READING MATERIALS

TEXT 1

What caused the structure of the family to change? In the early 1900s in the United States the divorce rate (i.e., the percent of legal endings compared to the number of marriages) began to rise, and the birthrate (i.e., the number of births per 100 or 1000 people) began to decline; in other words, couples stayed married for fewer years, and they had fewer children. Women often chose to get an education and take jobs outside the home. Decades later, the same changes began to happen in other industrialized countries. Today, they are happening in many of the developing nations of the world as well.

The decades of the 1930s and 1940s were difficult years in the industri­alized world. Many families faced serious financial problems because the heads of households lost their jobs. During World War II (1939-1945), millions of women had to take care of their homes and their children alone. Because so many men were at war, thousands of these "war widows" — that is to say, women whose husbands were away at war — had to go to work outside the home. Most women worked long hours at hard jobs. There weren't many "perfect families."

TEXT 2

Most words in the English language have more than one simple, or basic, meaning. One example is the word *diet.* The most general definition of the noun is "a person's or a group's usual food choices and habits." In a more specific definition, *diet* means "an eating plan with only certain kinds or amounts of food." For instance, a diet is often a plan to lose weight. And as a verb, *diet* means "go on a diet."

All over the world, the global diet includes *fast food—* prepared items from inexpensive restaurants, snack bars, or food stands. Some examples of typically American fast food are *hamburgers, hot dogs, sandwiches, fried chicken,* and so on. Some types of international fast foods might be German *sausage* and *schnitzel,* Italian, *pizza* and *pasta*, Mexican *tacos* and *burritos,* Middle Eastern *shish kebab* and *falafel,* Japanese *sushi* and *tempura,* Chinese *eggrolls* and *noodles,* and the like. The variety of fast foods available on the planet is growing. Even so, this kind or style of nourishment is becoming *universal, or* worldwide. Fast-food places usually prepare and serve the items quickly. Many are part of *fast-food chains* (eating places with the same name and company owner). For instance, the biggest and most famous American fast-food chain serves hamburgers in every continent on the planet except Antarctica. In over 120 different countries, its 25,000 eating places have the same look. They have a similar atmosphere. The menu items may not be exactly alike from one culture to another, but the style and taste of the foods don't differ much.

TEXT 3

It is extremely difficult to explain why something is funny. No one knows for sure why we laugh at cer­tain ideas and situations. However, research is beginning to tell us more about how and why humor affects us.

Some psychologists say that peo­ple laugh because of the element of surprise in humor. When the audi­ence hears the funny part at the end of a joke, the "punch line," they experience a familiar idea in a new, humorous way. These psychologists say that a joke or a situation is funny because two ideas do not match. This is called incongruity. There can be a mismatch, or incongruity, between characters in a joke or story. There might also be a mis­match between what happens in a funny situation and what usually happen in "real life." On some level, when ideas that don't match are out together, this surprises us and causes us to laugh.

According to other researchers, humor can make people feel that they are better than other people. If we see ourselves as superior, we will feel better. This kind of humor is good if it doesn't hurt another person. Jokes about certain jobs or cer­tain types of people can make a per­son feel superior.

TEXT 4

It is clear that the United States is a nation that needs to eat healthier and slim down. One of the most important steps in the right direction would be for school cafeterias to provide healthy, low-fat options for students. In every town and city, an abundance of fast-food restaurants lure teenage customers with fast, inexpensive, and tasty food, but these foods are typically unhealthy. Unfortunately, school cafeterias—in an effort to provide food that is appetizing to young people—mimic fast food menus, often serving items such as burgers and fries, pizza, hot dogs, and fried chicken. While these foods do provide some nutritional value, they are relatively high in fat. Many of the lunch selections school cafeterias currently offer could be made healthier with a few simple and inexpensive substitutions. Veggie burgers, for example, offered alongside beef burgers, would be a positive addition. A salad bar would also serve the purpose of providing a healthy and satisfying meal. And tasty grilled chicken sandwiches would be a far better option than fried chicken. Additionally, the beverage case should be stocked with containers of low-fat milk.