means

- **A** a large trailer.
- **B** a noisy parade.
- **C** people traveling together for safety.
- **D** a group of vehicles traveling together.

26. The LEAST likely item to find in Clown Alley during a show would be

- **A** bright blue and red face paint.
- **B** baggy pants with holes in them.
- **C** a stocking cap.
- **D** a tiny object to use as a prop.

27. Which of the following is an OPINION expressed in the article?

- **A** Clowns are the most important part of circuses.
- **B** Some people go to college to learn clowning.
- **C** Clown Alley is busy during performances.
- **D** Clowning is serious business.

28. The main idea of the passage is that

- **A** being a circus clown takes work.
- **B** clowns have been around for many years.
- **C** make-up and clothes are important to clowns.
- **D** people who just want to have fun should be clowns.

29. You can conclude that one reason clowning takes a lot of energy is because

- **A** clowns juggle, do acrobatics, and walk on stilts.
- **B** Clown Alley is far from the circus tent.
- **C** clowns have to help with setting up the circus.
- **D** clowns have to practice harder than other performers.

30. According to the passage, clowns put colored grease paint on their faces

- **A** after putting on their wigs.
- **B** before putting on clown white.
- **C** before putting on their noses.
- **D** after putting on their costumes.

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31. The MOST likely conclusion about why circus performers become friends and family to each other is that

- **A** they only like to be with other circus people.
- **B** their travels prevent them from having time to make other friends.
- **C** their own families are not pleased about their jobs.
- **D** they are too tired to make other friends.

32. Which of the following is a FACT expressed in the passage?

- **A** Clowning is fun.
- **B** A clown's costume is important.
- **C** Clowns are fun-loving people.
- **D** Clowns have their own dressing area.

Old Ways, New Ways

Natalie has only lived in Florida for a few years, but she has already learned to enjoy American food. She bites into a juicy hamburger with just as much enthusiasm as her new friends. Not only is Natalie learning about American food, but she is also sharing foods from her homeland, Haiti, with her new friends. As these boys and girls learn about the food traditions of Haiti, they are learning about the culture of this country, which is an island nation in the Caribbean.

As Natalie has explained to her American friends, most people in Haiti live on small farms. Farmers raise rice, corn, yams, coffee, and cacao, which is used in making chocolate. These foods are important in the Haitian diet. For example, a common food is a porridge that is made of ground corn, milk, and sugar. Because Haiti's climate is warm, lots of fruits and green vegetables grow in this country. These foods include limes, oranges, avocados, guavas, and mangoes. Natalie is glad that she can get these foods in her new home in Florida, too. Plantains are another popular Haitian crop. This fruit, which is similar to the banana, is fried. One Haitian crop that her new friends do not know is "calabash," a Haitian gourd. Natalie's mother had many ways of cooking calabashes. This food is so important to the Haitians that their unit of money is called the gourde. For meat, Natalie's family ate mostly pork and chicken in Haiti.

Natalie's parents did not have a lot of money in Haiti, so there were not many treats. Once in a while, her dad would make his special dish, "blancmange," a coconut custard. Chewing the sweetness out of sugar cane was also a treat. As the family has settled into American life, things have gotten a little easier for them. Sometimes, they are able to make special Creole meals like the ones richer people in Haiti eat. Creole foods are spicy meals that are a delightful mixture of Spanish, French, and African recipes. These dishes use

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interesting main ingredients like conch (a shellfish), dried beef, or green turtle steak. The meats are flavored with onions, peppers, okra, and avocado. Rice and beans are important parts of Creole meals, too. For instance, "djon-djon" is a delicious mixture of rice, beans, and a black mushroom that can only be found in Haiti.

Some Haitians raise much of their own food. People also get foods they need from marketplaces. These markets are very different from the grocery stores in Natalie's new neighborhood. Haitian marketplaces are outdoor stands where farmers sell the fruits, vegetables, and meats they have raised. There are no refrigerators at the market, so foods sit out in the open.

As with most cultures, food is important in Haitian celebrations. For instance, "Manger Yam" is a fall holiday that celebrates the importance of yams. On this day, people sing, dance, and, of course, eat yam dishes. In Haiti, Natalie's family celebrated Christmas, and they continue this tradition in Florida. In her homeland, people decorated for Christmas by placing gourds on a "tonnelle," a banana-thatched roof standing on poles. In Florida, Natalie puts gourds on the family's Christmas tree to help remember the tradition. The family also joins their new neighbors in celebrating New Year's Day. Just as in their homeland, they have a special ham dinner and cake for dessert. This day has special meaning for Natalie's family because it is also Haiti's Independence Day.

Not only do the foods of Haiti help people live and celebrate, but they are also part of the wisdom of the culture. Natalie's mother often quotes the Haitian proverb, "You can't eat okra with one finger," which means that people must cooperate. Natalie has found that cooperation has been important as she has learned about her new friends, and as they have learned about her.

33. The main idea of this passage is that

- **A** eating Haitian foods is one way to learn about Haiti.
- **B** Natalie likes her new home and friends.
- **C** Natalie's family did not have a lot of money in Haiti.
- **D** foods are important in Haitian celebrations.

34. What kind of cooperation is described in this passage?

- **A** Natalie's parents have helped her cook food for her friends.
- **B** Haitian farmers sell food in the marketplace.
- **C** Natalie and her new friends have learned about each other's foods.
- **D** Both Haitians and Americans celebrate New Year's Day.

35. The author's purpose in writing this passage was to

- **A** persuade the reader that Haitian food is good.
- **B** inform the reader about Haitian culture.
- **C** inform the reader about Natalie's new home.
- **D** describe celebrations held in Haiti.

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36. According to the passage, Haitians use gourds for all of the following EXCEPT

- **A** decorations.
- **B** treats.
- **C** units of money.
- **D** vegetables.

37. From this passage, you can conclude that Haitians

- **A** eat many desserts with meals.
- **B** use more fruits than vegetables.
- **C** fry most of their foods.
- **D** eat many foods grown in Haiti.

38. Which of the following does NOT describe where Natalie lived before moving to her new neighborhood?

- **A** Florida
- **B** Haiti
- **C** An island
- **D** A nation in the Caribbean

39. Plantains are similar to

- **A** mangoes.
- **B** French fries.
- **C** bananas.
- **D** yams.

40. Which of the following is an OPINION?

- **A** Most people in Haiti live on farms.
- **B** Natalie eats some Haitian foods in her new home.
- **C** "Manger Yam" celebrates the importance of yams.
- **D** "Djon-djon" is a delicious rice and bean recipe.

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