

## Pre-Reading Activities

### A: Discussion

Answer these questions in small groups.

1. Think about the kinds of books you like to read. Which of the following do you like to read: **romance, science fiction, horror stories, adventure, history, encyclopedias, other nonfiction**, etc.? Why?
2. Have you read any science fiction? If you have, do you enjoy this kind of writing? If you haven't, why?
3. Why do you think many modern science fiction writers offer a pessimistic view of the future?
4. In your opinion, which of the following may jeopardize the future of humanity: **pollution, new diseases, terrorism, war, alien invasion**?
5. What other things could be a great danger to humanity in the future?



### B: Vocabulary

The following words are in today's article. Match the words you know to their meanings, guess the others. When you have finished, compare your answers in pairs and check the ones you guessed.

#### Words

1. **uncanny**
2. **demise**
3. **flashback**
4. **recount** (v)
5. **inspiration**
6. **spate**
7. **eerie**
8. **plague** (v)

#### Meanings

- a. to cause trouble or difficulty to someone over a long period of time
- b. a sudden good idea
- c. strange and difficult to explain
- d. death
- e. a large number of events coming together in time
- f. strange; mysterious and frightening
- g. a scene that goes back in time to show something
- h. to tell a story

## Reading Activities

### A: Scanning

Read **Part One** of today's article as fast as you can, and choose the best answer for the following question.

**Snowman in Atwood's new novel is...**

- a. the Abominable Snowman or yeti (*i.e. a large hairy creature that looks like a man reported to be living in the Himalayan mountains*).
- b. a person's name.
- c. a figure made of snow.
- d. a person who enjoys the cold.



## Atwood's New Novel Eerily Echoes SARS Outbreak

BY LEAH EICHLER

TORONTO Fri May 9 (Reuters) - Just as Toronto begins to relax after weeks of worrying about SARS, celebrated hometown author Margaret Atwood is releasing a novel about a deadly virus that wipes out civilization. 'Oryx and Crake' by the Booker Prize-winning author about life after a deadly virus is bound to touch a few nerves in her home country and around a world still plagued with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, which has killed 500 globally. The author, however, insists the timing of the book's release was an uncanny accident. 'It's completely eerie but it is a coincidence,' Atwood said with a laugh in an interview with Reuters.

'Can I see the future? No. Nobody can. There are too many variables,' said the author of more than 30 books that have

been published in over 35 countries. Yet, Atwood thinks that her novel and SARS should serve as a wake-up call. 'Diseases roam the world. We've been lucky here. Toronto used to have malaria and yellow fever ... We had it here and we eliminated it. Now we have something new,' said Atwood.

'Oryx and Crake' opens with a character named Snowman who is the last human inhabitant of the planet. While struggling to survive in an unfriendly climate where intelligent bio-engineered animals hunt on a harsh wasteland, Snowman dutifully watches over a group of experimental humans known as the children of Crake. (Continued/...)

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### B: Text Organization

The beginnings of six sentences have been removed from **Part Two** of today's article.

They are listed below. Read **Part Two** and try to put each sentence beginning back in the correct place.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Travel advisories... <input type="radio"/> | 2. Although a virus... <input type="radio"/>                 |
| 3. Many reviewers... <input type="radio"/>    | 4. It is while visiting Hott Totts,... <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. Growing up... <input type="radio"/>        | 6. Episodes in 'Oryx and Crake'... <input type="radio"/>     |



### Part Two

## Demise of Civilisation

(.../Continued) Crake was a genius and Snowman's closest childhood friend in the Compound, a gated community run by a biotech company. (1)... the two boys played video games called Extinctathon and Kwiktime Osama while watching live executions and pornography on the Internet.

(2)... a child pornography site, that Snowman and Crake first encounter Oryx, a mysterious woman and a former child sex slave from a Far East country, who later becomes their mutual lover.

In flashbacks, Snowman recalls the events that led to the swift demise of civilization. (3)... annihilates the world's population, the stage is set by the unethical work of biotech companies, extreme climate change and a madman's vision to improve humanity.

(4)... bear a striking resemblance to Toronto's outbreak of SARS where more than 20 have been killed and hundreds quarantined by the disease. The World Health Organization warned against travel to Canada's biggest city, but later lifted that after new cases subsided.

Snowman recounts how soon after the virus surfaced, medical experts appeared on television to name it JUVE, or Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary, in an attempt to make it more manageable. (5)... were issued and nose filters quickly purchased, although they prove to be ineffective. Cities are quarantined and eventually doctors and nurses contract the virus themselves.

(6)... are drawing a comparison between 'Oryx and Crake' and the 1986 novel 'The Handmaid's Tale,' Atwood's story of a male-dominated world in which women were strictly controlled and assigned to various classes.

Atwood recalled that after 'The Handmaid's Tale' was published, some reviewers thought the plot was unrealistic. 'Oh, some said, "This could never happen" and then it happened and, "Oh, nobody would ever do this," said the author with a hint of sarcasm. "The fact is, when I was writing the book, people were already doing 'this' such as in Romania under Ceausescu where women were actually forced to have babies.'

(Continued/...)

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### C: True, False or Not Given

Read **Part Two** again and decide if the following statements are true or false. Write **T** (true) if the statement is true, **F** (false) if it is false, or **NG** (not given) if the article contains no information about it.

- Kwiktime Osama is a Japanese character's name.
- The heroes first encounter Oryx in virtual reality.
- Some episodes of Atwood's book remind the readers of the recent SARS outbreak.
- JUVE is a character's nickname.
- In the novel, doctors and nurses become sick too.
- Atwood is currently working on a new novel.

## D: Matching Sentences

Here are the sentences which make up the last part of today's article. However, they have been separated into beginnings and endings. The sentence beginnings are in the correct order, but the endings have been placed in random order. Match the sentence beginnings to their endings.

### Part Three

## Inspiration After Sept. 11

### Beginnings:

1. The novels differ in that 'Oryx and Crake' does not have...
2. It is also Atwood's first novel where a male character...
3. Atwood explained that her inspiration for the novel...
4. The spate of anthrax incidents following Sept. 11, 2001...
5. 'Things happen all the time, and I don't mean terrorist attacks...
6. Little things boil up...
7. 'In order to really do a massive job, you would have to have an overall plan...

### Endings:

- a. ... came from the back pages of newspapers and magazines.
- b. ... and do something so fast that it couldn't be contained.'
- c. ... an outwardly feminist theme.
- d. ... also served as an inspiration.
- e. ... narrates throughout.
- f. ... but new germs, new people trying to kill people in the Japanese subway system.
- g. ... but usually they are quite small and containable,' she explained.

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## E: Choose The Best Answer

Check your understanding of **Part Three** by choosing the best answer to complete each sentence.

1. The novel was **not** written as an openly...
  - a. *feminist book.*
  - b. *pessimistic book.*
  - c. *scary book.*
2. The author's inspiration came from...
  - a. *movies.*
  - b. *newspapers and magazines.*
  - c. *the Internet.*
3. Atwood is concerned about...
  - a. *global warming.*
  - b. *new diseases.*
  - c. *a number of factors.*
4. Atwood believes that it is harder to contain a huge threat if it is well thought out and done...
  - a. *slowly.*
  - b. *quickly.*
  - c. *carelessly.*



## Post-Reading Activities

You may do one or more of these.

### A: Acronyms

In today's world, acronyms - words formed from the first letters of the words that make up the name of something - are quite common. Acronyms are often used because they use fewer letters than the original word or phrase, they are simple to understand, and they are easily recognized. SARS, the acronym used in today's article, is a recent example.

By yourself...

1. find SARS in today's text and write down what it stands for.
2. scan today's article to find the name of the organization which is widely known by the acronym WHO.

In pairs or small groups, make up lists of acronyms for...

3. **organizations:** \_\_\_\_\_
4. **countries:** \_\_\_\_\_
5. **phrases:** \_\_\_\_\_

### B: Find Someone Who...

Here is a game which encourages you to talk about books and reading. Use the worksheet below to find people in your class who have done the following things. Make questions from the sentences and then try to find someone in your class who has done each thing. When you find someone, write their name on the space provided next to the question.

Then ask them a couple of follow-up questions and practice having a conversation with them on that topic.

Find Someone Who...

- has read a science fiction book in the last month. \_\_\_\_\_
- keeps a diary. \_\_\_\_\_
- wants to write a book some day. \_\_\_\_\_
- doesn't enjoy reading books. \_\_\_\_\_
- used to read lots of books but nowadays has little time for reading. \_\_\_\_\_
- always reads before going to sleep at night. \_\_\_\_\_
- prefers nonfiction to fiction. \_\_\_\_\_
- would like to be an illustrator for children's books. \_\_\_\_\_
- has had a story or poem or article published somewhere (in a school magazine, newspaper, etc.).  
\_\_\_\_\_
- tried to write a story once but never finished it. \_\_\_\_\_
- finds writing essays in English very difficult. \_\_\_\_\_
- has recently seen a movie based on a book. \_\_\_\_\_
- can tell you the name of their favorite writer. \_\_\_\_\_
- thinks that people won't read books in the future. \_\_\_\_\_
- always carries a book with them. \_\_\_\_\_
- reads a newspaper every day. \_\_\_\_\_
- thinks their life is stranger than a book. \_\_\_\_\_
- has met or seen (in the flesh) a famous writer. \_\_\_\_\_



## C: Vocabulary Extension

**Part One:** In English, some words may sound similar and / or have a similar spelling though they may mean totally different things. Check that you know the meanings of the words below, then use them in sentences of your own. Write the sentences in the spaces provided.

**Words: inspiration, perspiration, desperation, respiration**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

Offer your sentences to the class, replacing today's words with the word '**kangaroo**'. The class must guess what the missing word is.

**Part Two:** Your teacher will now give you a story with gaps. Fill the gaps using the words from **Part One**. You may need to change the form of the words (i.e. from noun to verb or from noun to adjective, etc.).

## D: Writing

Write a review of a science fiction novel. In the review include...

- *the title of the novel.*
- *the author's name.*
- *the characters' names.*
- *the main story line.*

Try to offer as many arguments as you can for recommending the novel (if you liked it) or not recommending it (if you disliked it).

Alternatively, you may wish to write your own essay about the future of the planet or the future of your country.



# TEACHERS' NOTES AND ANSWER KEY

**Please Note:** The article in this lesson refers to adult themes. It may not be suitable for younger learners.

## Pre-Reading Activities

### B: Vocabulary - Answers

1. c, 2. d, 3. g, 4. h, 5. b, 6. e, 7. f, 8. a.

## Reading Activities

### A: Scanning - Answers

Answer: b

### B: Text Organization - Answers

1. Growing up...
2. It is while visiting Hott Totts,...
3. Although a virus...
4. Episodes in 'Oryx and Crake'...
5. Travel advisories...
6. Many reviewers...

### C: True, False or Not Given

1. F (It's a video game.), 2. T, 3. T, 4. F (It's an acronym for Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary), 5. T, 6. NG.

### D: Matching Sentences - Notes

Make sure students understand that they are looking at Part Three of the article. Remind them to refer to Parts One and Two before putting the sentences together as this will help them to understand more quickly where the sentences of Part Three fit in. (You may like to give them a copy of Part Three below once they have finished this activity. They may then find it easier to do Reading Activity E.)

### D: Matching Sentences - Answers

## Part Three

### Inspiration After Sept. 11

The novels differ in that 'Oryx and Crake' does not have an outwardly feminist theme. It is also Atwood's first novel where a male character narrates throughout.

Atwood explained that her inspiration for the novel came from the back pages of newspapers and magazines. The spate of anthrax incidents following Sept. 11, 2001 also served as an inspiration.

'Things happen all the time, and I don't mean terrorist attacks, but new germs, new people trying to kill people in the Japanese subway system.

Little things boil up but usually they are quite small and containable,' she explained.

'In order to really do a massive job, you would have to have an overall plan and do something so fast that it couldn't be contained.'

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### D: Matching Sentences - Answers

1. The novels differ in that 'Oryx and Crake' does not have ... an outwardly feminist theme.
2. It is also Atwood's first novel where a male character ... narrates throughout.
3. Atwood explained that her inspiration for the novel ... came from the back pages of newspapers and magazines.
4. The spate of anthrax incidents following Sept. 11, 2001 ... also served as an inspiration.
5. 'Things happen all the time, and I don't mean terrorist attacks, ... but new germs, new people trying to kill people in the Japanese subway system.
6. Little things boil up ... but usually they are quite small and containable,' she explained.
7. 'In order to really do a massive job, you would have to have an overall plan ... and do something so fast that it couldn't be contained.'

### E: Choose The Best Answer - Answers

1. a, 2. b, 3. c, 4. b.

## Post-Reading Activities

### A: Acronyms - Sample Answers

1. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.
2. World Health Organization.
3. **Organizations:** UN - United Nations, UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund, NHS - National Health Service (UK).
4. **Countries:** UK - United Kingdom, USA - United States of America, RF - Russian Federation, RSA - Republic of South Africa.
5. **Phrases:** BTW - by the way, TGF - Thank God it's Friday, ASAP - as soon as possible.

### B: Find Someone Who... - Notes

Give students time to read through the questions and ask you about anything they do not understand. Then tell students to stand up and mingle, trying to find a person for each of the questions. Their aim is to be able to match a name next to each question. Tell them, however, that this is good conversation practice and they do not have to 'rush' talking to other students. When they find someone who says 'Yes' to one of their questions, they can ask a couple of follow-up questions of that person. Once they have someone's name for that question, they should not ask anyone else the same question.

At the end of the activity, ask each student (if your class is quite small) to give a report back on one of their questions. For example, one student might say, "Chris had a story published in a newspaper once. When he was nine he entered a writing competition with a story about a pig. It won second prize and was published in the newspaper and his parents were very proud of him."

(If your class is large, you could ask for volunteers to give a report on one question.)

### C: Vocabulary Extension - Part Two - Text To Be Given To Students

I've always wanted to be a writer. One day last year I decided to write a book. At first I couldn't think of anything to say but finally, in 1. \_\_\_\_\_ I started writing about my family. I wrote about my children and my elderly father who has 2. \_\_\_\_\_ problems.

Each morning I would get up very early and sit at my desk. I would stare out the window hoping for 3. \_\_\_\_\_, but some mornings I couldn't think of anything to say. Slowly the novel took shape and finally it was ready for the publisher.

I sent it off and would sit by the mail box each day, waiting in the 4. \_\_\_\_\_ hope for good news.

Eventually a letter came back from the publisher about my book. I 5. \_\_\_\_\_ from nervousness as I tore open the envelope.

My hands were shaking as I read the letter. "Congratulations!" it said. "Your novel is 6. \_\_\_\_\_! Thousands of people will want to read it and you will be a household name."

I laughed out loud and rushed to share the wonderful news with my family.

But why was I dressed in my pajamas? Why was it 5 a.m.?

7. \_\_\_\_\_ beaded my face as I realized my stupidity. I had been dreaming at my desk and my novel was still unfinished.

My laptop hummed as I looked around 8. \_\_\_\_\_, hoping that I was mistaken and that I hadn't imagined the letter.

Then sadly I returned to my laptop. Success was still possible but I would get nowhere by dreaming. It was time to get back to work. I began to type again.

### C: Vocabulary Extension - Answers

#### Part One

**inspiration** - encouragement; creative urge; example (for action, behavior)

**perspiration** - sweat

**desperation** - the state of not caring about the consequences; despair; hopelessness

**respiration** - breathing

#### Part Two

1. desperation, 2. respiratory, 3. inspiration, 4. desperate, 5. perspired, 6. inspirational, 7. perspiration, 8. desperately.