

NAME: _____

Passage 1 – Theatre

Theatre began in ancient Greece, where myths and legends were told in story form, rather than acted out, by a group of people called the chorus, who chanted their lines to enthralled audiences. Then came the idea of making the dramatic impersonation of someone other than yourself, in other words acting, and an actor was introduced into the performance. Through time, plots became more complicated with the introduction of a second or third actor, although the scope for stylish acting was limited by the fact that the actors wore masks to represent the characters. The popularity of Greek plays increased as they were performed during the major spring festival, and people flocked to the open-air, hillside amphitheatres to be entertained by the plays. At first, only tragedies were performed, but the introduction of comedy, with its often cruel satire of contemporary society, appealed to the ordinary people, thus increasing the popularity of drama. Sometimes, competitions were held to see who could write the best play in honour of the gods. The link between religion and drama made it an important part of Greek life.

Later, drama became popular in Rome, and the development of a secondary story, or subplot, came about, which made plays more sophisticated by enabling audiences to look at the lives of more than one set of characters. In addition to theatre-going, the Romans attended hugely popular shows with gladiators and animals in massive, purpose-built arenas.

In Europe, groups of street actors, often accompanied by acrobats and animals, moved from town to town, appearing to a succession of appreciative audiences; towns were enlivened at the news of approaching players, and a great buzz ensued. The Christian church used plays during religious festivals because they were a way of communicating bible stories in dramatic form to illiterate people who could not read them. Through time, permanent buildings for the production of plays were established, bringing audiences to the theatre rather than vice versa, and this development increased the popularity of plays in Europe. It is estimated that in sixteenth century London, for example, one in eight adults went to the theatre every week. Around the world, various forms of theatre evolved, like the Japanese Noh theatre, in which actors sing and dance scenes from legends with an immense slowness and solemnity which is particularly moving.

Today, theatre continues to attract people all over the world. Because plays are performed live, every performance is different, and actors bring something fresh to each performance. This dynamic nature of theatre means that live performances are always better than films. Being gripped by the unfolding story of a play can be an excellent form of relaxation, and the experience of being transported into another setting or someone else's life – what is sometimes described as suspending disbelief – can be fascinating. Moreover, theatre lovers enjoy marvelling at the skill of the actors as much as did the ancient Greeks so long ago, which is why theatre acting is much more challenging than acting in front of a camera. Empathising with the characters' stories can make audiences relate them to their own lives and use them to make decisions or even to solve problems. The cleansing emotional experience – or catharsis – brought about by watching drama can be good for mental health.

A trip to the theatre can bring families together, for example during national holidays or celebrations, giving family members the opportunity to enjoy a common experience.

Technological advances in recent times – for example in lighting and special effects – can make theatre a spectacle as well as a play. In addition, theatre sometimes offers the opportunity of being part of a tradition. An example of this is a play called ‘The Mousetrap’, the longest running play in the world, where the attraction is not just the drama itself, but also being part of a large, world-wide, ‘secret’ group who share the knowledge of the identity of the villain. And of course, theatre audiences, often unwittingly, are part of an even longer tradition, one going back to the Greeks, thousands of years ago.

Passage 2 – Octavia

The summer wore away, and autumn set in, with rain, damp and an unseasonal frost at night. When I put gloves on the baby she chewed them and had to sit in her pram with cold, wet hands. I did not mind for myself, but I did not know how to keep her warm. She dribbled too and her chest was always damp. She resisted for some time but in the end she caught a cold.

I did not know what to do with her, as I hated going to the doctor. I had thought I would be finished with doctors at her birth, though I subsequently discovered there was an unending succession of inspections and vaccinations yet to be endured. Now, hearing Octavia’s heavy spluttering, I knew I would have to take her, much as I would hate it. I felt I was bothering the busy doctor unnecessarily. But it was not a simple choice between comfort and duty, and moreover it was not even my own health that was in question, but Octavia’s, and so I tried to dismiss the thought of sitting in a freezing cold waiting room with her. Had it been my own health, I would never have gone.

After I had made up my mind to see the doctor, I consulted my friend Lydia, who suggested that I should ring up the doctor and ask him to come and see me at home, instead of going to him; I immediately thought how nice it would be if only I dare. ‘Of course you dare,’ said Lydia. ‘You can’t take a sick baby out in weather like this.’ Then, with sudden illumination, she said, ‘Anyway, look how flushed she is! Why don’t you take her temperature?’

Astounded, I stared at her, for truly the thought of doing such a thing had never crossed my mind. Looking back, after months with the thermometer as necessary as a spoon or a saucepan, I can hardly believe this to be possible, but so it was; my life had not yet changed for ever. I took Octavia’s temperature and it was high enough to justify ringing for the doctor. To my surprise, the doctor’s secretary did not sound at all annoyed when I asked if he could call: I think I had half expected a lecture on my indolence.

When the doctor arrived, he took Octavia’s pulse and temperature, and told me it was nothing serious, in fact nothing at all. Then he said he ought to listen to her chest; I pulled up her vest and she smiled and wriggled with delight as he put the stethoscope on her fat ribs. He listened for a long time and I, who was beginning to think that perhaps I should not have bothered him after all, sat there absently aware of how innocent she was, how sweet she looked and that her vest could do with a wash. Had I known, I would have enjoyed that moment more, or perhaps I mean that I did enjoy that moment but have enjoyed none since. For he said, ‘Well, I don’t think there’s anything very much to worry about there.’ I could see that he had not finished, and did not mean what he said. ‘Just the same,’ he added, ‘perhaps I ought to book you an appointment to take her along to the hospital.’

I suppose most people would have asked him what was wrong, but I was too frightened. I think that the truth was the last thing I wanted to hear. When I heard his voice coming at me, saying that the hospital appointment would probably be for the next Thursday, I was relieved a

little; he could not be expecting her to die before next Thursday. I even mustered the strength to ask what I should do about her cold, and he said, 'Nothing, nothing at all.'

When he had gone, I went back and picked Octavia up and sat her on my knee and gazed at her, paralysed by fear, aware that my happy state had changed in ten minutes to undefined anguish. I wept, and Octavia put her fingers in my tears as they rolled down my cheek, as though they were raindrops on a window pane. It seemed that, in comparison with this moment, the whole of my former life had been a summer afternoon.

SECTION 1: READING FOR IDEAS

Read Passage 1 and answer **all** the questions below in the order set.

1 (a) Notes

Identify and write down the information in the passage which describes the stages in development, and rise in popularity, of theatre, and the reasons for its continuing popularity.

MAIN POINTS
Stages in the development, and rise in popularity, of theatre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>In ancient Greece myths/legends told in story form by chorus/chanting</i>

Reasons for the continuing popularity of theatre

- *Every performance is different/dynamic*

2. From your reading of the first paragraph, decide which one of the following statements is true and check the box you have chosen.

All Greek plays had complicated plots.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The audiences did not enjoy performances by the chorus.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion played an important part in Greek society.	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. From the fourth paragraph, select and write down two opinions.

One opinion is _____

Another opinion is _____

SECTION 2: READING FOR MEANING

Read Passage 2 and then answer **all** the questions below in the order set.

From paragraph 1

4 (a) What **one** feature of the weather was unusual for the time of year?

(b) Apart from the bad weather, what were the **two** reasons why the baby caught a cold?

From paragraph 2

5 (a) The writer 'hated going to the doctor'. Pick out and write down the other **single** word used in the paragraph which reinforces this idea.

(b) What **two** aspects of 'going to the doctor' did the writer expect to hate?

(c) What eventually made the writer decide to take the 'spluttering' baby to the doctor, despite her initial reluctance to do so?

From paragraph 3

6 For what **two** reasons did Lydia recommend that the doctor should be asked to come to the writer's house?

From paragraph 4

7 (a) According to the writer, how had her life 'changed for ever'?

(b) The doctor's secretary 'did not sound at all annoyed' when the writer asked the doctor to call. Explain **in your own words** what the writer expected to happen.

From paragraph 5

8 (a) What did the baby do which showed 'how innocent she was'?

(b) Explain fully why the writer says that the doctor 'did not mean what he said'.

From paragraph 6

9 (a) The writer was 'frightened'. Explain exactly what she was frightened of.

(b) The writer says that the doctor's voice was 'coming at' her. What effect is created by the expression 'coming at'?

10 (a) The writer says that her happy state 'had changed in ten minutes'. Explain **in your own words** what this change was.

(b) The writer says that the whole of her former life 'had been a summer afternoon'. Explain what she means by this.

From the whole passage

11 For each of the words below give **one** word or short phrase (of not more than seven words) which has the same meaning that the word or phrase has in the passage.

1. resisted	
2. subsequently	
3. in question	
4. illumination	
5. astounded	
6. absently	
7. mustered	
8. paralyzed	

VOCABULARY MEMORIZATION

Use the eight boxes below to help you memorize at least 10 vocabulary words from the two passages in this handout. You could use one or a combination of the following approaches:

- i) Flashcards
- ii) Sorting by general ideas
- iii) Sorting thematically

--	--

THE END