

ADVANCED LEVEL READING COMPREHENSION SAMPLE

Task 3

The Decline in Home Cooking

Once they were upheld as the paragons of feminine genius in the kitchen, but all that remains now of Les Mères de Lyon—the famous 20th-century French mother cooks—are their names. Mère Brazier may be written above the door of the restaurant at No. 12, Rue Royale in France's second major city, but there's a male chef in Eugenie Brazier's former kitchen. Mère Lea's stove at La Voûte (Chez Léa) is today **tended** by chef Philippe Rabatel and the restaurants of those equally renown priestesses, Mère Paulette Castaing and Marie Bourgeois, were long ago taken over by male chefs, who work very differently to their female forebears.

These bistro, or porte-pots as they were known, originated as places where the Lyon **white-collar work force** could stop and eat perfectly cooked, comforting, motherly food made from seasonal, often inexpensive ingredients. Les Mères often worked with only one assistant, and their short menus and practical techniques are in marked contrast to the technique heavy "haute cuisine" prepared by brigades of male chefs today.

The decline in French home cooking—specifically the nurturing, bourgeois home cooking for which French women have always been admired-- joins a trend that has affected all major European nations as their societies and economic structures changed post World War II.

Home cooking is in decline in Southern Europe as it is in the northern and Nordic countries, yet in each there are variables in the style of change. It is happening faster in certain countries—such as the U.K., where total industrialization was complete in the 19th century—than others.

Analyzing the decline across these nations is mainly a matter of reading the figures for sales of convenience and fast food, and collecting statistics that mark change in attitude and trend. Market-research firm Euromonitor carried out a **comprehensive** study of changing habits across Europe from 2000–2007. It found that among large, less affluent populations in European countries, the take up of fast food and convenience food is increasing. The researcher's latest figures this year for sales of packaged food in the U.K., France, Italy, Denmark and Germany, for example, show an average increase of 15% in consumption. But there is a parallel story of a much smaller number of wealthier women and men in the same countries becoming increasingly concerned about their health, trying organic and cooking fresh foods from scratch. When this group buys convenience food, they tend to buy the healthier, often natural or organic, option.

You cannot **pin** the demise of home cooking in European countries **on** a single issue. The loss of structured mealtimes can be put down to a number of causes including urbanization and smaller households, but the changing role of women in European society in the past 40 or 50 years is very significant. Exercising

their right to equality in the workplace raises the family income and the hard-pressed career woman relies more on prepared food or eating out when it comes to feeding her family. Mr. Marquis, an acclaimed chef, believes that aspirational tastes have put good traditional home cooking lower on the agenda in **upwardly mobile** European families. "In my youth, we had one car and ate very well on a budget supported only by my father's salary," he says. "Now everyone wants three cars, Apple technology and long-haul holidays, so both parents must work. Food becomes less significant," he adds.

There is the added dynamic that women are sometime sole **breadwinners**. Their male partners can enthusiastically take up the home-cooking role. Male keenness for cookery remains in the margin of wealthier families, but there is a role reversal that fits with the eminence of chefs in the media and heading up kitchens in the world's "best restaurants."

Controversially, there is the accusation that liberated women (who gave up cooking) inadvertently generated a modern irresponsible food industry. The women that chose not to follow their mother and grandmother's career, left the door open. Had the food companies created a healthy **surrogate** for all and not just wealthy society—we might not have the fast-food industry and ensuing health problems, such as rising obesity. It is important to note that no feminist would have intended such an outcome, and that other environmental and economical factors have contributed to the problem.

It is not that women in Europe need leave their jobs and go back to housework, but families risk rearing a generation of "kitchen orphans," men and women who have never **witnessed** their parents cooking. There is no substitute for this; no popular TV chef can replace the effectiveness of the conversation about the right way to prepare a dish between mother and daughter, or indeed father and son. The talented Les Mères gave up their kitchens to male chefs and their brigades of helpers, **worn down** by an unequal society that gave them too much work and little assistance, as did millions of stay-at-home mothers throughout Europe. In a culture where gender roles are more evenly balanced, there is a chance to revive the heroic, nurturing motherly food of each nation. It isn't just a sociological need, but an economic one. Mr. Marquis, whose life's work has been to emulate this, says a return to these basics is politically necessary. "In the past there were economic reasons for women getting out of the kitchen; now there is an economic reason for their simple, perfectionist cooking to be restored. This is the culture that is the envy of the world."

From *The Wall Street Journal*

Choose the best option a), b) or c) according to the text

1. Male chefs

- a) are better cooks than women.
- b) make more complicated dishes.
- c) are more practical.

2. The loss of home cooking has resulted mainly from
 - a) the loss of structured mealtimes.
 - b) women not wanting to cook.
 - c) spending money on more consumer products.

3. Prepared food was originally intended for
 - a) workers.
 - b) wealthier families.
 - c) less wealthy families.

4. Modern women
 - a) asked the food industry to produce fast food.
 - b) asked the food industry to produce healthy food.
 - c) didn't realise that fast food would be created.

5. Home cooking needs to come back
 - a) to maintain equal gender roles.
 - b) because of the economic climate.
 - c) for health reasons.

Now choose the LEAST APPROPRIATE meaning, according to the context, for these words from the text (in bold)

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| 6. tended | a) modernised b) managed c) watched over |
| 7. white-collar work force | a) clerics b) non-manual workers c) office workers |
| 8. comprehensive | a) extensive b) selective c) thorough |
| 9. pin...on | a) blame...on b) attribute...to c) change...by |
| 10. upwardly-mobile | a) technologically improving b) socially-advancing
c) class-ascending |
| 11. breadwinners | a) earners b) workers c) home cooks |
| 12. controversially | a) arguably b) accordingly c) disputedly |
| 13. surrogate | a) stand-in b) replacement c) selection |
| 14. witnessed | a) tried b) seen c) observed |
| 15. worn down | a) beaten b) survived c) weakened |

KEY 1.-b, 2.-a, 3.-b, 4.-c, 5.-b, 6.-a, 7.-a, 8.-b, 9.-c,
10.-a, 11.-c, 12.-b, 13.-c, 14.-a, 15.-b