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ФИО: Локтионова Оксана Геннадьевна

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СТРАНОВЕДЕНИЕ НА ИНОСТРАННОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

Методические указания по практическим занятиям
для студентов направления подготовки
38.03.01 Экономика (направленность (профиль)
«Мировая экономика»

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Составитель: К.А. Чеботарёва

Рецензент

Кандидат филологических наук, доцент *Л.А. Чернышёва*

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What basic facts do you know (geographical situation, territory, population, political system, history, etc.)?

Now read the text to find more information to add to your file.

TEXT 1. THE UNITED KINGDOM?

England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland were once customarily known as the British Isles. The phrase is still used as a geographical expression. But even as such the term must be used with caution. In fact, the people of these islands have seldom been united, politically or culturally. Efforts were made to unite them since the 12th century but they only came under the same monarch in 1603, and the complete political union, which was at last achieved in 1801, endured only for 120 years. The first attempt at unity was made by the Norman king Edward I at the end of the 13th century. He succeeded in Wales where huge Norman castles were built and their lords guarded the frontier. Edward I emphasized his conquest of Wales by conferring the title of prince of Wales in 1301 on his eldest son. The title has been regularly given to the eldest son of the reigning monarch ever since. Norman colonization of Ireland, though, did not stretch far beyond Dublin and the coastal towns. In Scotland, Edward failed disastrously. It was not till the reign of Elizabeth that Scotland was brought — and brought permanently — into the orbit of England. The Scottish dependence on England was achieved by diplomacy and was completed in 1603 by the succession of James VI, to the throne of England as James I. In the same year the most formidable Irish rebellion was crushed; and James I as the ruler of the three kingdoms could style himself King of Great Britain. But it was a fragile union, and it disintegrated in the next reign.

The third attempt to unify all the three kingdoms was marked by the Act of Union with Scotland in 1707 This Act also illustrates the differences between English policy in Scotland and English policy in Ireland, which were the results of the revolutions of the 17th century. While the Act of Union with Scotland was being

negotiated, the Irish House of Commons passed a resolution requesting a similar union, but the English government declined to consider it. The Union of Britain with Ireland came nearly a century later — in 1801. By that time the Irish Parliament was reluctant and the British government had to use wholesale bribery in order to achieve it. Britain has never been a completely unitary state. It has never had under the same Crown one legislature, one established church, one law. The period from 1800 to 1922 is the period during which unity was most nearly achieved. Even so it was a fragile unity and cracks were not long in appearing. In 1921 a treaty was signed giving dominion status to Ireland with Ulster (Northern Ireland) remaining within the United Kingdom. Since 1922 the process of unification has been reversed. The greater part of Ireland is independent, and there are political parties which advocate separation and independence for Scotland and Wales.

Comprehension questions:

Why should one be careful when using the phrase “the British Isles”?

When was the first attempt at unity made? Was it successful?

What difficulties did the union with Ireland present?

Can Great Britain be described as a unitary state? Why?

What does the question mark in the title imply?

TEXT 2. THE BRITISH EMPIRE

PRE-READING QUESTIONS:

1. What is an empire? In what way is it different from other states? Is there a second meaning of the word? (Give examples)
2. The world has witnessed the rise and fall of many empires. Can you name a few?
3. Think about the history of the Russian Empire. What facts do you remember?

Read the text about the British Empire and point out the stages in Britain's empire building.

At the beginning of the 20th century the British Empire covered more than one fifth of the land mass of the globe; it had interests on every sea, and was the largest empire the world had ever known. At that time London was the centre of the world, and children learned phrases which expressed in simple terms the "truths" which the British regarded as paramount: The sun never sets on the British Empire; India is the brightest jewel in the Imperial Crown; Britannia rules the waves. The first stage in Britain's empire-building began in the reign of Elizabeth I. The colonies in Virginia and New England along the east coast of North America were central to the First British Empire. After the revolt of the thirteen original British colonies in 1776, the flag of the infant United States was raised, which is usually taken as marking the beginning of a second British Empire. Its foundations were laid in 1750–1850, during which Britain acquired India, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and other territories. The colonization of Australia and New Zealand and, later South Africa was mostly settling and cultivating unoccupied lands. In India, a high civilization more ancient than Europe, which became the centre-piece of the second British Empire, the situation was different. It demanded new diplomatic skills. The unwise treatment of Indian soldiers in British pay resulted in revolt in 1847 which quickly became a national movement against foreign rule. It was India with its strong independence movement that eventually started the disintegration of the British Empire. After 1945 the Empire collapsed in a matter of 20 years, leaving a legacy of British-influenced institutions, (the British Commonwealth of Nations with Queen Elizabeth II as its head) and, in some cases, anti-British feelings.

INFERRING

When you read a text some details are not stated clearly but can be understood (inferred) from the other details which are stated.

1. What do the “truths” about the British Empire tell the reader?
2. How was colonization of India different from that of other territories?
3. How did this affect the future of the British Empire?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What relations prevail within the former empire? Why?
2. Is it inevitable that empires eventually collapse?
3. Looking back at ancient and recent history can you point out possible consequences of the disintegration of empires?

THE EXPLORATION OF CANADA (PATHFINDERS AND PASSAGEWAYS)

John Cabot was not searching for new fishing grounds when he discovered his “New Found Land” in 1497, he was seeking a new commercial route to Asia. Yet within just a few years, hundreds of ships carrying thousands of fishermen were sailing annually to the rich fishing grounds he had stumbled upon. Breton and Norman fishermen were voyaging to Newfoundland as early as 1504. Before the turn of the 17th century, another industry had begun to emerge: the fur trade. Native peoples had been trading furs with European fishermen and explorers since the first early encounters (случайные встречи), but as beaver-fur hats became a fashion item in Europe at the end of the 16th century, contact between the two cultures dramatically increased. It also led to the establishment of the first permanent European settlements in Canada.

A. Arrange the events mentioned in the text in chronological order:

1. Beaver-fur hats became fashionable in Europe.
2. John Cabot discovered Newfoundland.
3. John Cabot started searching for a new commercial route to Asia.
4. Europeans began fishing the rich Atlantic waters.
5. The first European settlements were established in Canada.
6. Native peoples started trading furs with Europeans.
7. The fur trade became an industry.

B. Think of an incident or a funny episode from your past. Tell it to the class using all the past tenses.

Read the following text fast to find out:

1. what were the aims and results of Rezanov's mission (student A),
2. whether the affair described was a matter of economics or romance (student B).

RUSSIANS IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

In 1812 the Russians founded Fort Ross in Northern California, the farthest reach of their eastward expansion. The advance to the Pacific started in 1582 when the renegade cossack Ermak captured Isker, the capital of Western Siberian Khakanate. In 1741 the Russians reached Alaska, which remained Russian territory till 1867. Count Nikolai Petrovich Rezanov, a Russian-American company(1) official, was dispatched in 1806 to Spain's northern province of California. His immediate mission was to try to buy supplies, but he was also to investigate prospects for the fur trade. Spanish authorities were not happy to receive Rezanov. Spain's hold on its frontier province was fragile, and it did not wish to assist another power that might threaten its claim. Besides, trade with the Russians was illegal. Rezanov knew that he must succeed, or the colony at Sitka(2) might starve. In the midst of the negotiations, which seemed doomed to failure, the count announced that he had fallen in love with Dona Concepcion Arguello. It was no

coincidence that she was the daughter of the commandant of the San Francisco Presidio(3). The fifteen-year-old Dona Concepcion, fell for the gallant count, who was thirty-five years her senior. She spoke up for him, and the authorities of church and state, including her father, were won over. Rezanov was furnished with the goods he needed. But the marriage had to wait. Dona Concepcion, a Roman Catholic, needed permission from Rome, and Rezanov had to ask for the Tzar's consent to the marriage. Rezanov sailed for Sitka with his cargo of supplies, promising to return to his betrothed as soon as possible. Rezanov died tragically enroute to Russia. Years went by. Not knowing of his death Concepcion waited, watching the sea for his ship to return, hoping, loving. She turned down many suitors. Dona Concepcion learned of Rezanov's death only after years of waiting. She never married. Writers have made much of the star-crossed(4) romance. In many accounts, Dona Concepcion grieves her lost love; her life thereafter is desperate and empty. The evidence suggests a more commonplace affair. Rezanov might have intended to marry her, but his proposal probably was more a matter of expedience (практическая целесообразность) than love. Far from wasting away in later life, Dona Concepcion, according to one historian, "became a stout and rather jolly woman who found much pleasure in acts of kindness and charity". Rezanov brought back two ideas from his venture into Spanish California — the desire to establish permanent trade relations, and the wish to found a trading base on what the Russians referred to as the "New Albion" coast north of Spanish territory. Six years after his death this wish became a reality.

Notes:

1. Russian-American Company — a trading and fur trapping firm whose primary aim was to explore and settle new territories in North America and the Far East; set up in 1799 by Paul I; main shareholders were members of the Tzarist family.
2. Sitka — a town in Alaska; founded in 1799 by the Russian-American Company. In 1804–1867 its name was New Archangelsk.
3. San Francisco Presidio — a military base set up by the Spanish in 1776; one of the oldest in the USA.

4. Star-crossed (romance) — continuously affected by bad luck (from Shakespeare's play Romeo and Juliet).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think the story can be made into an exciting / romantic novel / poem? Have you read any? Is it similar to the story above?
2. Read the extract from the beautiful poem “Concepcion de Arguello” by Bret Harte* on the next page. Is it consistent with the facts given in the text? How do you understand the words “And by Love was consummated what Diplomacy begun”?
3. What is your opinion of Rezanov's diplomatic skills?
4. Do you think the loss of Russia's possessions in North America was inevitable?

Note:

*Bret Harte (1836–1902) — an American writer best known for a collection of short stories *The Luck of Roaring Camp* (1870).

Read the epigraph. What idea do you think is expressed in it?

*The English left behind them in India and elsewhere churches in Victorian Gothic style. Now Regent's Park(1) in London is overshadowed by a gilded mosque(2).
The wheel has come full circle.*

TEXT A.

The word 'Empire' is no longer in use. The term 'Commonwealth' has already been used for a long time to describe the independent countries associated under the British crown. Within the Commonwealth Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa are Britain's first equal partners. The Commonwealth has no formal institutions, though informal contacts are well maintained. After 1945 its structure produced a new problem. Citizens of countries in the Commonwealth were free to emigrate to Britain, and by 1961 the numbers were so great that the Government decided on restriction. Nonetheless, by 1978 about two million people with origins in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the West Indies were living in Britain. There has always been some racial prejudice among the English. Today with the continuing change in the make-up of the population racist feelings in Britain seem to be on the rise.

WHAT IS RACISM ACCORDING TO THE YOUNG?

Having to keep relationships secret "I can't walk down the street with my boyfriend because our families wouldn't approve of us going out together."

Lisa, 15

Being singled out "I was in McDonald's and these lads said to my friend, 'Why are you going around with a Paki?' and pointed at me. Then they made jokes about there being a smell of curry."

Parveen, 17

Ignorance at home “My mum says she doesn't really mind my having black friends, but she would draw the line at me going out with ‘one of them.’”

Karl, 15

Not getting the respect you deserve “I hate the way people speak to me as though I can't speak English, just because my parents are Chinese. They own a take-away and you would not believe the abuse they have to endure.”

Anna, 18.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Racism is a belief that some races are superior based on the false idea that things like skincolour make some people better than others. The Race Relations Act of 1976 makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone because of their race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), ethnic or national origins. It applies to: jobs, training, housing, education, services from councils, the health system, banks, pubs, clubs, restaurants, accommodation agencies, etc.

Despite the law, racial discrimination, as well as racial harassment and violence, are still widespread, and run through all areas of society. On average, a racial attack occurs every half hour. Black people are 60 times more likely than white people to be targets. Asian people, particularly women and children, experience the highest number of attacks. The law cannot change, or do anything about, people's attitudes, particularly when racism is not legally recognised. It is also often difficult to prove that discrimination is happening. Whites are not the only people who show racial prejudice. Blacks, Asians and Jews can be just as hostile in their attitudes to other groups.

Anti-racist organisations

There are many organisations, both locally and nationally, who are actively fighting against all forms of racial discrimination. The Commission for Racial

Equality exists to enforce the Race Relations Act, and will help anyone who feels they have been discriminated against.

Notes:

1. Regent's Park is one of the Royal Parks of London. It is in the northern part of central London.
2. The London Central Mosque (more commonly known as Regent's Park Mosque), is the principal mosque of London. It was founded during World War II, in recognition of the substantial Muslim population of the British Empire and its support for the Allies during the war. The construction was completed in July 1977. The London Central Mosque is easily recognizable by its large golden dome and stout 140-foot minaret on the edge of Regent's Park.

Read the text for detail and answer comprehension questions.

1. Is Great Britain the formal leader of the Commonwealth?
2. What problem did Great Britain face by 1961?
3. What kind of racial prejudice do the young British people complain about?
4. What does the Race Relations Act say?
5. Who suffers most from racial discrimination in Britain?
6. Does the law effectively protect the victims of racial discrimination? Why (not)?
7. What is being done to improve the situation?

Read the text and say if the statements below are true or false.

RUSSIANS IN LONDON

The Russians are back in London — so much so that Newsweek International published the article “London calling” which describes it in some detail. Here are some excerpts. Three centuries ago, at the age of 26, Peter the Great came to London. The Russian tsar toured the Houses of Parliament and the Tower of London. Dressed as a sailor, he strolled incognito through the streets of 17th

century London, excited by the symbols of England's maritime mastery docked along the Thames. When he went home to build St. Petersburg, Peter summoned England's finest shipbuilders to build a first-class fleet to go with Russia's splendid new capital. "The English island is the best and most beautiful in the world," Peter said at the time. Modern-day Russians, though, prize the city as the Wall Street of Europe — an English-speaking citadel of wealth and opportunity less than four hours by air from Moscow or St. Petersburg. The Russian Embassy in London estimates that there are 100,000 or more Russian nationals living in and around the British capital. So many Russians have bought one million-and-up properties that they are known in real-estate circles as "the new Arabs". Russia's upper crust now sends its children to posh English boarding schools. The extraordinary number of frequent-flyer biznesmyeni landing at Heathrow persuaded British Airways to provide a VIP "Russian visitors service" to keep them happy. The history of the links between these two countries on the far reaches of Europe is long and well-known. Trade relations go back at least as far as the days of Queen Elizabeth and Ivan the Terrible, when the English Muscovy Company exported cloth to the Russians in exchange for furs, wax and rope. Russians have always envied the English for their liberal political culture. In the 19th century, expat dissident Alexander Herzen chose London as the home of his influential émigré journal. A generation of revolutionaries settled in London, and the Reading Room of the British Museum counted Lenin and Trotsky among its famous visitors. Later came White Russians who fled their country after the Revolution, and, later still, Soviet refuseniks in the 1970s. Unlike the Russian diaspora of old today's community is more broadly representative of the motherland. It comprises students and shopkeepers, businesspeople and artists, people who have not turned their back on post-Soviet Russia, but rather brought a chunk of it with them. They're here to make money, get an education or just get away for a while. Money is a big mover in this new diaspora. Rich Russians come to Sotheby's auctions, hoping to repatriate paintings by the likes of Serebriakova and Makovsky. At one recent auction of Russian art, Russians snapped up nine of

the 10 most expensive paintings. Natasha Chouvaeva, publisher of the Russian language *The London Courier*, has witnessed the transformation of the Russian community since she arrived in 1991. “Then there were the rich and the asylum seekers — the two extremes,” she says. “Now the recent immigrants are middle-class Russians who just want to try their luck in the West. We used to be an expat newspaper. We'd tell readers how to find a solicitor (адвокат) or how to find a good school for their children. But now people don't need that. They just want to keep the cultural side up and pass the language on to their kids.”

The transformation underway in London extends well beyond the Russian community. Veteran Muscovites on the Thames say long-held stereotypes of Russia — reinforced by Western ignorance — are finally breaking down more than a decade after the end of the cold war. As Russians broaden their horizons, it seems, Britons are doing the same. Aliona Muchinskaya, director of the Red Square PR agency in London, recalls her first visit to the British capital 11 years ago. “People asked me whether we had refrigerators in Russia”. I said, “No. We use the snow”. And they thought I was serious! Now people are much more aware of what is going on in Russia”. The changing face of London's Russian community seems less an astonishment—and more like another chapter in a very long story. “We're part of a living tradition,” says maestro Gergiev, the music director of St. Petersburg's acclaimed Mariinsky Opera. “The bridge between Britain and Russia has always existed. We're just walking freely over it again”.

True / False Statements:

1. Peter the Great was the first Russian tsar to establish trade relations with England.
2. A VIP “Russian visitors service” at Heathrow is a sign of rich Russians’ “invasion” in Great Britain.
3. London has always been the home of Russian revolutionaries and dissidents.
4. The Russian diaspora in London has changed a lot over the past decade or so.
5. The English are both ignorant of and hostile to Russians.

THE REALITY OF TODAY

PRE-READING QUESTIONS:

1. What behaviour can you describe as racist?
2. Why are racial prejudices so widespread?

Racism means:

- having to keep relationships secret
- not getting the respect you deserve
- being singled out
- being harassed or attacked

There is something in the shadows. Rabia Khan is worried. She has found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. She ought to know better than to be this end of Ravensmoor Road after dark. This stretch of road has a history. Rabia's father has warned her often enough. Now she is regretting the way she has ignored his advice not to go on her own. Despite everything Oakfield isn't a town that is used to living in fear. It is an ordinary sort of place, what you might call a backwater. But one simple fact haunts this town like many others: hatred can be ordinary and evil can be commonplace. This time it started to go bad the day two airliners changed the skyline of New York forever. Rabia knows how some people's eyes have flashed at her in the street since that day. She feels instinctively that the rules of her life have changed.

* * *

Suhail Khan glances at the kitchen clock. "She should be back by now," he says. "You worry too much," says his wife Diane. Suhail doesn't say anything, but he isn't reassured. Even after all these years, he and Diane feel different about this town. She is a white woman married to a British Muslim. She doesn't feel automatic hostility when she visits her family up the Ravensmoor Road, but her husband does. Her children do. They've all heard the shouts of Paki. Of course

Diane doesn't ignore what they tell her. What mother would? She suffered her own share of hostility in the early days. Even in the eyes of her parents she has committed the cardinal sin of marrying one of those people. "I think I'm going to take a run up to the library," Suhail says. Diane doesn't try to stop him.

* * *

"What's the matter, Fatima?" says one of the youths, flicking a peanut at Rabia. "Not talking?" No, she isn't talking. Not to the likes of him. For a moment Rabia feels defiant but it doesn't last long. She is too scared for that. Some of the other girls at school have been pushed around this way. Shahnaz from Rabia's maths set was walking round Oakfield Park wearing the Muslim headscarf, the hijab. Somebody tore it clean off. That was just after the World Trade Center was hit. Rabia feels uncomfortable. More than uncomfortable, she is scared. "Hey!" One of them grabs hold of her around the upper arm. Feeling his fingers digging into her flesh, she shrinks back. "What's the matter with you?" he asks, feeling her reaction. "Do you think you're too good for us or something?" He is trying to swing her round, to make her look at him. He wants to see the fear in her eyes. "Come on, love. Don't you want to do us the dance of the seven veils?" "Maybe she'd rather give us a kiss." Finally her reply breaks loose. "Let go of me!" Suddenly the pair of them are racing down the street towards Foulshurst Avenue. Rabia hears a familiar, gruff voice. "There you are, I've been up and down this road twice. I don't know how I missed you. The council should do something about the lighting along here." "Dad!" Suhail Khan hears the relief in his daughter's voice. "Is something wrong?" Instinctively he looks round in the direction of the two white boys he has just seen running up the hill. "Don't go after them," she says. "Why? What's happened?" "I'll tell you about it on the way home," she says.

* * *

A hundred metres down the road Suhail Khan is pulling up outside the house. He's been listening to Rabia's story. "I've a good mind to go looking for them," he

says. "Don't, Dad," says Rabia. "They're not worth it." "You're right, of course," says Suhail. "They're not worth it. It just makes me angry that they can go round picking on teenage girls. Master race, eh? Why don't they try it on with a grown man like me?" He remembers a night twenty years ago. He was a young man, little more than a boy, and he lay frightened and alone on a rain swept pavement while half a dozen men drove their boots into him. He hasn't forgotten his fear and humiliation. The memory makes him determined that his children will never feel that terror. This town is their home. They were born here. Surely that's enough to make them British! They should be able to go where they like without being threatened or abused. "Forget them, Dad." "I'll do my best," says Suhail. "But why should I? We work hard. We keep ourselves to ourselves. Why should my daughter be threatened by such people?" Rabia shrugs. He knows the answer as well as she does. You can hide your views or take off a badge, but you can't disguise the colour of your skin.

/from Caught in the Crossfire by Alan Gibbson/

Read the text again and do the task below.

Getting the story straight: pick out the statements which you know from the text to be true. Arrange them in the right order to make a story.

1. Rabia Khan is going home from the library after dark.
2. She comes from a Muslim family.
3. Her mother is British but her father is not.
4. They live in the small town of Oakfield.
5. It is in the Northwest of England.
6. The story is set in Great Britain following Sept. 11, 2001.
7. Most Muslim families live in the Ravensmoor Road.
8. Two white youths are stalking (following her in a threatening way) Rabia on her way home.
9. Rabia's father is a taxi driver.

10. Diane, Rabia's mother, married a Pakistani against her family's wishes.
11. The boys are insulting her.
12. Rabia is scared because she is afraid of the dark.
13. Rabia is scared because she is a Muslim girl and the white boys are acting as racists.
14. Oakfi eld has always been hostile towards non-British people.
15. Suhail comes to his daughter's rescue.
16. Suhail tries to catch the boys and teach them a lesson because a long time ago he was abused, too.

FAIR PLAY?

PRE-READING TASK.

The USA has the reputation of a successful multiethnic state, yet racial issues are still in the centre of attention. Today the internet provides a forum for the exchange of opinions on "affirmative action" (AA).

Read the extract from an encyclopedia (paragraph 1, text A). What can explain the fact that AA is widespread in the USA?

Now skim (read quickly) the text to the end to find out the difference in the two opinions expressed at an internet forum.

Text A

Reverse discrimination is a term used to describe discriminatory policies or acts that benefit a historically sociopolitically nondominant group (typically minorities). This term is sometimes considered synonymous with the terms "affirmative action" or "positive discrimination" used in the US. Reverse discrimination is illegal in some countries such as the United Kingdom. In the United States the effects of affirmative action can be seen both in the job market and college admissions. There are quotas of minorities to fill and a candidate may be selected solely due to the fact that they belong to a minority group.

It is discrimination to offer any advantage to anyone based on race, gender, marital status, religion, country origin, etc. We all agreed on that when most people's idea

of discrimination was whites against everyone else. Now we have a lot of other statistics that some people, white or black would like to ignore. Most whites are working class and poor like most people of colour. Most whites are not now and have never been economically or otherwise advantaged. Most whites have to work hard to get any little thing in life. Most whites did not participate in slavery. Most whites disagreed with slavery and fought hard to end it in the South. Most lives lost in the Civil War were white. Consider that for a moment before reading on. Most whites do not believe in racism and do not commit racist acts. I am sick of the constant inference that whites are all privileged racists who deserve to be discriminated against now because people of other races were discriminated against in the past. If a school wants to admit well-rounded people with a GPA(1) (grade point average) of 3,5 or higher, then that should be the criteria for all students. Do not discriminate against those who qualify. Discriminating against whites does not help blacks, and blacks need to stop being defensive about their racism.

* * *

I am glad I attended a historically black university. I didn't have to study with people who share these views. I can't believe how widespread the feeling that blacks "are getting it easy" is in the white community. The black kids you are so jealous of are only separated by one generation from their grandparents who had to endure a lifetime of racism. You all love to use even playing field(2) argument. But, if you really want to make the playing field even, strip every white person of their personal wealth and place all their children in 11 These letters are written in a rather informal style typical of internet communication second rate schools, and do this for about 200 years. Then the playing field will be even! I am sorry if a good white student doesn't get into the school they desire, but affirmative action was created for a reason. To offset the effect of racism on the black community. But I guess everyone has forgotten about it. I mean it was 30 something years ago and that has to be enough time to make up for the 200 and something years prior.

Note:

1. grade point average — средний балл
2. even playing field — equal opportunities

1. Look through the text and find the words that have similar English and Russian roots, suggest Russian equivalents.
2. Read the text again and make two lists of arguments: in support of affirmative action and against it. Be ready to express them in class and give your opinion.

Look through the text quickly to find out if you guessed correctly.

MILLENNIUM BLUES

There had been an unbelievable amount of talk about the weather, not to mention the end of the world and so on. The earth continued to turn around the sun but only just, it seemed. It has been an unnaturally hot summer, and even this early on Saturday there is no freshness in the air. Cassie Withers stands in her Kew(1) back garden and watches the planes cross the sky one after another, counting them instead of sheep. She was woken by the first flight in from Seoul despite the earplugs she has worn at night ever since moving to Kew ten years ago. Today at some point her husband Steven Withers will be returning from his fifth foreign trip of the month. Now Cassie gazes up beyond the planes as the sky grows lighter and the stars paler. She'd watched a documentary on stars last night, about how the earth is long overdue collision with an asteroid or comet, just like the one that killed the dinosaurs. She had also learned from this programme that a Grand Cross of the planets is due this month, in the four signs of the zodiac — Taurus, Aquarius, Scorpio, Leo — and that these signs are being interpreted as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse(2). Then she had gone to bed and read about Nostradamus(3) — in the last months of this century it is quite hard not to read about Nostradamus. She had lingered for a while over a particularly interesting couplet: The year 1999, the seventh month, From the sky will come a great King of Terror. Nuclear war was joint favourite with an asteroid attack, according to the

editor's note. Nostradamus had been right about several things so far, including the death of Henri II in a jousting accident and also the fall of Communism; so there was a strong possibility of something awful happening soon, it seemed.

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"Mum, what comes after nineteen-ninety-nine?" asks her five-year-old son Peter as she clears up after breakfast. "Is it nineteen-ninety-ten?" "No," says Cassie. "Would you sort those knives and forks for me like a good boy. No. It goes nineteen-ninety-nine. TWO THOUSAND." "Mum," he says, picking up a fork, frowning. "Mum, will it be the end of the world then?" "No of course not," says Cassie heartily. "It's just a number. It doesn't actually mean anything at all. Unless you believe in Jesus."⁽⁴⁾ "Do you believe in Jesus?" he asks, as he sometimes does. "I'm not sure," she says diplomatically. "Some people do. Auntie Katie does." "I believe in him," he says staunchly. "Well that's nice," she says, then can't help asking, "Why do you believe in him?" "Because otherwise who made it," he demands crossly. "Of course." He marches out of the kitchen. She finishes the dishes, then takes a cup of coffee into the front room where Peter is now lining up a row of small plastic dinosaurs behind the sofa while Michael, his elder brother, is doing his holiday homework in front of the television. "It's only the news," he says, forestalling her protest. "It helps me concentrate." She sits by him and lets the news wash over her. Plague is spreading up from Greece through the Balkans, and on to Venice. There are floods in China, drought in India, war in Africa, famine in North Korea, fire in Australia, hysteria in America and desperation in Russia. Record temperatures worldwide, yet again, have led to speculation that the human race will become a nocturnal species in the next century, on the basis that it's cooler at night.

* * *

They take sandwiches to the park for lunch. Cassie closes her eyes and feels the sun warm her shoulders, kiss her bare arms, and knows it is hostile, fake gold. Being out in the sun and the open air used to be health-giving. Now the sea is full of viruses, one bathe can leave you in a wheelchair for good; no wonder the fish

have turned belly up this summer. “You look a bit down,” says her friend Judith as she joins her on the park bench. “Is it so obvious?” smiles Cassie. “You know, I’ve got this horrible feeling that something appalling is about to happen.” “When you think about it, something appalling always is happening, somewhere in the world,” says Judith, watching her daughters run over towards the swings. “That’s why I don’t read the papers. I used to feel I ought to; that I ought to know about these terrible things. Then one day I just stopped. And my knowing or not knowing has made no difference at all to the state of the world.” “How do you know?” says Cassie.

* * *

The official transition from afternoon to evening in Kew is marked at this time of year by the lighting of a thousand barbecues. This Saturday it is Cassie’s neighbour’s turn to host the road’s annual summer party. The women stand on the patio, sipping white wine and keeping an eye on the children. The men have gravitated to the end of the garden under the trees where they help themselves to icy cans of lager(5) from the cool-box standing on the picnic table. Above them roars a steady stream of flights in and out of Heathrow. Cassie pours herself a glass of wine and joins a group of women who are talking about what they are going to do on New Year’s Eve. Carol has booked a family package to Paris, where it is rumoured the Eiffel Tower will lay a giant egg. Donna hopes to fly to Tonga(6) for a seafood feast on the night, then on to Samoa. Christine is hoping to dodge across the dateline on Concorde so that she can see the new century dawn twice. “I was just saying to Nigel the other day,” says Amanda from number twelve, “Wouldn’t it be nice to see the sun rise from Mount Kilimanjaro. But I don’t know what we’d do with the children, nobody’ll be wanting to babysit that night, will they?” “I really don’t see why air travel has to be so convenient and cheap,” says Cassie. “People should think twice before crossing the world.” It is exactly as though she has not spoken. Nobody ever listens to me, she thinks. Cassie fills her glass and walks off across the lawn towards the men. She has that sense of being able to see everything with perfect clarity, but nobody will listen to her. The men are talking

about whether the new century really only starts on the first of January 2001, as the Swiss claim, and are speculating about how many work days will be lost, how long the celebrations will last. “The good thing about the beginning of the year 2000,” says Christine’s husband Greg, “is that January the first is a Saturday so everyone will have the Sunday and the Monday to recover, because of course the Monday will be a bank holiday(7).” “By then there’ll have been a wave of computer crashes,” says Amanda’s husband Nigel. “It’ll be the El Nino(8) of I.T. I tell you, it’s unbelievable, half these guys I see haven’t even started to address the Y2K problem(9).” “Heads in the sand,” nods Carol’s husband Terry. “We’re talking about global economic crisis.” “Worse than that,” says Cassie. “A thousand times worse.” “Steven not back from the Philippines yet?” asks Terry, acknowledging her presence. “He’s up there right at this moment,” sighs Cassie, pointing at the sky. “Let’s hope air traffic control has sorted itself out before next year,” Greg chuckles knowingly. “Because it’s to be the busiest year in aviation history.” He rubs his hands together and grins. “Just make sure you’re not partying under the flight path on New Year’s Eve. Take it from me.” “They’re saying there’ll be record levels of suicide attempts on the thirty-first of December,” muses Greg. “Seems a funny time to do it.” “You can’t afford to worry about such things,” says Greg. “Listen, we are due a sun storm next year, which is when the US tracking system goes down. Completely useless. Perfect opportunity for a nuclear attack. Let’s hope the bad guys haven’t figured that one out.” “Too late,” says Cassie obscurely. “Cheer up, Cassandra,” Terry chides. “It may never happen.” Cassie looks over at where the boys are laughing and playing. “That’s the trouble,” she insists. “It will. Any minute now.”

/from Millennium Blues by Helen Simpson/

Notes:

1. Kew in South London is an attractive residential area despite the noise of aircraft from nearby Heathrow. It has good schools and plenty of green space.

2. The four horsemen of Apocalypse traditionally named War, Famine, Pestilence (чума) and Death, are mentioned in the Bible which predicts that they will ride in Apocalypse (the destruction and end of the world).
3. Nostradamus []— sixteenth-century French doctor and astrologer, who wrote a 942-verse history of the world's future.
4. Some Christians believe that the millennium is the time when Jesus Christ will return to the world and rule it for 1000 years. Lager.
5. - is a light-coloured beer.
6. Tonga, Samoa — countries in Oceania, in the southern Pacific Ocean.
7. Bank holiday (in UK) — official holiday when banks and most businesses are closed.
8. El Niño is a global ocean-atmosphere phenomenon in the tropical Pacific which has an important effect on the world weather.
9. The year 2000 problem (or Y2K problem) was a flaw in computer programme design which caused fears that important industries and government functions would stop working at exactly midnight, January 1, 2000.

Reading for detail.

- a) Read the notes first.
- b) Match the phrases from the text with the Russian equivalents / translations. Pay attention to the context!
 1. is long overdue collision
 2. joint favourite
 3. forestalling her protest
 4. to become a nocturnal species
 5. to host the road's (summer) party
 6. a family package
 7. to dodge across the dateline... twice
 8. heads in the sand
 9. acknowledging one's presence

10. tracking system

- a. перейти к ночному образу жизни
- b. показывая, что чье-л. присутствие замечено
- c. в равной степени популярна
- d. система слежения
- e. устраивать ежегодную вечеринку для соседей
- f. поездка для всей семьи (билеты, отель и т.д по цене наиболее выгодной, если путешествовать семьей)
- g. страусиная политика
- h. ухитриться пересечь линию суточного времени ... дважды
- i. давно должна была столкнуться
- j. прежде чем она успела запротестовать (предвосхищая...)

Read the text again and get the story straight:

Pick out the statements which you know from the text to be true. Arrange them in the right order and add the missing details to make a story.

1. The Withers are a well-to-do family.
2. The story takes place in the summer of 1999.
3. Steven Withers has a responsible job which involves a lot of travelling.
4. Cassie dislikes living in Kew.
5. The Withers live in a posh area.
6. Cassie has a sleeping problem.
7. Cassie is in a blue mood because she is worried about a) the future of the planet; b) her family.
8. Cassie is in the habit of reading about Nostradamus and makes predictions of the future.
9. The Withers have two sons; the elder goes to school.
10. Cassie is a non-believer while her younger son believes in Jesus Christ.

11. Both Cassie and her friend Judith stopped reading newspapers because of the terrible things they print.
12. There is a custom in Kew to organise parties for one's neighbours in summer.
13. Women at these parties talk mostly about their children.
14. The women are excited about the coming New Year.
15. The small talk the women make is very different from the talk of the men.
16. The men talk about the problems the year 2000 may cause.
17. Cassie shares the concern expressed by the men.
18. Kew is not a safe place for New Year celebrations.
19. Cassie was named after the mythological Cassandra.
20. The men laugh at Cassie because of her gloomy outlook.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think the main character's name is Cassie?
2. What atmosphere does the author create in the story? How does she achieve the desired effect?
3. What kind of ending do you expect?