

TOEFL Listening Practice Test 18

SET 1

Today we're gonna look at the life and some of the works of one of America's finest modern female poets, Sylvia Plath.

At the time of her death in 1963 Sylvia Plath was on the verge of the critical success and recognition that she had sought for most of her life. Her first novel *'The Bell Jar'* had just been published and the publication of her collection of poems *'Ariel'* had just been agreed.

These poems, which were mostly written during the last year of her life, chronicle the traumatic developments taking place in her personal life and were to make for her a reputation as a first rate poet. But it wasn't until 1982, almost twenty years after her death, that her posthumously published *'Collected poems'* won the Pulitzer Prize for literature. Since this time the fascination and intrigue with her work has continued to grow. Very few modern poets have captured the popular imagination as much as Plath, even to the extent that in 2003 a movie was made about her life and her intense relationship with husband and fellow poet Ted Hughes.

To understand the continued growth in interest in her work, we have to look at the issues which her life and work address. As Susan Bassnett writes in her book on women writers.

'Dying as she did in 1963, Sylvia Plath never knew that so soon afterwards the problems of what and how women write was to become such a crucial matter and was to be debated by so many other women'

So, Sylvia Plath was a woman writing about women's issues before they were recognised as being of any importance.

Sylvia Plath was born at Robinson memorial Hospital in Boston on 27th October 1932. She was the first born child of Otto and Aurelia Plath, both highly educated academic people. Her father Otto was a professor of biology at Boston University, but her mother had been subjugated into a domestic role as housewife despite her level of education. Her father was not too pleased with the birth of his daughter and demanded that his wife have a son within the next two years. Amazingly enough his wife obliged by giving birth to a son almost exactly two years later.

This domineering father figure became a common theme that recurred throughout Plath's writing. With the birth of her brother, Sylvia had to work much harder to win her father's attention and approval. When in 1936 Plath's father became ill, access to him became even more restricted, and Plath's main means of getting attention from her father was by achieving academic success. This meant that from an early age she began to equate love with success.

In 1940 Plath's father died and this left the family in a very difficult financial situation. They were forced to move away from the seaside home that Plath had enjoyed so much and into a suburb of Boston and her mother had to take a part time job to support the family.

In 1950 Plath graduated from Bradford High school and won a scholarship to Smith College. In the same year she published a short story entitled *'And summer will not come again'* and a poem called *'Bitter strawberries'*.

Plath's time at Smith was difficult as she had very high expectations of herself. She wanted to achieve immaculate grades, but she also wanted to be accepted by her peers and an important part of being accepted was being popular and dating lots of boys. This was difficult because as a scholarship girl she had only a very small allowance to spend on clothes and going out, and each year's continued scholarship was dependent on the level of her grades.

In 1953 Plath won a fiction contest sponsored by Madamouse magazine and was offered the opportunity to go to New York as a guest editor. She relished this opportunity to spend a month working in a professional publishing environment, but Plath returned from New York feeling exhausted and after hearing news that her application to a creative writing course had been rejected, she fell into what was to become one of many depressions.

Q1. The Bell Jar was

- A. about her father**
- B. her first novel**
- C. a very successful collection of poems**
- D. her last poem**

Q2. Sylvia Plath's 'Collected poems'

- A. won the Pulitzer Prize twenty years after it was published**
- B. were written during the last year of her life**
- C. won the Pulitzer Prize in 1982**
- D. were never published**

Q3. Sylvia's husband

- A. made movies**
- B. died in 2003**
- C. was also a poet**
- D. had a movie made about him**

Q4. Susan Bassnett thought Sylvia's work

- A. was about her husband**
- B. wasn't very good**
- C. was about work life**
- D. was of great interest to women**

Q5. Sylvia's brother

- A. was two years older than her**
- B. was born two years after her**
- C. was a professor at Boston University**
- D. was a highly educated academic**

Q6. Sylvia Plath's time at college was difficult because

- A. she got bad grades**

- B. she won a scholarship
- C. boys didn't like her
- D. she was short of money

Q7. In 1953 Sylvia

- A. left New York to get a job as an editor
- B. rejected an offer to teach creative writing
- C. worked as a guest editor in New York
- D. returned to New York because she was depressed

Q8. What does the lecturer imply when she says "Very few modern poets have captured the popular imagination as much as Plath"

- A. Plath was able to understand the hopes of ordinary people
- B. Plath has become very popular
- C. It is unusual for a modern poet to become popular with ordinary people.
- D. Plath's writing was about modern people and their imagination.

Q9. What does the lecturer imply when she says "This domineering father figure became a common theme that recurred throughout Plath's writing."

- A. The image of her father appears in many of her poems.
- B. Plath often wrote of her love for her father.
- C. Plath's writings were dominated by the image of her father.
- D. Plath's father often told her what to write about.

Q10. Which THREE sentences best summarise the passage?

A What's remarkable about Plath's work is that it addresses many women's issues that were ahead of her time.

B Plath's father was one of her guiding influences and he supported and mentored her until he died in 1940.

C Plath's early life was spent living happily by the sea with her mother who had a part time job to support the family.

D The real significance and the greatness of work was never recognised within in her lifetime.

E Plath's academic path to success was secured by winning an early scholarship. After this she never looked back.

F Plath's work reflects the many of the personal difficulties that she had whilst growing up and later as a wife and mother.

SET 2

Accommodation Officer:

Sorry to keep you waiting. What can I do for you?

Student:

Erm, well, I need some help finding accommodation for this semester.

You've left it a bit late haven't you? You'll be lucky to find anything.

Yeah, well I had a room lined up with someone in town, but I rang her yesterday and it turns out she's given the room to someone else.

Didn't you pay a deposit?

No. I didn't think I needed to. We had a sort of... informal agreement.

Hm. Very informal by the sounds of it. Well, that'll teach you for next time won't it? Well, we don't have a lot available, I have to say. We definitely don't have any rooms available in the student dorms. I mean, there are always a few no-shows, but we won't know about that for another couple of weeks, and presumably you'll need a place to stay in the meantime?

Yeah. I mean, my parents are here now. We're staying in a motel just out of town, but they'll be leaving in a couple of days.

Well, you could always stay on there for a couple more weeks and then take up any free spaces in the dorms when we know about them.

That might be a problem. I mean, I don't have my own transport so it'll be hard for me to get on and off campus.

Well, that's likely to be an issue whatever you do. You won't find anywhere on campus now.

I suppose I could sleep on a friend's floor for a couple of weeks.

Now now, you know that's against college rules, don't you?

Yes, I guess.

Well, it seems to me you have two options. You can either find a motel or a guest house somewhere closer to the campus where you can stay a couple of weeks until we know about any students who don't show up this term. Mind you, they're going to be pretty full now, what with all the students arriving. And there are a lot of people on the waiting list, so we can't guarantee you a dorm. You may be better off looking for some private accommodation in town, you know renting a room in a private house, or sharing a flat with other students.

Yeah, that might be best. Do you have a list of places here?

Well, we've got a folder over there of people in town with rooms available. You can look through it and jot down some numbers. Bear in mind though that we've had about fifty students a day for

the past week coming in and taking a look at it, and we can't keep track of what's available and what's taken. You'll have to do some ringing around.

Yeah, okay.

Of course, you can always look on the student body website. There's an accommodation page there too, isn't there?

Is there?

Yeah, but again, this time of year, things are getting snapped up all the time. It's hard to keep tabs on what's still out there.

Okay, well, thanks for your help. Can I put my name on that waiting list anyway, in case I don't find anywhere else?

Sure. Write your details on this form and we'll get in touch if anything comes up.

Thanks.

Q1. Why is the student looking for accommodation now?

- A. The accommodation she booked is no longer available.**
- B. She forgot to book accommodation earlier.**
- C. She signed up for the course at the last minute.**
- D. She dislikes her present accommodation and wants to change.**

Q2. Listen to this part of the conversation again.

Student: No. I didn't think I needed to. We had a sort of... informal agreement.

Accommodation Officer: Hm. Very informal by the sounds of it. Well, that'll teach you for next time won't it?

What does the man imply when he says 'Well, that'll teach you for next time won't it?'

- A. He thinks the student was foolish.**
- B. He feels sorry for the student.**
- C. He wants to give the student some advice.**
- D. He expects the same thing to happen again.**

Q3. Why doesn't the student want to remain where she is staying now?

- A. It is too far from the college campus.**
- B. She doesn't want to stay with her parents.**
- C. The rooms are too expensive.**
- D. She is currently sleeping on the floor.**

Q4. What sort of accommodation may the man be able to offer her in a couple of weeks?

- A. a room in a student dorm**

- B. a room in a motel
- C. a room in a shared student flat
- D. a room in a private house

5. What is the problem with the accommodation listed in the folder and on the website?

- A. It goes out of date very quickly.
- B. There aren't many addresses listed there.
- C. Most accommodation was booked up long ago.
- D. There is a waiting list for the accommodation listed there.