

DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHERS

LISTENING SECTION

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH

Wednesday, June 18, 2008 — 9:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., only

BE SURE THAT THE LISTENING SECTION IS ADMINISTERED TO EVERY STUDENT.

- 1 Before the start of the examination period, say:

Do not open the examination booklet until you are instructed to do so.

- 2 Distribute one examination booklet and one essay booklet to each student.

- 3 After each student has received an examination booklet and an essay booklet, say:

Tear off the answer sheet, which is the last page of the examination booklet, and fill in its heading. Now circle “Session One” and fill in the heading on each page of your essay booklet.

- 4 After the students have filled in all headings on their answer sheets and essay booklets, say:

Look at page 2 of your examination booklet and follow along while I read the **Overview** and **The Situation**.

Overview:

For this part of the test, you will listen to an account about Madame Marie Curie, answer some multiple-choice questions, and write a response based on the situation described below. You will hear the account twice. You may take notes on the next page anytime you wish during the readings.

The Situation:

Your science class is exploring qualities that make scientists successful. You have decided to make a presentation to your class on the qualities that made Madame Marie Curie a successful scientist. In preparation for writing your presentation, listen to an account by writer and historian Barbara Goldsmith about Madame Marie Curie. Then use relevant information from the account to write your presentation.

Now I will read the passage aloud to you for the first time.

- 5 Now read the passage aloud, including the attribution at the end. Read with appropriate expression, but without added comment.

Listening Passage

When I was a teenager, a class assignment was to find a hero or heroine, someone who inspires you to be the best person you can be. Perhaps because she seemed exotic, I chose Madame Curie. I cut a photograph of her out of a newspaper and tacked it up on my bulletin board. Underneath, I put her quotation, “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood.”

Good advice, I thought. In truth, I didn’t know much about her—just a few facts and, I found out later, a lot of misconceptions. I knew that in 1893 Madame Curie became the first woman to secure a degree in physics at the Sorbonne in Paris—one of only two women in a science program of more than 1000 men. She was first in her class. She was the first woman to be appointed a professor at that institution. She was the first woman to win not one but two Nobel Prizes: the first in 1903 for her contribution to the discovery of radioactivity and the second in 1911 for her isolation of the elements polonium and radium.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the luminous element radium was hailed as an almost magical substance. Its discovery was thought to be Marie Curie’s greatest accomplishment. Radium destroyed cancers and other deep-seated tumors, but it also became a world-class fad when it was added to cosmetics, toothpaste, tea and tonics. Since it glowed in the dark, it was used for paint, watch dials, costumes and toys, among other products. Radium was widely utilized until people began to die from overexposure to it—as did Madame Curie, her daughter Irène and countless others.

In fact, Marie Curie’s great discovery was not the element radium but the uses of radioactivity, the fierce invisible energy released by atoms that could be used for the good of humanity or for its destruction. Her discovery paved the path to the atom bomb but also to harnessing the energy we now use to improve our daily lives. Her insight that radioactivity was an atomic property led to scientific discoveries that are being made right now...

As I began to research Marie Curie’s papers, I discovered not the idol of my youth but a real woman who was forced to cope with many of the same problems we have today: trying to balance a career with family life, raising children as a single mother, fighting the prejudice that often follows successful professional women, and having to prove again and again her worth to others and to herself.

The Marie Curie I found was not what I’d expected. She wasn’t French; she wasn’t even Marie. She was born Marya Salomee Sklodowska in 1867 in Warsaw, Poland (a country that, at that time, technically did not exist, having been taken over by three other countries after Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo in 1815). In school she was forced to speak and write only in Russian. Her father, once a respected physics professor, was dismissed for trying to teach Polish pride. When Marya was 7, her sister died of typhus; four years later, her mother succumbed to tuberculosis. But this brave child later wrote, “Never let one be beaten down by persons or by events.”

Her family was desperately poor—poor in a way that a stamp, or a skuttle of coal or an occasional apple, was a treat. But Marya had dreams—big dreams. She worked for eight years as a governess to earn enough money to come to Paris, where she lived in an unheated fifth-floor garret on a measly diet of bread, tea and an occasional egg. Yet, she wrote, this was “the happiest time of my life. All I saw and learned was a new delight to me ... a new world opened to me ... which I was at last permitted to know in all liberty.” While she was determined to make her dream of becoming a scientist come true, she was well aware, she wrote, that “the way to progress is never swift or easy.” Marie believed that if you pursue your dream, things that seem like sacrifices don’t really matter.

Being a woman scientist was difficult in those days. Dr. Hélène Langevin-Joliot, Marie's physicist granddaughter, points out that at the 1911 Solvay Conference of eminent scientists there were 23 male scientists to one woman—Marie Curie. (She adds that the ratio is about the same today.)

Marie's husband, Pierre Curie, also was remarkable for his time. He treated his wife as an equal, championed her accomplishments and supported her work. I'd read that they had fallen in love at first sight. Their letters tell a different story. At first, Marie sought Pierre's technical assistance; neither of them was looking for love. Pierre wrote that he found women a distraction, and she had wanted to return to Poland to help others. They became best friends. It was only after they married that they fell deeply in love—a love that ended only when Pierre died in a horrible accident, struck down by a horse and wagon. Marie—who was only 38 when Pierre died—told her daughters that it's always good to marry your best friend.

The woman who emerged from the Curie papers was someone who lived a selfless life. "Our special duty is to aid those to whom we think we can be most useful," she wrote. The Curies, never wealthy, gave much of their money to the pursuit of science. They refused to patent radium because that "was not in the scientific spirit," even though they knew it could bring a fortune. They gained little profit from Marie's discovery, while others became multimillionaires.

After Pierre died, Marie bravely carried on, raising her two daughters and working steadily until her death at 67. As I came to know her, I realized that heroes and heroines can be all too human. Marie worried that her daughter Eve wore too much makeup and that daughter Irène had married a playboy who traded on the Curie name—until he proved her wrong by becoming a Nobel Prize-winning scientist (as did Irène, for chemistry).

Here was a woman who triumphed in a world where men made the rules but who also was shy and vulnerable and suffered periods of depression in which she was unable to function. Yet she always bounced back. In short, Madame Curie was not the frozen symbol of perfection I had picked as a young girl but a woman who displayed courage, dedication and a sense of values to guide other lives. Albert Einstein said of her that she was the only person he knew who "was not corrupted by fame."

These days, heroes and heroines are in scarce supply. We live in an age of image, where people are famous for being famous. Our celebrity culture often glorifies those who are notorious, not noteworthy. An image can be easily altered: It can go from good to bad in an instant. Today's heroine becomes tomorrow's villain, and we become cynical when these synthetic idols disappoint us. Not so with Marie Curie, who believed that "you cannot build a better society without improving individuals." She thought of the good of humanity before her own good. She blazed a trail for others to follow. By the time I completed my book, I'd found my heroine.

—excerpted from "I Found My Heroine"
Parade, November 28, 2004

6 After reading the passage aloud once, say:

You may take a few minutes to look over **The Situation** and your notes.
(Pause) Now I will read the passage aloud a second time.

7 Read the passage a second time.

8 After the second reading, say:

Now turn to page 4 of your examination booklet, read the directions, and answer the multiple-choice questions. Be sure to follow all the directions given in your examination booklet and your essay booklet. You may now begin.