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# UNIT 9

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## 9.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit we shall give you further practice in reading comprehension by

- i) giving you an autobiographical passage to read – 'A Page from the Book of Memory' by Indira Gandhi, and
- ii) giving a glossary of difficult words and questions on comprehension.

We shall also set exercises on the use of selected items of vocabulary.

In the section on grammar and usage we shall discuss the use of articles.

We shall also ask you to write an essay using arguments for and against a proposition.

After completing this unit you should be able to

- read and appreciate simple autobiographical passages,
- use the articles correctly,
- write a short essay involving arguments for and against a proposition.

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## 9.1 READING COMPREHENSION

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### 9.1.1 Introduction

What was the kind of atmosphere in India in the 40s when the freedom struggle was at its most intense stage? What did it feel like for a national leader like Indira Gandhi to be part of this movement? Was it terrifying? Was it exciting? When arrested, how did she cope with life behind the high walls of a prison? Read this moving autobiographical account of her role in the Independence Movement by one of India's greatest leaders.

### 9.1.2 Passage for Reading

#### A Page from the Book of Memory

by Indira Gandhi

- 1 On 9th August, 1942, the pre-dawn arrests of our leaders launched the Quit India Movement and I had my first experience of a tear gas attack at the flag-hoisting ceremony. My husband Feroze Gandhi decided to go underground, doing propaganda and other work. He grew a moustache and dressed in khaki. Because of

his complexion, which was fair and ruddy, he passed off as an Anglo-Indian soldier. On his journey from Bombay he got off at a small wayside station, thinking that he was too well-known in Allahabad to risk being seen at the station, even in disguise. No conveyance was available and finally he hitched a ride from a truck full of British and Anglo-Indian soldiers, who were scared stiff and almost refused to let him get off again, saying that the damned natives would hack him to pieces if they found him alone and unarmed.

- 2 Swaraj Bhawan was occupied by the military, and next door in Anand Bhawan we had the unattractive sight of a row of guns aimed at us from across the garden wall. Our servants, mostly villagers, were naturally terrified and found it difficult to reply to the curt "Halt, who goes there" every time they approached the wall.
- 3 There was a warrant for Shastriji's arrest. Acting on the assumption that no one would ever guess that he could be rash enough to stay in Anand Bhawan, he did just that and remained with us incognito until he could make full arrangements for the work of the movement to go on. He could not come out of his room until after dark and food was taken up to him surreptitiously. We pretended we had an ailing relative. This situation could hardly be maintained for long without the news leaking out. Besides there was always the danger of a search; so Shastriji had to move and he did, and was arrested within a short time. We were hedged in on all sides and it was well nigh impossible for workers to get together. My husband became one of the links through whom I could pass on money and political literature to other underground workers and we had to arrange to meet briefly and late at night in the houses of different non-political friends.
- 4 Then came information that I was to be arrested. Until then I had tried to remain as inconspicuous as possible but I did not feel like going to jail so tamely. So I hastily packed some clothes and books and went to stay elsewhere. Whispered from ear to ear spread the news of a public meeting at five. Police swarmed all over the city, for they could not discover the whereabouts of the meeting. At the scheduled time I emerged and crowds of people poured out from all sides, from the cinema house, the shops and nearby houses, where they had been collecting for some hours. I had hardly spoken for ten minutes when truck-loads of armed British military drove up and formed a cordon around us. My husband had decided not to get involved and was looking down at us through the shutters of a first-floor window. However, at the sight of a gun barrel, just a yard away from my head, excitement and anxiety got the better of him and he came charging down, yelling at the sergeant to shoot or to lower his gun. The sergeant made the mistake of touching my arm to lead me to the prison van. It was like a signal, the crowd surged forth; my other arm was grabbed by some Congress women and I thought I would be torn asunder. Somehow we all survived. There was no firing, though rifle butts were used and many were hurt. A large number of us, men and women, including my husband and I, were arrested. The ride to the jail was rather an extraordinary one, for the police in my van were apparently so moved by my talking to them that they apologised, put their turbans at my feet and wept their sorrow because of what their job compelled them to do!
- 5 Since earliest childhood I had visited jails either for trials of relations and friends or for unsatisfactory but highly-treasured twenty-minute interviews. People have heard of my parents' imprisonments but it is not often realised what a large number of relatives, on both my father's and mother's sides—off hand I can think of two dozen names but there were probably more—spent long years in prison. I do not know of any other family which was so involved in the freedom struggle and its hardships.
- 6 What a world of difference there is between hearing and seeing from the outside and the actual experience. No one who has not been in prison for any length of time can even visualise the numbness of spirit that can creep over one when, as Oscar Wilde writes, "each day is like a year, a year whose days are long", when day after day is wrapped in sameness and in spite and deliberate humiliation. Pethick-Lawrence said, "The essential factor in the life of the prisoner is that he takes on a sub-human status." Herded together like animals, devoid of dignity or privacy, debarred not only from outside company or news but from all beauty and colour, softness and grace. The ground, the walls, everything around us was mud-coloured and so became our jail-washed clothes; even our food tasted gritty. Through the barred apertures we were exposed to the dust storms, the monsoon downpour and the winter cold. Others had an interview and a letter once or twice a month but not me. My husband was in the same prison. After persistent efforts we were permitted a short interview but soon he was transferred to another town. I kept cheerful and busy, reading and

teaching. I took over the entire care of a small baby whose mother I was coaching, to enable her to earn her living on her release.

- 7 There was no yearning for the outside world, for no one worthwhile was there. Besides, we had convinced ourselves that we were in for seven years. I was determined to bear all privations and insults smilingly. Many pictures come to mind: the visit of the Civil Surgeon sent by the Governor of the U.P. in view of the public concern over my ill-health. He prescribed a tonic and a special diet including delicacies such as Ovaltine. But hardly was his back turned when the Superintendent tore up the list and tossed the pieces on the floor. "If you think you are getting any of this", he said, "you are mistaken." This was surprising for I had not asked for anything – even the Surgeon's visit was unexpected.
- 8 One night we were startled out of sleep by a blood-curdling shriek. Although Zohra was the nastiest and most unpopular of our wardresses, we could sympathise with her terror and agitation, for there was an enormous cobra only a yard from our bars coiled under one of the clocks which the wardress had to punch on her rounds. So, apart from the imminent danger of snake-bite there was the legitimate fear of losing her job. We were locked inside the barrack and she within the outer wall. There was no stick or other weapon. Zohra's shouts, now frightened, now exasperated, now bullying, now entreating, did nothing to shake the calm of the sentry outside, who wanted detailed information regarding the exact location of the snake, specifications of its length and breadth and so on. "Are Kambakht!" (O you unfortunate one), shouted Zohra. "Have I got a tailor's tape to measure it from head to tail?" It was several hours before the sentry could be persuaded to call the matron. Her house was three furlongs away and she in turn had to walk to the Superintendent's house to awaken him, before they could go together to the main office to fetch the key to the women's prison. By the time this little procession entered our enclosure, we had long since fallen asleep and the snake had glided away.
- 9 Another day, we barely escaped being burnt to death. It was war-time and the cantonment was crowded with not only British but Americans and Canadians as well! A Canadian ace pilot was struck by our Superintendent's attractive daughter. Once he was flying low over her house, as he often did, when his wing touched a telegraph wire and burst into flames. We saw it falling towards us at alarming speed but it just skirted the jail wall and crashed into a half-built bungalow not far away.
- 10 All things pass and so did this. My unexpected release was like coming suddenly out of a dark passage — I was dazzled with the rush of life, the many hues and textures, the scale of sounds and the range of ideas. Just to touch and listen was a disturbing experience and it took a while to get adjusted to normal living.

### 9.1.3 Glossary

1 **launched:** caused to begin

**'Quit 'India 'Movement:** On 8th August, 1942 the All-India Congress Committee meeting at Bombay passed a resolution calling upon the British to withdraw from India. The Movement was violently put down by the British in a few months.

**'go under'ground:** go into hiding and work secretly

**'propa'ganda:** spreading of information, ideas, etc.

**'ruddy:** red (showing good health)

**dis'guise:** the changing of one's appearance in order to deceive, or to hide one's identity.

**hitched:** travelled by asking (here, the truck-driver) for a free ride

**hack:** cut roughly, chop

2 **Swa'raj 'Bhawan:** The old house of the Nehru family in Allahabad which was gifted to the nation by Motilal Nehru in 1930 and renamed Swaraj Bhawan

**A'nand ' Bhawan:** the Nehrus' ancestral home in Allahabad which has been gifted to the nation

**curt:** too short in speech to be polite

3 **'warrant:** written order giving official authority for something

**rash:** overbold

**'incog'nito:** hiding oneself under another name

**'surrep'titiously:** secretly

**'ailing:** ill

- 'hedged 'in: surrounded  
'well nigh: nearly, almost
- 4 **incon'spicuous**: not easily seen  
**swarmed**: moved in large numbers  
**'cordon**: a line or ring of policemen, etc., placed around an area to enclose it  
**'sergeant**: non-commissioned army officer  
**surged**: moved forward like powerful waves  
**a'sunder**: apart
- 6 **'numbness**: state of being without the ability to feel or move  
**spite**: ill will  
**de'void of** : without  
**de'barred**: shut out, prevented  
**'gritty**: like sand or stone  
**'apertures**: openings
- 7 **'yearning**: strong desire  
**privations**: state of being deprived of something  
**'Civil 'Surgeon**: Doctor employed by the government and attached to a government hospital
- 8 **'blood-'curdling**: sending feelings of horror through the body  
**'nastiest**: most unpleasant and ill-tempered  
**'wardress**: woman acting as guard in a prison  
**'agitation**: anxiety; excitement of the mind or feelings  
**colled**: curled round and round  
**rounds**: usual visits, especially of inspection  
**'imminent**: likely to happen soon  
**le'gitimate**: reasonable; that can be justified  
**'barrack**: large building for soldiers (or prisoners) to live in  
**ex'asperated**: irritated  
**'bullying**: threatening  
**en'treating**: asking earnestly; requesting earnestly  
**'sentry**: soldier posted to keep watch and guard  
**'specifications**: details  
**'matron**: woman housekeeper in an institution  
**'glided**: moved along smoothly and continuously
- 9 **can'tonment**: permanent military station  
**ace**: first-rate
- 10 **'dazzled**: unable to see because of strong light thrown into the eyes; made to feel the wonder of something  
**hues**: colours  
**'textures**: the arrangements of the threads in cloth

#### 9.1.4 Exercises in Comprehension

In this section, we shall concentrate on two important aspects of intensive reading: factual or literal comprehension and inferential or interpretative comprehension. **Factual** comprehension, as you may know, involves the ability to extract largely factual information from a reading passage, information which is quite explicitly stated. **Inferential** comprehension involves the ability to read between the lines, that is, the skill of understanding information that is not explicitly given in the passage.

##### Exercise 1

Answer the following questions by choosing the best alternative under each :

- 1 Why did the English soldiers in the truck fail to identify Feroze Gandhi?
- He was fair-complexioned.
  - He was disguised as an Anglo-Indian soldier.
  - He looked like an Anglo-Indian soldier.
- .....

- 2 What made the servants in Anand Bhawan thoroughly frightened?
- The presence of armed soldiers next door.
  - The impolite question: "Halt, who goes there?"
  - The sight of a row of guns aimed at them.
- .....
- 3 How did Shastriji manage to avoid being arrested?
- He fooled the police by staying in a closely watched place like Anand Bhawan.
  - His friends protected him by pretending that they had an ailing relative with them in Anand Bhawan.
  - He pretended he was ill and staying with his relatives in Anand Bhawan.
- .....
- 4 What caused the confusion at the public meeting addressed by the writer?
- The forming of a cordon around the Congress workers by the military.
  - The unexpected arrival of Feroze Gandhi on the scene.
  - The touching of the writer's arm by the sergeant.
- .....
- 5 What was so special about the writer's family?
- At least two dozen members of her family had been imprisoned during the freedom struggle.
  - Her parents were in prison during the freedom struggle.
  - Her family was deeply involved in the freedom struggle and its hardships.
- .....
- 6 How is the life of a prisoner reduced to a 'sub-human status'?
- He spends every day in the midst of sameness, ill-will and humiliation.
  - He is shut out from all beauty and colour, softness and grace.
  - He lives in dirt and misery like an animal.
- .....
- 7 The Civil Surgeon's visit made no difference to the writer's health. Why?
- He prescribed a tonic and a diet which could never have been made available to a prisoner.
  - The Jail Superintendent refused to get her what the Civil Surgeon had prescribed.
  - Jail authorities in those days hardly ever respected the advice of Civil Surgeons.
- .....
- 8 What added to Zohra's terror on seeing the cobra?
- She had no weapon to kill the cobra.
  - The sentry outside ignored her shouts for help.
  - She could not punch the clock.
- .....
- 9 Why did the Canadian pilot often fly so low over the Superintendent's house?
- He wanted to impress the Superintendent's daughter.
  - The Superintendent's daughter wanted him to do so.
  - It was part of his job to fly low over houses.
- .....
- 10 How did the writer feel on being released unexpectedly?
- Happy.
  - Relieved.
  - Bewildered.
- .....

### Exercise 2

Complete the following sentences by choosing the best alternative under each. Think carefully before you make your choice.

- 1 The tear gas attack at the flag-hoisting ceremony was carried out by
- the British.

- b) the Congress Party.  
 c) the national leaders.  
 d) Feroze Gandhi.
- .....
- 2 Feroze Gandhi got off at a small wayside station because  
 a) a British truck was waiting to take him to Allahabad.  
 b) he was too well-known in Allahabad.  
 c) he felt that he might be arrested at Allahabad station.  
 d) he wanted to disguise himself before moving into Allahabad.
- .....
- 3 Shastriji was arrested  
 a) in Anand Bhawan.  
 b) in Swaraj Bhawan.  
 c) when he moved from Allahabad.  
 d) when he moved from Anand Bhawan.
- .....
- 4 The writer met her husband secretly  
 a) to organize public meetings.  
 b) to pass on money and political literature.  
 c) to give him news of national leaders.  
 d) to ask about the progress of the underground activities.
- .....
- 5 When information came that she was to be arrested the writer  
 a) gave herself up to the police readily.  
 b) made arrangements to hold a public meeting.  
 c) went into hiding in Swaraj Bhawan.  
 d) left Anand Bhawan immediately.
- .....
- 6 The ride to the jail was an extraordinary one for the writer because  
 a) the police felt sorry for what their job forced them to do.  
 b) the police actually wept and told her about their misfortunes.  
 c) the police unexpectedly put their turbans at her feet.  
 d) the police were moved by her talking to them.
- .....
- 7 The writer spent her time in prison  
 a) looking after a small baby.  
 b) trying hard to meet her husband.  
 c) caring for the baby, reading and teaching.  
 d) coaching the mother of the little child.
- .....
- 8 The writer bore all hardships and inconveniences  
 a) readily.  
 b) cheerfully.  
 c) patiently.  
 d) tamely.
- .....
- 9 Zohra thought she would lose her job if she failed  
 a) to kill the cobra.  
 b) to inform the matron about the cobra.  
 c) to punch any of the clocks on her rounds.  
 d) to fetch the key to the prison in time.
- .....
- 10 On her unexpected release the writer settled down to normal living  
 a) straightaway.

- b) after some time.
- c) after a long time.
- d) in a month's time.

**Exercise 3**

There are twenty statements below. Only ten of them are correct, according to the passage. Read the statements carefully and pick out the ten correct ones.

- 1 The arrests of our leaders on the 9th of August 1942 enabled the British to crush the Quit India Movement.
- 2 Feroze Gandhi disguised himself by growing a moustache, changing his complexion and dressing in khaki.
- 3 The British soldiers thought that Feroze Gandhi's life would be in danger if he travelled alone and unarmed.
- 4 Swaraj Bhawan and Anand Bhawan were located next to each other.
- 5 The servants in Anand Bhawan were terrified by the guns because they were villagers.
- 6 Shastriji was one of the leaders who managed to avoid arrest for some time.
- 7 Shastriji was able to make arrangements for the movement to go on by staying hidden in Anand Bhawan.
- 8 Unlike their leaders, the workers were not closely watched and so they could get together rather easily.
- 9 The writer and her husband met in the houses of different non-political friends because such people were less likely to be watched by the police.
- 10 The news of the public meeting was spread secretly by word of mouth.
- 11 The police got information about where the public meeting was to be held well in time.
- 12 Feroze Gandhi could have avoided arrest had he not come down to rescue his wife at the meeting.
- 13 Many people were killed as a result of police firing at the meeting.
- 14 The writer valued interviews with her friends and relations in jail though they were short.
- 15 The actual experience of prison life, and hearing about it or seeing it from the outside are not the same at all.
- 16 Oscar Wilde felt that like everywhere else time in prison moved very slowly.
- 17 Except the writer every prisoner had occasional interviews and letters.
- 18 Since the writer and her husband were in the same prison it was not difficult for them to meet as often as they wished.
- 19 The writer and the others who were arrested at the public meeting served seven years in prison.
- 20 The 'little procession' (Paragraph 8) was made up of the Superintendent, the matron and the sentry.

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**9.2 VOCABULARY**

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In this exercise, you will practise some useful words that appeared in the passage, by using them in a piece of connected writing.

**Exercise 4**

Fill in the blanks with words taken from the list given here:

- |             |            |          |
|-------------|------------|----------|
| humiliation | launch     | herded   |
| underground | yearned    | barracks |
| interviews  | propaganda | status   |
| warrant     | spite      | nasty    |

In 1921 prison was still an almost unknown place for Jawaharlal Nehru. But one afternoon the police came to Anand Bhawan with a ..... to arrest both him and his father. The young Nehru's offence was distributing notices and doing ..... for a hartal. He had seriously considered going ..... before the Government could ..... an offensive against him but had been advised against it. And now his first term in prison was about to begin. He vaguely imagined that prison inhabitants were ....., desperate people and dangerous criminals. In his mind the place was associated with isolation, ..... and ..... His first term of three months partly confirmed this view.

Most of Nehru's fellow prisoners were kept in huge ..... in the inner circle of the Lucknow prison. About eighteen others, selected for better treatment on the basis of their ....., were kept in an old weaving shed. Nehru, his father and two of his cousins were ..... into a small shed, about 20 feet by 16. However, they were not prevented from moving about from one barrack to another. Frequent ..... with relatives outside were allowed. Gradually, Nehru adjusted himself to the life within though there were moments when he ..... for freedom to continue his political activities.

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### 9.3 GRAMMAR AND USAGE

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#### Articles

In this section you will learn the use of articles.

*a* and *an* are called indefinite articles, and *the* is called the definite article.

Look at the following sentences:

1 Yesterday I met an old man in Delhi.

As *old man* here does not refer to any particular person, it is preceded by the indefinite article *an*. (*An* is used before a vowel sound and *a* before a consonant sound).

2 The man standing there is a friend of mine.

Here I am referring to a particular man, one who is 'standing there'. So I use the definite article *the*. As I have a number of friends and this man is one of them, I have used the indefinite article *a* before *friend*.

#### Exercise 5

Fill in the blanks with *a*, *an*, or *the*

- 1 ..... people standing there are on strike.
- 2 Are you going to ..... post office?
- 3 When I was coming to school, ..... bus came from behind and hit my bicycle.
- 4 Please close ..... door. It is rather cold today.
- 5 I had to wait at ..... bus stand for ..... long time.
- 6 What ..... beautiful shirt!
- 7 He belongs to ..... rich family.
- 8 One of our neighbours is ..... teacher.
- 9 I thought you were ..... honest man.
- 10 I am not ..... good judge of poetry.
- 11 ..... arrest of our leaders launched ..... Quit India movement.
- 12 Swaraj Bhawan was occupied by ..... army.
- 13 There was ..... warrant for Shastriji's arrest.
- 14 ..... news spread quickly throughout ..... city.
- 15 I was awakened by ..... loud cry.

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### 9.4 WRITING

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In this section, you will learn to write an essay using arguments for and against a proposition. In an argumentative essay you have to use facts much more than



imagination. The aim is to try to persuade or convince your reader to agree with your point of view.

The essential part of your preparation for this type of essay is the selection and organization of facts as also their presentation. For your presentation to be effective and convincing, it is important (a) to be fair to the other point of view, and (b) to depend on known or accepted facts alone. It is not wise to invent a fact to prove your point.

### Exercise 6

**Capital Punishment** means punishment by death according to law. Whether it should continue is a matter hotly debated in India and other countries. Let us suppose that you have been asked to write a 500-word essay on 'Should the Death Penalty be Abolished?' for your local English newspaper. Here are some ideas for and against the proposition to help you write the essay:

#### *For / Yes*

- 1 Death penalty is based on the savage principle of vengeance and retaliation.
- 2 In countries where capital punishment has been abolished or suspended, capital crime has *not* increased.
- 3 Therefore the 'deterrent' argument is not sound: the death penalty has never protected anyone.
- 4 Overcrowding, slums, poverty, broken homes: these are the factors that lead to crime.
- 5 Crime can therefore be reduced only by the elimination of social injustices.

#### *Against / No*

- 1 Criminals are a threat to society. They must be done away with.
- 2 'Life' sentence does not mean what it says. After ten years or so of 'good conduct', the criminal can return to society and has the freedom to live on the proceeds of his crime.
- 3 So, those who escape capital punishment are not necessarily reformed after a spell in prison. They often return to a life of crime.
- 4 People hold liberal views at the expense of others. Were the victims consulted before the suspension or abolition of the death penalty in some countries? No; they were dead.

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## 9.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have given you practice in

- reading and understanding an autobiographical passage by Indira Gandhi,
- using some of the words occurring in the passage,
- using the articles correctly,
- writing a short essay using arguments for and against a proposition.

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## 9.6 KEY WORDS

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'argument: reasoned discussion

'aspect: a particular part

'autobi'ography: story of a person's life written by himself/herself

'capital 'punishment: punishment by death

'concentrate: focus (one's attention on something)

'definite 'article: *the*

'essay: a piece of writing, usually short, on any subject

ex'plicit: clearly and fully expressed

in'definite 'article: *a, an*

'inference: conclusion based on facts or reasoning

**in'tensive:** deep and thorough

**in'terpretative:** making the meaning clear

**'passage:** a short extract from a speech or a piece of writing

**'penalty:** punishment for wrong-doing

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## 9.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

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### Exercise 1

- |   |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|
| 1 | c) | 6  | c) |
| 2 | c) | 7  | b) |
| 3 | a) | 8  | c) |
| 4 | c) | 9  | a) |
| 5 | a) | 10 | c) |

### Exercise 2

- |   |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|
| 1 | a) | 6  | a) |
| 2 | c) | 7  | c) |
| 3 | d) | 8  | b) |
| 4 | b) | 9  | c) |
| 5 | d) | 10 | b) |

### Exercise 3

3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 17, 20

### Exercise 4

warrant, propaganda, underground, launch, nasty, spite, humiliation, barracks, status  
herded, interviews, yearned

### Exercise 5

- |   |        |    |          |
|---|--------|----|----------|
| 1 | The    | 9  | an       |
| 2 | the    | 10 | a        |
| 3 | a      | 11 | The, the |
| 4 | the    | 12 | the      |
| 5 | the, a | 13 | a        |
| 6 | a      | 14 | The, the |
| 7 | a      | 15 | a        |
| 8 | a      |    |          |