

## UNIT 11: READING

### 1 Read the text below. What type of text is it? Choose the best answer.

- 1 An extract from a newspaper article
- 2 An extract from an article in an academic journal
- 3 An extract from a magazine article
- 4 An extract from an undergraduate university textbook
- 5 An extract from publicity information about a university

### CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is the scientific study of people, society and culture. The word itself derives from Greek and means 'to talk about human beings'. Cultural or socio-cultural anthropology is viewed by some as one of the four main fields of anthropology. These are:

- Biological / physical
- Socio-cultural
- Linguistic
- Archaeology

Socio-cultural anthropology developed as a field of study in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pioneering researchers travelled to often previously unexplored locations around the world and studied the societies, customs and family life of the native inhabitants. This type of research generated a great deal of interest in both Europe and America.

One well-known cultural anthropologist of the time, Margaret Mead, was a young, educated American woman. One area that she investigated which raised many questions about American society was her research into adolescence.

In the US at the time, and still today, a child's adolescent years are viewed as a time of rebellion. These days it is not considered unusual for teenagers to experiment with drugs, alcohol, sex and sometimes violent and/or illegal activity. Some view this as part of a human being's normal developmental process. In other words, adolescents are learning about the world and becoming independent from their parents.

Mead observed family life and children in communities on islands in the South Pacific such as Samoa. She discovered that the transition from childhood to adulthood in many of these cultures was a smooth one

and not characterised by rebellion in any way. Realisations such as this introduced the idea that certain aspects of behaviour are not necessarily part of an individual's natural process of development. Instead, it may be the influence of society on the individual.

Other studies demonstrated how the role played by children in the family could influence the role that those individuals would take up in society.

In America, for example, it was observed how the children in Latin American families generally played a more active role in the house, bringing up their younger brothers and sisters and doing household chores. Because of this upbringing, these children displayed prosocial tendencies, in other words, they were very helpful to others.

This culturally-influenced characteristic contrasted and conflicted with the typical American school culture of individual success and achieving one's own potential. This competitive atmosphere is present in artistic, sports and academic arenas. Therefore it is possible that the underperformance of many Latin American students in schools could derive from the mismatch between the pupils' culture and that of the school.

This area of study is highly complex. The generalisations that have been given as examples above apply to groups of people. However, there is the added problem of individual personalities and how those unique individuals behave within their own cultural group. It is not an easy task to find where the influence of group culture stops and where the influence of individual personality starts.

**2 Find the answers to the following questions in the text above.**

- 1 When did people start to study cultural anthropology as a subject?
- 2 When cultural anthropology emerged as a subject, how did researchers collect their data?
- 3 In paragraph four, why are 'drugs, alcohol, sex and sometimes violent and/or illegal activity' mentioned?
- 4 The text suggests a reason why this type of behaviour amongst teenagers is tolerated in modern America. What is it?
- 5 Mead didn't accept this explanation. Why not?
- 6 What does the adjective 'prosocial' mean?
- 7 Why do children from Latin American families tend to be more 'prosocial'?
- 8 Why might children from Latin American families not do well in school in America?
- 9 According to this text, why is cultural anthropology complex?