**UNIT 4. READING:**

**Fake but fun?**

In our post-truth world, it can be hard to judge where the truth lies. Rumours and deliberate misinformation can spread around the world seemingly without anyone wondering why. Here is a handful of stories, some are older than others, and only one is true.

It is widely held that Walt Disney paid to have his dead body frozen in the hope that sometime in the future, when medical technology was sufficiently advanced, he could be miraculously brought back to life. It’s not clear how this story came into being, but what is known is that Disney’s remains were cremated when he died in 1966, and his ashes reside at the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California. It’s possible that the secrecy surrounding his funeral helped this rumour to gain popularity; and in terms of its origins, some people suspect that a group of Disney employees were having a laugh at their former boss’s expense. His daughter dismissed the claims in 1972: ‘There is absolutely no truth in the rumour that my father, Walt Disney, wished to be frozen. I doubt that my father had heard of cryonics.’

Speculation surrounding celebrity deaths (Elvis is still alive!), and celebrity bodies (Kylie Jenner had plastic surgery!) are common themes of this type of ‘reporting’. Back in 2012, Beyoncé was on the receiving end of the online rumour mill when she gave birth to her first child. Or did she? Breathless online reporting began with claims that Beyoncé and husband Jay-Z had spent millions to secure an entire section of Lennox Hill hospital in New York, complete with bullet-proof suite and muscle-bound security. This was strongly denied by the hospital, which distributed details of its executive suites. This rapidly escalated to tales of other parents being turned away from visiting their own children by the couple’s security team. Again, the hospital protested. Some less reliable news sites went even further and insinuated that Beyoncé was not pregnant at all and was using the services of a surrogate mother behind the hospital’s expensive walls. Perhaps it is no wonder that Beyoncé released seemingly endless pregnancy photos in 2017 before she gave birth to twins, Rumi and Sir.

Nevertheless, these types of stories can prove surprisingly difficult to combat. Back in 1963, the US President John F. Kennedy went to Germany to give a speech. Delivering his speech in German, in his strong Bostonian accent, Kennedy famously said to the crowd: ‘Ich bin ein Berliner’ which translates as ‘I am a citizen of Berlin’. But since a ‘Berliner’ also refers to a type of doughnut that was popular in Germany at the time, it’s possible that the people might have heard him saying: ‘I am a jam doughnut.’ And indeed, sometime after the event, stories began to appear in the press, claiming that JFK’s line had provoked spontaneous laughter and ridicule during the speech because of this. When and where this story originated isn’t known, but it has since been proven to be a myth. Kennedy’s speech, including the famous phrase, had been translated and checked scrupulously by his people, who denied that the jam-doughnut interpretation had any truth in it at all; indeed, people in Berlin actually refer to jam doughnuts as ‘Pfannkuchen’, not ‘Berliner’. The original transcript is stored at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C.

Finally, here’s a story that might fit the profile of a ‘weird celebrity body shock’ rumour, but is actually true. During the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, on his way to smashing three world records, sprinting superstar Usain Bolt ate … junk food. Counter to the nutritional rules for everyone else on the planet, Bolt’s athletic victories were fueled by chicken nuggets, fries and apple pies. Rather than risking his peak condition on unfamiliar Chinese food, Bolt consumed on average 100 boxes of chicken nuggets each day from his favourite fast-food restaurant. That’s an astonishing 5,000 calories, including a great deal of unhealthy fats. When the story first hit the news, people around the world rolled their eyes in gentle resignation. What else could the Jamaican do that we couldn’t … fly? Clearly, his diet didn’t do him any harm but it is notable that in later years Bolt has changed his ways. He now eats lean chicken and broccoli (even though he doesn’t like it).

**Read the article and choose the correct letter.**

1. Many people …

a still believe today that Walt Disney was frozen after death.

b previously thought that Walt Disney was frozen.

c think that medical advances will enable us to bring dead people back to life.

2. It’s thought that …

a the rumour was started by Disney’s daughter.

b Disney had secretly made enquiries into cryonics.

c some people were playing a joke on Disney.

3. Gossip about celebrities …

a has become more problematic since 2012.

b more frequently focuses on men than women.

c often focuses on the same kinds of stories over and over again.

4. The stories about Beyoncé’s pregnancy …

a affected other patients in the hospital.

b became more and more outrageous.

c implied that she had paid for better medical treatment than other patients.

5. The newspapers reported that …

a JFK had called himself a jam doughnut.

b the President’s American accent had sounded ridiculous.

c people had laughed at Kennedy for giving his speech in German.

6. The general response to the Bolt story …

a indicated a boredom with celebrity diet stories.

b increased sales of the chicken pieces.

c showed that people felt kindly towards him.

7. Later on, Bolt …

a ate more healthily despite his tastes.

b adjusted his diet to suit his age.

c modified his diet but retained some of the junk food elements.