**Assessment Task for Reading**

**Topic: Letters to Newspapers**

This assessment task focuses on developing senior secondary students’ reading skills.

This set of materials contains the following:

* **The reading text**
* **A set of questions**
* **Suggested answers**
* **Annotated text**

**Reading Text**

**Letter 1**

I call upon the Hong Kong Government to ban the shark fin trade. Shark fins have no nutritional value, are of no use in curing anything and lack all taste. True, they are a traditional status symbol in expensive soups. But the cost of maintaining this traditional way of showing off is marine disaster. About 100 million sharks are being killed annually. As sharks have few offspring and take many years to grow, losses on this scale will soon cause the disappearance of the shark. Removing the top predator in any food chain is dangerous. The species on which sharks feed suddenly increase dramatically in numbers, probably with disastrous effects on other species lower in the chain. Ecosystems which have taken a million years to develop are suddenly in chaos. Please let’s act before it is too late. We are gambling with our own future in a totally irresponsible way.

Jenny Yeung, Shatin

**Letter 2**

Big businesses are no longer local. They serve international markets. Research shows that in such circumstances management teams with people from different backgrounds make better decisions than those whose members are very similar in experience and outlook. With this in mind let’s look at the boards of Hong Kong’s largest companies. We can start with just one type of diversity: sex. The most recent figures I can find show that among the one hundred largest companies by market capitalisation 8.6% of the directors are women. This figure is appalling and can only be explained by prejudice and unfairness. Given this fact, we must take steps to correct the situation. This we can do by means of legal quotas such as those in force in slightly different ways in countries such as Norway, Italy, France, Spain, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates and India. A law is needed stating that companies above a certain size must by a certain year have a board with at least 30% female membership. This will be good for women and good for the companies. As the number of female directors increases the number of women in senior positions will rise too and the number of female hirings. The entire economy will gain from this better use of human resources. Let’s not delay.

Winnie Chan, Mong Kok

**Letter 3**

Sometimes governments put taxes on things which they do not want people to do or buy as a way of deterring them from doing so. Probably the most familiar example is the tax on tobacco products; duties on alcohol and gambling are other examples. Recently an epidemic of obesity in developed nations is leading legislators to target other items. About three quarters of the states of the US now have a tax on soft drinks, which are seen as an important factor in adding to the weight problems of American teenagers. This leads to the question of whether we should add taxes to the cost of what is known commonly as junk food, low in value to the body but high in calories and loaded with too much sugar and salt which harms our health. I admit I am uncertain whether it would be a good idea or not. Such taxes do hit the lower paid more than the wealthy and that is unreasonable. Also, I am not too keen on the government directing us about what we can eat. I have heard the argument that people with unhealthy lifestyles cost the community more in terms of health costs, but recent studies in the Netherlands show that over a lifetime this is not true. Actually longer-lived people cost more because of the number of problems ageing brings about. Perhaps your readers would like to give their opinions on this matter and help me make up my mind.

Jo Wong, Sai Kung

**Letter 4**

There is one thing I deeply dislike about Hong Kong and that is the racial prejudice that I see too often. The main victims are, of course, those minority communities - Filipino and Indonesian maids, and South Indian residents. It seems that to many local Chinese a dark skin is a sign of inferiority. Anyone with one must get used to unfavourable and unfriendly comments about it. Filipinos (frequently maids, but sometimes well-off visitors) are subjected to degrading treatment - denied seats, told to move aside, made to wait longer in queues, pushed and shoved about and cursed and scolded publicly. I know also of many examples of, when they see a dark skin, landlords suddenly having no property available, taxi drivers losing interest in being hired, and employers offering highly qualified people only the most menial jobs at rock bottom wages. Of course, there is racial prejudice all around the world, but wouldn’t it be nice for us to be different?

Jan Tai, Wanchai

**Letter 5**

I do wish there were more hawkers in the streets. They add so much to the atmosphere of the streets with their interesting goods and loud cries for customers to come and look. I often feel rather dull and sleepy as I go to work in the morning, especially if it is a grey day. But often all that changes when I meet a hawker with just the scarf I have been looking for, the perfect pair of shoes for my nephew or a delicious something for my breakfast. Having hawkers keeps down unemployment and brings people cheaper goods. Please think of such advantages and don’t grumble that they get in your way. Don’t be a stick-in-the-mud!

Elizabeth Wong, North Point

**END OF READING TEXT**

**Read Letter 1 and answer questions 1-4.**

1. What is the writer trying to say when he suggests that shark fins are a ‘*traditional status symbol*’ (line 3)?

A. Shark fins may be considered to have something to do with a high social class.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ |

B. Shark fins are not liked by westerners.

C. Shark fins are getting limited in supply.

D. It takes many years for sharks to grow.

For questions 2 and 3, fill in each of the blanks with one word according to the given information.

1. The writer refers to the killing of about 100 million sharks annually as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
2. Fill in each of the following blanks with one word according to the given information.

If sharks are killed massively, species \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the food chain will outnumber those \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the chain, which has disastrous effects on the ecosystem.

1. What does the writer mean by suggesting that ‘*we are gambling with our own future*’ (lines 9-10)?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Read Letter 2 and answer questions 5-9.**

1. Which of the following best expresses the meaning of ‘*board*s’ in line 16?

A. long thin pieces of wood

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ |

B. meals provided at a hotel

C. groups of people who control a company or an organisation

D. to get on a bus

1. Give two words which the writer uses to show her attitude to the relatively low representation of women in senior positions in large companies. (2 marks)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What point does the writer want to make about the competence of women in the following sentence?

‘*The figure is appalling and can only be explained by prejudice and unfairness*.’ (lines 18-19)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. From the information given in Letter 2, decide if the following statements are True (T), False (F) or Not Given (NG). (5 marks)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| a) | Big businesses serve mainly local customers. |  |
| b) | Research shows that management teams comprising people with different experience make better decisions. |  |
| c) | All companies in Hong Kong have a board with less than 10% female membership. |  |
| d) | The writer believes that legislation is a solution to the limited opportunities for women to hold senior positions in companies. |  |
| e) | ‘*Legal quotas*’ prove effective in many countries. |  |

1. What is the tone of the ending of the text?
2. Critical

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ |

1. Persuasive
2. Sad
3. Informative

**Read Letter 3 and answer questions 10-13.**

1. Complete the following summary using the ideas in Letter 3. Use one word for each blank. The words may or may not appear in the text. (6 marks)

The tax on tobacco and alcohol is meant to reduce public a) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of potentially harmful products. As a b) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of growing obesity, in about c) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ per cent of the states in the US a tax is imposed on soft drinks, which are believed to d) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the weight problems of teenagers. Legislators are now e) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ adding tax to the cost of junk food which contains f) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ quantities of sugar and salt and has little nutritional value.

1. What does ‘*it*’ in line 35 refer to?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Find words in Letter 3 that mean the same as the following: (3 marks)
2. discouraging \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. not sure \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
4. growing old \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. Give two arguments against tax on junk food provided in Letter 3. (2 marks)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Read Letter 4 and answer questions 14-16.**

1. The writer suggests that people from some countries are frequently subjected to unfavourable treatments. Give two examples of these countries. (2 marks)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Give examples of problems faced by ethnic minorities. (5 marks)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Aspects of Life** | **Problems** |
| Accommodation | Landlords are unwilling to a) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ flats to them. |
| b) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Taxi drivers refuse c) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. |
| d) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Getting a e) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ job is almost impossible. |

1. Which of the following statements about Filipinos are true according to the information provided in Letter 4?
2. Not many visitors to Hong Kong are Filipinos.
3. Filipino maids are more vulnerable than Filipino visitors to discrimination in Hong Kong.
4. Filipinos are inferior.
5. The writer is critical of the way Filipino maids and visitors are treated in Hong Kong.
6. It is common for Filipino maids and visitors to be unfavourably treated in public areas.
7. 1, 2 and 3

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ |

1. 1, 4 and 5
2. 2, 3 and 4
3. 2, 4 and 5

**Read Letter 5 and answer questions 17-19.**

1. The writer feels \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ when meeting hawkers with just the things she looks for.
2. What are the advantages of having more hawkers in the streets? (2 marks)

For society: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

For individuals: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. ‘*A stick-in-the-mud*’ (lines 61-62) refers to a person who
2. indulges in shopping.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ |

1. uses a stick as a support while walking.
2. refuses to try new and exciting things.
3. cares little about society.

**Questions 20-22 are based on Letters 1-5.**

1. Choose the best title for each of the five letters. Write the number of the letters (1-5) in the spaces provided. (5 marks)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Title** | **Letter** |
| Convenient and Economical |  |
| Polluted Seas |  |
| Sin Taxes |  |
| Global Companies a Disaster |  |
| Total Ban the Only Answer |  |
| Let’s Fight Obesity |  |
| Bring in the Women |  |
| Treat All Equally |  |
| Shame on Hawkers |  |

1. The following are some lines written in reply to the five letters. Identify which letter each line refers to and write the number of the letters (1-5) in the spaces provided. (8 marks)

‘*Companies must be free to decide for themselves who is best for any position.*’

‘*Almost anything can be argued to be bad for you. Fruit juice causes diabetes and rice can be connected to cancer.*’

‘*We are an integrated society, and a handful of cases should not be exaggerated into making us all guilty*.’

‘*It’s a good idea and will help people make sensible dietary choices*.’

‘*They bring pirated goods, accidents, unsafe food and congestion to the streets*.’

‘*I agree that a group of people who all think the same will easily fail to see new opportunities.*’

*‘Forcing these people into indoor markets is the wrong policy.’*

*‘Thick noodles and dried mushrooms can be a very good substitute for them in terms of texture.’*

1. Which of the five letters do you find the most persuasive? Give a reason to support your answer.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**END OF QUESTIONS**

**Suggested Answers to the Reading Task**

1. What is the writer trying to say when he suggests that shark fins are a ‘*traditional status symbol*’ (line 3)?

A. Shark fins may be considered to have something to do with a high social class.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⚫ | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ |

B. Shark fins are not liked by westerners.

C. Shark fins are getting limited in supply.

D. It takes many years for sharks to grow.

1. The writer refers to the killing of about 100 million sharks annually as marine disaster.
2. If sharks are killed massively, species higher in the food chain will outnumber those lower in the chain, which has disastrous effects on the ecosystem.
3. What does the writer mean by suggesting that ‘*we are gambling with our own future*’ (lines 9-10)?

We are damaging the environment and put our future lives at risk.

**Read Letter 2 and answer questions 5-9.**

1. Which of the following best expresses the meaning of ‘*boards*’ in line 16?

A. long thin pieces of wood

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⭘ | ⚫ | ⭘ |

B. meals provided at a hotel

C. groups of people who control a company or an organisation

D. to get on a bus

1. Give two words which the writer uses to show her attitude to the relatively low representation of women in senior positions in large companies. (2 marks)

Appalling, prejudice, unfairness (any two)

1. What point does the writer want to make about the competence of women in the following sentence?

‘*The figure is appalling and can only be explained by prejudice and unfairness*.’ (lines 18-19)

Women are just as good as men at running business.

1. From the information given in Letter 2, decide if the following statements are True (T), False (F) or Not Given (NG). (5 marks)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| a) | Big businesses serve mainly local customers. | F |
| b) | Research shows that management teams comprising people with different experience make better decisions. | T |
| c) | All companies in Hong Kong have a board with less than 10% female membership. | NG |
| d) | The writer believes that legislation is a solution to the limited opportunities for women to hold senior positions in companies. | T |
| e) | ‘*Legal quotas*’ prove effective in many countries. | NG |

1. What is the tone of the ending of the text?
2. Critical

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⚫ | ⭘ | ⭘ |

1. Persuasive
2. Sad
3. Informative

**Read Letter 3 and answer questions 10-13.**

1. Complete the following summary using the ideas in Letter 3. Use one word for each blank. The words may or may not appear in the text. (6 marks)

The tax on tobacco and alcohol is meant to reduce public a) consumption of potentially harmful products. As a b) result of growing obesity, in about c) 75 per cent of the states in the US a tax is imposed on soft drinks, which are believed to d) worsen the weight problems of teenagers. Legislators are now e) considering adding tax to the cost of junk food which contains f) harmful/large/huge/vast quantities of sugar and salt and has little nutritional value.

1. What does ‘*it*’ in line 35 refer to?

To add taxes to the cost of junk food

1. Find words in Letter 3 that mean the same as the following: (3 marks)
2. discouraging deterring
3. not sure uncertain
4. growing old ageing
5. Give two arguments against tax on junk food provided in Letter 3. (2 marks)

It hits the lower paid more than the wealthy. / The government should not have the power to direct us about what we can eat. / People with unhealthy eating habits increase the burden on public health care. (any two)

**Read Letter 4 and answer questions 14-16.**

1. The writer suggests that people from some countries are frequently subjected to unfavourable treatments. Give two examples of these countries. (2 marks)

The Philippines/India/Indonesia (any two)

1. Give examples of problems faced by ethnic minorities. (5 marks)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Aspects of Life** | **Problems** |
| Accommodation | Landlords are unwilling to a) lease/rent flats to them. |
| b) Transportation | Taxi drivers refuse c) hire. |
| d) Employment | Getting a e) well-paid/highly-paid/skilled job is almost impossible. |

1. Which of the following statements about Filipinos are true according to the information provided in Letter 4?
2. Not many visitors to Hong Kong are Filipinos.
3. Filipino maids are more vulnerable than Filipino visitors to discrimination in Hong Kong.
4. Filipinos are inferior.
5. The writer is critical of the way Filipino maids and visitors are treated in Hong Kong.
6. It is common for Filipino maids and visitors to be unfavourably treated in public areas.
7. 1, 2 and 3

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⚫ |

1. 1, 4 and 5
2. 2, 3 and 4
3. 2, 4 and 5

**Read Letter 5 and answer questions17-19.**

1. The writer feels energetic/bright/lively when meeting hawkers with just the things she looks for.
2. What are the advantages of having more hawkers in the streets? (2 marks)

For society: It keeps down unemployment.

For individuals: It allows people to buy cheap goods.

1. ‘*A stick-in-the-mud*’ (lines 61-62) refers to a person who
2. indulges in shopping.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A | B | C | D |
| ⭘ | ⭘ | ⚫ | ⭘ |

1. uses a stick as a support while walking.
2. refuses to try new and exciting things.
3. cares little about society.

**Questions 20-22 are based on Letters 1-5.**

1. Choose the best title for each of the five letters. Write the number of the letters (1-5) in the spaces provided. (5 marks)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Title** | **Letter** |
| Convenient and Economical | 5 |
| Polluted Seas |  |
| Sin Taxes | 3 |
| Global Companies a Disaster |  |
| Total Ban the Only Answer | 1 |
| Let’s Fight Obesity |  |
| Bring in the Women | 2 |
| Treat All Equally | 4 |
| Shame on Hawkers |  |

1. The following are some lines written in reply to the five letters. Identify which letter each line refers to and write the number of the letters (1-5) in the spaces provided. (8 marks)

‘*Companies must be free to decide for themselves who is best for any position.*’

‘*Almost anything can be argued to be bad for you. Fruit juice causes diabetes and rice can be connected to cancer.*’

‘*We are an integrated society, and a handful of cases should not be exaggerated into making us all guilty*.’

3

2

4

‘*It’s a good idea and will help people make sensible dietary choices*.’

‘*They bring pirated goods, accidents, unsafe food and congestion to the streets*.’

‘*I agree that a group of people who all think the same will easily fail to see new opportunities.*’

5

3

2

*‘Forcing these people into indoor markets is the wrong policy.’*

*‘Thick noodles and dried mushrooms can be a very good substitute for them in terms of texture.’*

5

1

1. Which of the five letters do you find the most persuasive? Give a reason to support your answer.

The reasons provided should correspond with the letter chosen. Possible answers: The writer uses research data to support his/her arguments. (Letter 2) / The writer uses strong adjectives/adverbs to express his/her attitudes. (Letters 1 & 2) / The writer provides a wide perspective on the issue. (Letters 1 & 3) / The writer puts forth feasible solutions to the problem. (Letter 2) / The writer uses real-life examples to support his/her arguments. (Letters 3, 4 & 5)

**END OF SUGGESTED ANSWERS**

**Annotated Text**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Letter 1**  I call upon the Hong Kong Government to ban the shark fin trade. Shark fins have no nutritional value, are of no use in curing anything and lack all taste. True, they are a traditional status symbol in expensive soups. But the cost of maintaining this traditional way of showing off is marine disaster. About 100 million sharks are being killed annually. As sharks have few offspring and take many years to grow, losses on this scale will soon cause the disappearance of the shark. Removing the top predator in any food chain is dangerous. The species on which sharks feed suddenly increase dramatically in numbers, probably with disastrous effects on other species lower in the chain. Ecosystems which have taken a million years to develop are suddenly in chaos. Please let’s act before it is too late. We are gambling with our own future in a totally irresponsible way.  Jenny Yeung, Shatin  **Letter 2**  Big businesses are no longer local. They serve international markets. Research shows that in such circumstances management teams with people from different backgrounds make better decisions than those whose members are very similar in experience and outlook. With this in mind let’s look at the boards of Hong Kong’s largest companies. We can start with just one type of diversity: sex. The most recent figures I can find show that among the one hundred largest companies by market capitalisation 8.6% of the directors are women. This figure is appalling and can only be explained by prejudice and unfairness. Given this fact, we must take steps to correct the situation. This we can do by means of legal quotas such as those in force in slightly different ways in countries such as Norway, Italy, France, Spain, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates and India. A law is needed stating that companies above a certain size must by a certain year have a board with at least 30% female membership. This will be good for women and good for the companies. As the number of female directors increases the number of women in senior positions will rise too and the number of female hirings. The entire economy will gain from this better use of human resources. Let’s not delay.  Winnie Chan, Mongkok  **Letter 3**  Sometimes governments put taxes on things which they do not want people to do or buy as a way of deterring them from doing so. Probably the most familiar example is the tax on tobacco products; duties on alcohol and gambling are other examples. Recently an epidemic of obesity in developed nations is leading legislators to target other items. About three quarters of the states of the US now have a tax on soft drinks, which are seen as an important factor in adding to the weight problems of American teenagers. This leads to the question of whether we should add taxes to the cost of what is known commonly as junk food, low in value to the body but high in calories and loaded with too much sugar and salt which harms our health. I admit I am uncertain whether it would be a good idea or not. Such taxes do hit the lower paid more than the wealthy and that is unreasonable. Also, I am not too keen on the government directing us about what we can eat. I have heard the argument that people with unhealthy lifestyles cost the community more in terms of health costs, but recent studies in the Netherlands show that over a lifetime this is not true. Actually longer-lived people cost more because of the number of problems ageing brings about. Perhaps your readers would like to give their opinions on this matter and help me make up my mind.  Jo Wong, Sai Kung  **Letter 4**  There is one thing I deeply dislike about Hong Kong and that is the racial prejudice that I see too often. The main victims are, of course, those minority communities - Filipino and Indonesian maids, and South Indian residents. It seems that to many local Chinese a dark skin is a sign of inferiority. Anyone with one must get used to unfavourable and unfriendly comments about it. Filipinos (frequently maids, but sometimes well-off visitors) are subjected to degrading treatment - denied seats, told to move aside, made to wait longer in queues, pushed and shoved about and cursed and scolded publicly. I know also of many examples of, when they see a dark skin, landlords suddenly having no property available, taxi drivers losing interest in being hired, and employers offering highly qualified people only the most menial jobs at rock bottom wages. Of course, there is racial prejudice all around the world, but wouldn’t it be nice for us to be different?  Jan Tai, Wanchai  **Letter 5**  I do wish there were more hawkers in the streets. They add so much to the atmosphere of the streets with their interesting goods and loud cries for customers to come and look. I often feel rather dull and sleepy as I go to work in the morning, especially if it is a grey day. But often all that changes when I meet a hawker with just the scarf I have been looking for, the perfect pair of shoes for my nephew or a delicious something for my breakfast. Having hawkers keeps down unemployment and brings people cheaper goods. Please think of such advantages and don’t grumble that they get in your way. Don’t be a stick-in-the-mud!  Elizabeth Wong, North Point | Q1  Q1, Q2  Q3  Q4  Q8a, Q8b  Q8b  Q5  Q7  Q8c  Q6, Q8c  Q6, Q8d  Q8d, Q8e  Q9  Q10a, Q12a  Q10b  Q10c  Q10d  Q10e  Q10f  Q11, Q12b  Q13  Q13  Q13  Q12c  Q14  Q16  Q15a  Q15b, Q15c  Q15d, Q15e  Q17  Q18  Q19 |

**END OF ANNOTATED TEXT**