**Reading 8 - Passage 1**

**ADAM'S WINE**

**A**  
Water is the giver and, at the same time, the taker of life. It covers most of the surface of the planet we live on and features large in the development of the human race. On present predictions, it is an element that is set to assume even greater significance.

**B**  
Throughout history, water has had a huge impact on our lives. Humankind has always had a rather ambiguous relationship with water, on the one hand receiving enormous benefit from it, not just as a drinking source, but as a provider of food and a means whereby to travel and to trade. But forced to live close to water in order to survive and to develop, the relationship has not always been peaceful or beneficial. In fact, it has been quite the contrary. What has essentially been a necessity for survival has turned out in many instances to have a very destructive and life-threatening side.

**C**  
Through the ages, great floods alternated with long periods of drought have assaulted people and their environment, hampering their fragile fight for survival. The dramatic changes to the environment that are now a feature of our daily news are not exactly new: fields that were once lush and fertile are now barren; lakes and rivers that were once teeming with life are now long gone; savannah has been turned to desert. What perhaps is new is our naive wonder when faced with the forces of nature.

**D**  
Today, we are more aware of climatic changes around the world. Floods in far-flung places are instant hews for the whole world. Perhaps these events make us feel better as we face the destruction of our own property by floods and other natural disasters.

**E**  
In 2002, many parts of Europe suffered severe flood damage running into billions of euros. Properties across the continent collapsed into the sea as waves pounded the coastline wreaking havoc with sea defences. But it was not just the seas. Rivers swollen by heavy rains and by the effects of deforestation carried large volumes of water that wrecked many communities.

**F**  
Building stronger and more sophisticated river defences against flooding is the expensive short-term answer. There are simpler ways. Planting trees in highland areas, not just in Europe but in places like the Himalayas, to protect people living in low-lying regions like the Ganges Delta, is a cheaper and more attractive solution. Progress is already being made in convincing countries that the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases is causing considerable damage to the environment. But more effort is needed in this direction.

**G**  
And the future? If we are to believe the forecasts, it is predicted that two-thirds of the world population will be without fresh water by 2025. But for a growing number of regions of the world the future is already with us. While some areas are devastated by flooding, scarcity of water in many other places is causing conflict. The state of Texas in the United States of America is suffering a shortage of water with the Rio Grande failing to reach the Gulf of Mexico for the first time in 50 years in the spring of 2002, pitting region against region as they vie for water sources. With many parts of the globe running dry through drought and increased water consumption, there is now talk of water being the new oil.

**H**  
Other doom-laden estimates suggest that, while tropical areas will become drier and uninhabitable, coastal regions and some low-lying islands will in all probability be submerged by the sea as the polar ice caps melt. Popular exotic destinations now visited by countless tourists will become no-go areas. Today's holiday hotspots of southern Europe and elsewhere will literally become hotspots - too hot to live in or visit. With the current erratic behaviour of the weather, it is difficult not to subscribe to such despair.

**I**  
Some might say that this despondency is ill-founded, but we have had ample proof that there is something not quite right with the climate. Many parts of the world have experienced devastating flooding. As the seasons revolve, the focus of the destruction moves from one continent to another. The impact on the environment is alarming and the cost to life depressing. It is a picture to which we will need to become accustomed.