

Spend no more than 30 minutes reading the following texts.

After you are done, spend two hours or so practicing other subjects, and then go back to the corresponding tests and answer the questions from memory. Do not take notes while you read, as you will not be allowed to do so in the real test.

Note that the length and the contents of the text passages may be different in the real test.

Preliminary Text #1

In the Tanzanian village of Liyasongoro, located 1,700 meters up the south slope of Mount Kilimanjaro, Wilbert Minja has lived for more than 60 years, and lately he has been worried. The weather is all wrong, he says: "Rain falls when it should not, and does not come when it should." He recites stories describing how new settlers used to flock to the mountainside, lured by its rich soil and abundant fresh water. Now, he says, they are abandoning their failed homesteads. The mountain streams are running dry, and the dusty ground that was once fertile and full of life has turned barren.

When asked about global warming, the old man says he doesn't understand the term. But it is obvious that he and the one million or so other inhabitants of Kilimanjaro's flanks are getting a first-hand education in the phenomenon and its human impact. Government water experts claim that the mountain's annual rainfall has declined every year since 1984. In fact, two years ago, the drought got so bad that Minja's crop failed; for the first time in his life, he had to buy food in order to survive.

Farther uphill, past the farms and villages, the rain forest that covers the mountain's midsection has also been affected. It is receding, gradually being consumed by illegal logging and wildfires in the dry heat. And above it all, at the top of Africa's highest peak, the snows of Kilimanjaro are vanishing. It is happening at a frightening rate.

Two American climbers found this out for themselves last year when they set out for the 6,000-meter summit, relying on a map just three years old. The two Americans had planned to climb the southern route by hiking up the Heim glacier. It turned out to be impossible. In the short time since the map had been drawn, the glacier had shrunk by half its size. The leading edge had broken off and melted, leaving a towering wall of ice to block the way.

* Adapted from: Gough, David. "The Melting Mountain." *Newsweek* (Pacific Edition). Vol. 139. Issue 8 (2002): p34.

Preliminary Text #2

Whether King Arthur ever really existed or was created by poetic imagination is still debated by historians. The foundations for the legends of Arthur were laid by Geoffrey of Monmouth from Wales in his work *History of the Kings of Britain*, completed around 1138 CE. Geoffrey claimed to have obtained an ancient Celtic manuscript on which he based his work. *History of the Kings of Britain* became massively popular, with 215 copies still in existence today. In the several decades following its publication, it had kindled the imagination of novelists throughout Europe.

Some of these writers added new elements to the canon, which later became inseparable parts of it. For instance, the Round Table was added to the tale in 1155 by French poet Maistre Wace. French writer Chretien de Troyes originated the chivalrous character of Lancelot and added five stories to the narrative, in which the knights rescued damsels in distress and fought against strange beasts. Another Frenchman, Robert de Boron, added the theme of the quest for the Holy Grail, the search for a lost treasure believed to cure all ailments.

In 1485, Sir Thomas Malory wrote *Le Morte D'Arthur*, an anthology of eight stories compiling the chronicles of King Arthur. Malory's version, which sets the events in the Middle Ages, is the best-known work of Arthurian literature. Interestingly, each author that wrote about King Arthur located him in his own time, so that the development of the saga reveals more about the eras in which the writers lived than Arthur's alleged time period. This relates to the popularity of Arthur's tale, which was first published around the Viking and Norman invasions of England. The region was subject to attacks and settlement by conquerors, similar to what it had undergone by the Saxons centuries earlier during King Arthur's reign. Time was ripe for tales of a great leader who could defeat invaders and protect his people.

So, what is true? Establishing the facts is virtually impossible. *History of the Kings of Britain* was written 600 years after the purported events. The Celtic source of Geoffrey's work has never been found. Studying old manuscripts, we encounter various spellings of names and locations, making it difficult to draw parallels. And so, both the hopeful historians and the skeptics can find support to their claims.

Preliminary Text #3

The hot air balloon is the oldest and the simplest of all flying machines. Joseph-Michel and Jacques-Étienne Montgolfier of France were the inventors of the modern flying balloon. As paper mill owners, the brothers tried to float bags made of paper and fabric. When the brothers held a flame near the opening at the bottom, the bag (called a balon, hence "balloon" in English) expanded with hot air and floated upward. In 1783 in Versailles, a Montgolfier hot air balloon carrying a sheep, a rooster, and a duck flew for eight minutes before Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and the French court. Later that year the balloon had its first human passengers.

A hot air balloon consists of a fabric bag called the envelope, which is filled with a gas that is lighter than the surrounding atmosphere. As the entire balloon is less dense than the relatively cold air outside it, it rises, taking along with it a basket attached underneath that carries passengers and a source of heat, usually an open flame. As with all aircraft, hot air balloons cannot fly beyond the atmosphere. Some directional control is possible by making the balloon rise or sink in altitude to find favorable wind directions.

Early unmanned hot air balloons were used in China during the Three Kingdoms era (220–280 CE). The Chinese used airborne lanterns, known as Kongming lanterns, for military signaling. There is also speculation that hot air balloons could have been used as an aid for designing the famous Nazca lines and giant ground drawings etched across 30 miles of desert, called Riddles in the Sand, which were created by the Nazca culture of Peru between 400 and 650 CE.

The first military use of a hot air balloon was at the Battle of Fleurus (battle during the French Revolutionary Wars) in 1794 to observe the movements of the enemy. During the American Civil War, the Union Army Balloon Corps was established by the scientist and inventor, Thaddeus Lowe. The balloons were used both for reconnaissance and mapmaking from the vantage point of the air. Using his personal balloon, Enterprise, Lowe made flag signals from above, directing soldiers on the ground to fire accurately at targets they could not see — a military first. Today, there are hot air balloon festivals and competitions, as well as companies that provide the unforgettable experience of a hot air balloon ride to individuals who wish to celebrate a special occasion.