

Life is more fun when you know
you're going to die!
Comprehension worksheet
Part TWO

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1. DON'T want to appear unduly maudlin on a Sunday morning but I am going to discuss death. About six years ago I discovered I suffer from an incurable condition that will eventually claim my life.
2. I've known about it since I was very young but for a large part of my life I was in what is known as "denial", never believing that I could fall victim to it. Once I acknowledged it and realised that I only had a certain time to live, it changed my attitude enormously.
3. You've no idea how much fun you can have when you finally come to realise that there may be no tomorrow. Sunsets in the bush become even more dramatic and you can spend hours just sitting on a rock watching the ocean roll in, knowing that there is nothing else you would rather be doing right then.
4. Relationships with other people become more important and you learn that close friendships and money matters don't usually go well together. You also realise that life is too short to spend with people you don't much care for.
5. This incurable condition of mine is known simply as mortality. Depending on the seriousness of the condition it can have quite unpleasant symptoms, but for many people it is just there and they remain unaware of it until it is too late.
6. Unavoidable though it is, mortality is not a fashionable topic of conversation. Glossy magazines don't carry full-page adverts for designer coffins. When it comes to the accoutrements of death there are no premium brands because even the advertising industry realises that, at that stage, who gives a damn?
7. In our dynamic, thrusting society death is seen as the ultimate failure. It is uncool to die. Which is presumably why some people are prepared to spend enormous amounts of money on prolonging their lives, regardless of quality, in the vain hope that they won't be seen as party poopers.
8. A by-product of this desire for immortality is the equally absurd quest for eternal youth. There are a few women of 50 who deserve to look like 30-year-olds because they have eaten sensible diets, exercised regularly, stayed off the booze and never smoked. Some are just lucky and obviously swam in the deep end of the gene pool.
9. However, most women of 50 get the looks they deserve (as do men) and no amount of cosmetic tinkering and Botox injections can disguise that.
10. Can there be a more pitiable sight, I wonder, than a woman who has obviously spent a small fortune on cosmetic surgery in a desperate attempt to make herself look younger? Women's magazines frequently carry stories telling readers how to "look younger in minutes".
11. It usually involves slapping on some expensive rejuvenation cream with a secret formula developed by scientists at a remote laboratory in the Swiss Alps. Whether the formula actually exists or, as seems more likely, was dreamed up by the marketing department of a pharmaceutical company doesn't seem to bother the users, who are prepared to pay through the nose to look younger. Vanity, thy name is woman.
12. It would, of course, be a lot more honest if women's magazines ran the headline "Disguise yourself as a younger woman", but that would shatter the all important illusion that, by rubbing in creams, going on weird diets and indulging in expensive surgery you are actually becoming younger. Well, mentally, maybe.
13. The preoccupation with eternal life and youthful good looks helps to explain our inability to understand the AIDS epidemic in this country. Almost a year ago I wrote a column suggesting that the government

was "unwilling to pump public money" into providing HIV drugs because it would involve keeping an economically unviable portion of the population alive.

14. The chances of many of these people becoming active contributors to the South African economy after a course of free drugs is, sadly, remote. I was expecting howls of protest but I heard nothing, so must I assume that I was spot on.

15. HIV cannot be caught by breathing tainted air. In most cases it is a "voluntary" condition, transmitted sexually. The fact that it is widespread and growing is often put down to a lack of education but it could just as easily be that the threat of AIDS is not a particularly strong deterrent to people who know that their quality of life, if they abstain from casual sex, is never going to amount to much.

16. Unlike the cosmetically altered zombies terrified of the ignominy of death, some people actually embrace their own mortality.

David Bullard, *Sunday Times*, 6 April 2003

Paragraph 8:

1. Why should the "quest for eternal youth" be seen as "absurd"? (4)
2. What is meant by "some women obviously swam in the deep end of the gene pool"? (4)

Paragraph 9:

3. Explain the sarcastic comment that "most women of 50 get the looks they deserve". (2)
4. What are "cosmetic tinkering and Botox injections"? What are they supposed to do? (4)

Paragraph 12:

5. Why would it be more honest of magazines to run the headline "Disguise yourself as a younger women"? (4)

Paragraphs 13 to 15:

6. Why does the writer refer to HIV carriers as "an economically unviable portion of the population"? (4)
7. The writer does not believe that contracting HIV is caused by ignorance. Indeed, the threat of getting AIDS, he says, is not a deterrent to many people. What reason does he give for his argument? (4)
8. What does the writer mean when he says that HIV is a "voluntary condition"? (2)
10. Which of the following BEST describes the language style of this article? Explain why. (4)
 1. Formal; 2. Colloquial; 3. Jargon; 4. Slang.
11. Which of the following BEST describes the overall style of this article? Explain why. (4)
 1. Humorous; 2. Sarcastic; 3. Ironic; 4. Insulting.

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