

N5

National Qualifications

2022

English

Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation (Text)

Thursday, 12 May

Instructions to Candidates

Candidates should enter their surname, forename(s), date of birth, Scottish candidate number and the name and level of the subject at the top of their first answer sheet.

Total marks - 30

Read the passage carefully and attempt ALL questions, which are printed on a separate sheet.

Life after The Sims

In 2005, when I was 16, I worked in a busy local cafe. I churned out hot beverages at high speed, while constantly
5 restocking my cup and saucer area. I found the work hard and boring, which was strange given that at the end of every shift I'd rush home to play Diner Dash, a video game in which you become
10 a waitress in a busy restaurant, taking orders, serving customers, clearing away their cups and plates. In the great gallery of video games, Diner Dash was not among the most
15 realistic, but I enjoyed its simplicity and I was enthralled by the thrill that came with pleasing customers and advancing levels. How many levels were available was never made clear.
20 The game seemed infinite. I'd play for hours. In 2017, I lost my job - my dream job - and slipped into the uncertain world of freelance work, a
25 transition that led to a period of acute anxiety. I began to spend most of my working week at home, alone, making lists, staring out of the window at the pigeons. Sometimes I
30 read Amazon reviews of

household items, which was exciting. I
tried exercising. I tried
structure. But nothing seemed to
ease my niggling, hollow feeling of

35 worry. Then I downloaded a
new-ish version of The Sims, the
popular simulation game. Bingo. It
was like putting Vaseline on chapped
lips.

40 The Sims, in which you design and
build homes in a blank slate of
a neighbourhood, and set about creating
'Sims' to live inside them, was
released in 2000, and is the

45 bestselling video game of all time.
As a teenager, The Sims was my thing.

Back then I averaged two or three
hours every weekday, and I'd put in a
proper sesh at the weekend. It felt
50 wonderful to return home from the
incomprehensibly dull monotony of
school to a digital world I'd
created - a kind of haven of order and
control.

55 My interminable adolescent thirst
to be someone else was quenched. I could
throw teachers I disliked into swimming
pools. I could invent a handsome Sim
and command him to kiss an incredibly

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60 cool, elegant Sim who,
coincidentally, shared my name. I could
make a Sim of a pretty, popular
girl in my school, and prevent her from
falling in love. It was a kind of
65 escapism. Beautiful.
Addictive. A little devilish.
The game's appeal also comes from
its close-to-real-life-ness. You
pay bills. You load the dishwasher.
70 You make beds. You clean stuff.
(In a game, you clean stuff!)
Tuck your Sims up after a hard
day's work and dinner spent together as a
family, and experience the pride of a
75 weary, content mother. You cannot 'win.' Your
Sims might reach the top of their career
ladders, retire with a healthy pension
and then die, but the game goes on.
My Sims habit resumed last
80 year, when actually I had a lot of
work on. I had a huge deadline which
I had kept putting back. A few
days before the deadline I was nowhere near
ready and had reached peak
85 procrastination. I knew The Sims
would be catastrophically detrimental
to my deadline. And my social
life. And my relationship. But I
clicked 'purchase' anyway. That

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90 week I played until 3
am every night. I played in every spare
waking minute I had. Once, I
considered getting out my laptop and
playing on the top deck of a bus.

95 A few weeks after I downloaded the
game, my right eye started twitching
uncontrollably - too much
late-night screen-time. I told people it was
because I drank too much
100 caffeine.

In some of my lowest moments of last
year, pre-Sims, when the anxiety
was a struggle, I became obsessed
with doing laundry. It excited me,
105 particularly a good white wash, the
removal of stains. Laundry
became an achievable goal.

Something I could do well and quickly. The
Sims offered similar rewards. I

110 became good at the game. In a world
I had designed and constructed, my
Sims thrived. And having control
over their lives meant it became
easier to escape dwelling on what

115 was going on in my own. When I
played the game, my worries
floated away, my thoughts disappeared.
In 2017, the video games
journalist Andy Kelly wrote an

- 120 article about the most relaxing
games available at the time.
'Flick to any news channel and
it's like watching the pre-credits
sequence for an apocalyptic action
125 movie. So turn your TV off and
switch on your console, where lovely,
precious video games will help you
forget about the world burning outside.'
The ultimate escapism.
- 130 Huge numbers of new games are
now being designed with distraction, joy
or tranquillity in mind. Calm
games that present you with manageable,
gratifying tasks and puzzles.
- 135 Games that don't make you want to
smash your controller into the wall with
frustration.
One expert observed: 'Video
games place you at the centre of the
140 story - you are an active
participant, instead of a passive
observer. They offer us a safe
place to interrogate and test the
emotional consequences of our actions.
- 145 Far from being a meaningless waste of time,
games help us explore what it
means to be human, to explore
notions of love and loss, and to
allow us to travel to far-off

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150 incredible places, to
 become incredible people - all from the
 comfort of our own home.'
 Psychologist Kirsten Godfrey
 believes that it is a normal
155 aspect of human nature to
 desire a certain level of control
 over ourselves in order to achieve some
 positive outcomes in our lives.
 'We're often drawn to tasks that
160 are easy to complete or give us
 some sense of reward,' Godfrey
 says. 'That buzz you get from
 completing your to-do list or
 achieving the next level on a game
165 can trigger the release of dopamine in
 the brain, making you feel good - just the
 ticket when you're not feeling good.'
 But like any dopamine hit, it's
 best enjoyed in small measures, and
170 with caution. It can be addictive.
 'It's about knowing when to do enough to
 make yourself feel better,'
 Godfrey warns, 'but not so much you
 become dependent.' She says that
175 desiring a feeling of control is
 simple human nature.

 She's right. Since realising why
 I am playing The Sims so much,
 it's made me want to play it

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180 (a little) less. Work feels
manageable and it doesn't feel as
difficult to keep my head above
water. I'm excited about the future
but I'm not ashamed of how I'm
185 spending my time. You can't 'win' at
life any more than you can 'win' at The
Sims. All you can do is spend it
doing what you love, with some laundry
thrown in for good measure.

[END OF PASSAGE]