

READING PASSAGE 3

Answer Questions 30-46, which are based on Reading Passage 3 on pages 10 and 11.

Understanding the lessons of the past

The historian and philosopher R.G. Collingwood likened the difference between those who understood history and those who did not to that between 'the trained woodsman' and 'the ignorant traveller' in a forest. While the latter marches along unaware of their surroundings, thinking 'Nothing here but trees and grass', the woodsman sees what lurks ahead. 'Look,' he will say, 'there's a tiger in that grass.' What Collingwood meant was that, through their familiarity with people, places and ideas, historians are often equipped to see how a situation might turn out. He had a wide-ranging view of the role historians might play in society, believing that their understanding of human behaviour and long-term economic or cultural processes meant that they could be more than just specialists in the past. By being able to spot the tiger in the grass, historians could also advise on contemporary and future challenges faced by the world.

For around 2,500 years, the notion of the historian as a commentator on the present day was well established. Thucydides, a historian in ancient Greece, believed that his *History of the Peloponnesian War* was not just an account of the war between Greece and Sparta, but a document revealing the basic causes of military conflict in every period and place, and so would have lasting value. Historians writing in later periods saw themselves as not only piecing together the details of specific events, but also helping their readers to understand current social and political situations.

Of course, historians cannot predict the future precisely and their assessments can be wrong. Yet the idea of history providing a valuable guide for present and future action was seldom questioned. This makes sense. After all, the past is our only source of information about what works and what does not; there is nothing else to draw upon. In their everyday lives, people generally look back and review their past experience and use this to help them determine their future actions. While two situations may not be perfectly alike, nevertheless they see patterns and lessons in the past that can help them make better choices.

In recent decades, the longstanding view that history is something which can help people understand the present and plan for the future has fallen out of favour with historians. Studying a series of historical events and using this knowledge to help society deal with current problems makes many of today's historians feel uneasy. There are two reasons for this. One is that historians no longer look at the big picture but work in ever-narrower fields, becoming specialists in topics which are of interest to only a small number of colleagues. The other is that because no two situations are exactly the same, attempting to compare two events or situations runs the risk of oversimplification.

However, other historians continue to insist that history can help those who are responsible for making important policy decisions, such as government officials. Most fundamentally, they believe that history teaches us to investigate the roots of a situation and search for the underlying, long-term causes of problems. If historians can pinpoint the factors that brought a situation about, they can make helpful observations about how likely it is that a proposed course of action will succeed.



Perhaps the most accessible tool offered by history is analogy – a comparison between similar events. It is conventional for people in all walks of life, not only professional historians, to liken a historical event to present circumstances and to spot similarities. People in government often use historical analogies in order to justify their policies. Using analogies is a valuable way of making a point, yet it is all too easy to misuse them or for analogies to be misunderstood. Historians can examine analogies and judge whether they are appropriate and can also identify the most relevant analogies and employ them to enrich public debate about important issues in society. Currently, the range of analogies utilised in public debate is depressingly small – almost any event of significance is related to either the international crises of the 1930s or the economic problems of the 1970s. The role of the historian should be to provide public speakers with a new and more appropriate range of alternatives.

So can we ever learn from history? Although history does not provide rules for action that are consistently reliable, or state definitively what should be done in any given scenario, we should remember Thucydides' view that 'the present, while never repeating the past exactly, must inevitably have some similarities to it. Hence, so must the future'. We should also be aware that if history teaches anything, it is that radical plans to completely change the status quo rarely work out as intended, so policy makers need to move cautiously.

The scepticism among the majority of historians about whether it is worthwhile applying the lessons of the past to the present is a shame. If they make a claim to expertise in cause and effect, they should have faith in their ability to see patterns and future trends. Furthermore, the public expect historians to be willing to tackle big problems. The apparent anxiety among historians about whether history has practical value may be one reason why history graduates worry that their history degree might prove 'useless'.

What makes history so stimulating is that it offers deep insights into the human condition which are of enduring value and impossible to acquire in other ways. Collingwood believed that the past is contained in the present and so 'lives on' because the present is nothing more than the accumulated decisions and actions of the past. History is 'alive and active' and stands 'in the closest possible relation to practical life'.



Questions 30 – 34

Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

Write the correct letter in boxes 30-34 on your answer sheet.

- 30** What is the point of the comparison made in the first paragraph?
- A** It suggests that historians exaggerate potential problems in modern society.
 - B** It explains the difficulties historians have in assessing unexpected events.
 - C** It emphasises that historians have the skill to predict future developments.
 - D** It describes the best way for historians to analyse unfamiliar situations.
- 31** What did the historian Thucydides see as the main purpose of his work?
- A** to discuss what made a particular conflict unique
 - B** to ensure there was an accurate record of military campaigns
 - C** to focus on how to win wars quickly and easily
 - D** to identify the underlying reasons for all armed conflict
- 32** What is the main idea the writer expresses in the third paragraph?
- A** We tend to make decisions based on what happened to us in the past.
 - B** We are unable to imagine a future life that is different from the past.
 - C** We wrongly assume there are many connections between past events.
 - D** We find it hard to know whether our past mistakes can teach us anything.
- 33** In the fourth paragraph, the writer suggests that historians feel concerned about
- A** missing important details when analysing past events.
 - B** failing to communicate clearly with the public.
 - C** struggling to work with colleagues in related fields.
 - D** making complex situations sound too straightforward.
- 34** In the fifth paragraph, the writer says that historians can help people in positions of power by
- A** pointing out the mistakes that they have made.
 - B** evaluating how practical their proposed measures are.
 - C** reminding them of important moments in recent history.
 - D** suggesting a specific course of action.



Questions 35 – 40

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer in Reading Passage 3?

In boxes 35-40 on your answer sheet, write

YES	<i>if the statement agrees with the views of the writer</i>
NO	<i>if the statement contradicts the views of the writer</i>
NOT GIVEN	<i>if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this</i>

- 35 Using analogies is common practice among individuals working in a range of professions.
- 36 Politicians tend to avoid using historical analogies when discussing the measures they are proposing.
- 37 Analogies are a useful way of ensuring that people will understand the point being made.
- 38 Historians disagree about which historical periods have most in common with the present day.
- 39 In public debates, people refer too frequently to the events of the 1930s and 1970s.
- 40 People who engage in public debates are reluctant to make use of historians as a source of new analogies.



Questions 41 – 46

Complete the summary using the list of words, **A-J**, below.

Write the correct letter, **A-J**, in boxes 41-46 on your answer sheet.

Learning from history

We cannot always get precise **41** from history on what action should be taken to deal with current problems. However, there will always be some **42** between the present and the past which we can learn from. One important lesson from history is that trying to bring about a comprehensive **43** is usually a mistake. Unfortunately, some historians don't have **44** in their skills and as a result can sometimes appear to doubt the **45** of their subject to contemporary society. The insights that history provides regarding people's **46** are always valuable and cannot necessarily be obtained from studying other subjects.

A influence
D resemblance
G consequence
J behaviour

B confidence
E relevance
H transformation

C approach
F guidance
I difference

