

2004-1 Text 2

1- Over the past century, all kinds of unfairness and discrimination have been condemned or made illegal.

But one insidious form continues to thrive: alphabetism.

This, for those as yet unaware of such a disadvantage, refers to discrimination against those whose surnames begin with a letter in the lower half of the alphabet.

2- It has long been known that a taxi firm called AAAA cars has a big advantage over Zodiac cars when customers thumb through their phone directories.

Less well known is the advantage that Adam Abbott has in life over Zoë Zysman.

English names are fairly evenly spread between the halves of the alphabet.

Yet a suspiciously large number of top people have surnames beginning with letters between A and K.

3- Thus the American president and vice-president have surnames starting with B and C respectively; and 26 of George Bush's predecessors (including his father) had surnames in the first half of the alphabet against just 16 in the second half.

Even more striking, six of the seven heads of government of the G7 rich countries are alphabetically advantaged (Berlusconi, Blair, Bush, Chirac, Chrétien and Koizumi).

The world's three top central bankers (Greenspan, Duisenberg and Hayami) are all close to the top of the alphabet, even if one of them really uses Japanese characters.

As are the world's five richest men (Gates, Buffett, Allen, Ellison and Albrecht).

4- Can this merely be coincidence?

One theory, dreamt up in all the spare time enjoyed by the alphabetically disadvantaged, is that the rot sets in early.

At the start of the first year in infant school, teachers seat pupils alphabetically from the front, to make it easier to remember their names.

So short-sighted Zysman junior gets stuck in the back row, and is rarely asked the improving questions posed by those insensitive teachers.

At the time the alphabetically disadvantaged may think they have had a lucky escape.

Yet the result may be worse qualifications, because they get less individual attention, as well as less confidence in speaking publicly.

5- The humiliation continues.

At university graduation ceremonies, the ABCs proudly get their awards first; by the time they reach the Zysmans most people are literally having a ZZZ.

Shortlists for job interviews, election ballot papers, lists of conference speakers and attendees: all tend to be drawn up alphabetically, and their recipients lose interest as they plough through them.

26. What does the author intend to illustrate with AAA A cars and Zodiac cars?

[A] A kind of overlooked inequality.

[B] A type of conspicuous bias.

[C] A type of personal prejudice.

[D] A kind of brand discrimination.

27. What can we infer from the first three paragraphs?

[A] In both East and West, names are essential to success.

[B] The alphabet is to blame for the failure of Zoë Zysman.

[C] Customers often pay a lot of attention to companies' names.

[D] Some form of discrimination is too subtle to recognize.

28. The 4th paragraph suggests that _____.

- [A] questions are often put to the more intelligent students
- [B] alphabetically disadvantaged students often escape from class
- [C] teachers should pay attention to all of their students
- [D] students should be seated according to their eyesight

29. What does the author mean by “most people are literally having a ZZZ” (Lines 2-3, Paragraph 5)?

- [A] They are getting impatient.
- [B] They are noisily dozing off.
- [C] They are feeling humiliated.
- [D] They are busy with word puzzles.

30. Which of the following is true according to the text?

- [A] People with surnames beginning with N to Z are often ill-treated.
- [B] VIPs in the Western world gain a great deal from alphabetism.
- [C] The campaign to eliminate alphabetism still has a long way to go.
- [D] Putting things alphabetically may lead to unintentional bias.