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**Reading 1 Humans**

There are many different kinds of animals at the zoo. However, the animal you will see the most does not live in the zoo. It is a tall two-legged animal called a human. We humans like to think that we are different from other animals. But why?

One reason is our use of tools. While other animals use tools, none use them as much as we do. Animals may use sticks to get food and build a place to live, but we use thousands of special tools every day to make our lives easier and more comfortable. Cars, phones, and clothing are just some of the tools that help us in our everyday lives. Other animals cannot make such special tools.

Language is another special human tool. While animals use simple calls to talk to each other, none can use language in the way that we can. For example, other animals cannot talk about tomorrow or about things you can’t see. They cannot tell stories or learn from a book. Humans use language to do these things and more.

Another way in which we are different from other animals is our ability to have many different feelings. Humans can feel happy, sad, angry, and many other feelings. Animals do not have as many feelings as humans, and their feelings are not like ours. For example, humans can have two or more feelings at once. When someone dies, we may feel sad, angry, and happy all at the same time. Having these different feelings at the same time can make humans act in ways unlike other animals.

We humans like to think that we are special—and clearly, in some ways, we are special. However, we are not that different either. Think about that the next time you visit a zoo.

**Reading 2 Rainforests**

Rainforests are very thick, warm, and wet forests. They are usually found in the hottest parts of the earth and often have five hundred centimeters or more of rain each year. That’s more than a centimeter of rain each day. Rainforests are also very rich in life. In fact, it seems that 40% to 75% of all living things began their life in rainforests.

The plants that grow in rainforests often grow very large. The thick leaves of the tallest trees keep out most of the sunlight, so inside a rainforest it can be very dark. Under this thick cover of trees, other plants must fight for their share of sunlight. Plants must grow very quickly and often on top of one another, making a thick cover of plants.

Along with lots of plants, rainforests are also home to many animals. Scientists think that rainforests are home to two-thirds of all the living plants and animals on earth, but in fact this number is just a guess. There is no way to actually count all of the living things in all of the rainforests of the world. Even now, scientists continue to discover new and unknown kinds of living things every year.

Although rainforests seem like wild and dangerous places, they are worth a lot to us. Not only do rainforests help to clean our air, scientists also think that 25% of all our natural medicines comes from plants and animals discovered in rainforests. And yet, less than 1% of total different living things in rainforests have been studied for their use in making medicines.

Unfortunately, not everyone agrees that rainforests are important. Since 1970, we have lost about 20% of the Amazon rainforest. Once they go, rainforests are gone forever. Sadly, we may never know what we are throwing away.

**Reading 3 The Hippo**

Most people’s idea of the hippo is of a large, slow, friendly-looking animal. This, however, is a long way from the truth. In fact, the hippopotamus (meaning “river horse”) is one of the most dangerous animals in all of Africa. They are even more dangerous than lions and kill more than five hundred people each year.

Hippos are dangerous because they will do anything to protect their living space and their young. If they feel they are being attacked, they become very dangerous. When they open their mouth wide, they are showing their teeth, so be careful.

Hippos are also surprisingly fast. They can run at up to 30 kilometers an hour, which is faster than most humans. That’s very fast when you consider that a hippo can be up to 3,200 kilograms.

Paul Templar is one man who knows how dangerous hippos are. He used to take visitors on trips down the Zambezi River. One day his boat was attacked by a hippo. The hippo held him in its mouth and took him to the bottom of the river. The bottom part of Paul’s body was in the hippo’s mouth, while the top half of his body was sticking out. Paul held his breath and hoped the hippo would open its mouth and let him go. Then the hippo went back up for air, and Paul got free. His friend pulled him out of the river, and even though he was badly hurt, Paul lived. He was very lucky.

We should all learn something from Paul’s experience. The animals we see on television or in books often look nice or friendly, but the truth can be quite different. Wild and unknown animals can be dangerous. If you are not careful, you may make a mistake that could kill you.

**Reading 4 Bees**

Bees can be difficult to live with. When you are walking in a park on a nice day, you don’t want a bee flying around you. Most people worry about being hurt by a bee. It can hurt a lot and can even kill some people. However, bees are also an important part of nature. If all bees died at once, it could be a real problem for life on earth.

Bees are important for a number of reasons, but the most important reason for us is food. Many of the food plants we grow need bees to live. Like little workers, bees go from plant to plant, picking up and dropping off small pieces of pollen. If there were no bees to do this, the pollen couldn’t easily move from one plant to the next and new plants wouldn’t be able to grow.

In some parts of the world, the number of bees has gone down in the past few years. Scientists are worried that we are killing the bees by putting too many bad things in the water and in the ground. Also, we may be using too much land for growing human food and not enough for the plants and flowers that the bees like. If we continue this way, we may lose not only bees, but many of our favorite kinds of food too.

However, there is some good news. In a few places around the world where beekeepers and other food growers have worked together to save the bees, the number of bees has started to go up again. The problem is that it takes more time and money to save bees than to do nothing. In other words, saving bees makes the price of food go up, and nobody wants that to happen.

**Reading 5 The Greatest of All Time**

The question of who is the greatest athlete of all time is a difficult one to answer. First of all, comparing athletes across different sports is almost impossible. Who can say that a boxer such as Mohammed Ali was a better or worse athlete than a top baseball player such as Ichiro Suzuki? Their sports are so different that it is impossible to compare.

Comparing athletes within a single sport is a little easier, but even that can still lead to problems. In men’s tennis, for example, Roger Federer is believed by many to be the greatest of all time. This is because he has won more competitions than any other tennis player. He passed the earlier winner, Pete Sampras, in 2009 when he won his fifteenth major competition.

However, does this mean that Federer is in fact the best? Many say that another tennis player, Rafa Nadal, is better—even though Nadal has not won as many major competitions. This is because he has beaten Federer many times; surely this makes him better than Federer.

Another interesting player to consider in men’s tennis is the Australian player Rod Laver. Laver only won eleven major competitions, which is fewer than Sampras, Nadal, or Federer. However, Laver won his eleven competitions even though he was stopped from playing for five years during his best years. It is easy to imagine that he would have won many more major competitions during those five years, which could have made him the best.

Judging athletes is not a science. Some people will always want to support their favorite players, and often who is “the greatest” will change when we think about different parts of their game. We may never agree who is the greatest of all time, but maybe that’s not a bad thing.

**Reading 6 William Shakespeare**

William Shakespeare is without a doubt the most important writer in English. His work is now available in all major languages, and his plays have been seen all over the world. The ideas in his work have had a major effect on other writers. His words have even helped to change the English language itself.

We don’t know much about Shakespeare’s life. What we do know is that he was born in 1564 in the small English town of Stratford-upon-Avon. When he was eighteen, he married a woman named Anne, and they had three children. In his early twenties, he worked in London as an actor and writer. He became very successful. Shakespeare stopped working in 1613, and he died in 1616.

We also know that, between around 1585 and 1615, Shakespeare wrote some of the best plays and poems in the English language. His best-known plays are *Hamlet, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear,* and *Macbeth*. Even if you have never seen or read any of them, it is likely that you may still know some of the stories and quotes. For example, do you know the quote, “To be or not to be?”

Shakespeare’s poems were very different from other writers’ poems. For example, in one of his poems, Shakespeare surprises the reader by saying that his lover is not as beautiful as the sun and not as pleasing as music. It does not seem like a love poem until the end. There, Shakespeare surprises us again by saying that his lover is more beautiful than any other woman who is compared to those things.

Today, we think of Shakespeare as “difficult.” Although it’s true that his language is a little hard to read now, you may be surprised that his ideas are as fresh as ever.

**Reading 7 Madonna**

Madonna Louise Ciccone, known on stage only by her first name, was one of the greatest pop stars of the late 1900s and early 2000s. She became well known in the 1980s for her bestselling pop songs, such as *Material Girl* and *Like a Virgin*. However, unlike most pop singers, Madonna was also a very smart business person, songwriter, book writer, and actor.

As an actor, Madonna starred in several big movies and was even considered for a best actress prize for her part in the 1996 musical *Evita*.

As a writer, she wrote bestselling children’s books and coffee-table books. In 2004, she was called “America’s smartest business woman” by a professor at a top business university.

Madonna is well known not only for her art and business sense, but also for being different. As a young rising star, Madonna did many things which made older people unhappy and uncomfortable but which helped her to become well known. For example, she started wearing underwear on top of her clothes, she put Christian ideas into her music and videos, and she lived a sexually open life. In the song *Like a Prayer*, for example, Madonna puts a Christian idea together with sexual ideas. To the listener, it’s not clear if the song is sung to God or to a lover. The video for the song also made people uncomfortable by showing Madonna kissing a saint.

Madonna’s love life only added to her “bad girl” image. She married three times: to actors Sean Penn and Warren Beatty, and to filmmaker Guy Ritchie. She also dated basketball star Dennis Rodman and troubled artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, among others.

In 2011, music magazine Rolling Stone called Madonna the 36th greatest artist of all time, ahead of such well-known singers as John Lennon, David Bowie, and Jim Morrison.

**Reading 8 Women in Science**

Not so long ago, science was considered too dangerous and too difficult for women. People used to tell women that they should stay at home and look after their family. Most people at the time believed that science and other work which involved deep thinking was for men, not for women. However, some women scientists did go on to do very important work.

When people think of well-known women scientists, Marie Curie is always at the top of the list. Curie (1867–1934) was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize and the only woman ever to win two. She won the prizes because of her work on radiation and her discovery of two new elements.

However, Marie Curie is not the only woman in her family to do important work in the world of science. Her daughter, Irene Joliot-Curie (1897–1956), also won a Nobel Prize. Together, the Curies are the first mother-and-daughter winners of Nobel Prizes.

Rosalind Franklin (1920–1958) is another woman who won a Nobel Prize. Without her work on DNA, much of the recent work would not have been possible. However, like the Curies, when Franklin started her studies, science was something mostly done by men. At first, even Franklin’s own father did not want her to go into science.

Many other now well-known scientists, such as Lise Meitner, another scientist in the same field as Curie, were stopped from studying as young women. Yet, they went on to make important discoveries which have helped us all. If you want to do something, you should not let others stop you.

In most countries, women make up about 50% of the people. It is strange to imagine how much better the world could be today if we had always helped both men and women to study science.

**Reading** **9 Easter Island**

The earth is full of interesting places. One such place is an island 4,000 kilometers west of South America called Easter Island. Except for some smaller islands around it, there is no other land for hundreds of kilometers anywhere near Easter Island.

One of the things that make Easter Island so mysterious is that it is not like any other island in the south Pacific Ocean. The island is mostly grassy fields, with no forests or rivers. In fact, it does not have any large plants or trees at all. All other large Pacific islands, such as Tahiti, have many rivers and forests.

However, what makes Easter Island stand out are its hundreds of well-known very large stone statues of people. These statues are called moai, and they were a mystery for a long time. By the time Europeans arrived in 1722, the people of Easter Island had forgotten how and why the moai were made.

There are more than 800 large moai on the island. Some are just one meter tall, while others are over ten meters tall. That’s as tall as a three-story building. How did the builders make and move such heavy things, and why did they do it?

After many years of study, scientists can now answer the first question. The moai were made in one place on the island and then moved by rolling them over hundreds of cut trees. Hundreds of years ago, Easter Island was covered with trees, but these were cut down to make and move the moai.

Today, the question about Easter Island is not how the moai were made, but why? Did the people there make them to honor people from their past or for another reason? More importantly, did they not notice what they were doing to their island?

**Reading 10 The Dead Sea**

The Dead Sea is the lowest point on the surface of the earth. It is 418 meters below sea level. Although called a “sea,” it is actually a saltwater lake between Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank of Palestine.

The Dead Sea has been a part of human history for thousands of years, but it may not be there in the future if we cannot save it.

The Dead Sea got its name because it is so salty that animals and plants cannot live in it. Its waters are made up of about 30% salt, which is more than eight times saltier than the earth’s seas. However, this high amount of salt can make it fun for visitors, who can enjoy lying on top of the water without going under.

The Dead Sea is in the middle of a deep valley. This valley is over 6,000 km long, running from Turkey to Africa. Around three million years ago, the area used to get filled by the Mediterranean Sea, making a large saltwater lake. Around two million years ago, the land moved and stopped it from mixing with the Mediterranean. This made the saltwater lake become smaller and saltier over time. Around 10,000 years ago, it reached the size it is today.

Today, the Dead Sea gets only 50 mm of rain each year. The Jordan River is the only river which feeds it. Unfortunately, in recent years, people have taken a lot of water from the Jordan River to drink and grow food. This means that the Dead Sea is getting even less fresh water.

People in the area have started trying to save the Dead Sea. For example, Jordan, with help from Israel and Palestine, is now building a pipe to bring in water from the Red Sea.

**Reading 11 The Silk Road**

The Silk Road is not really one single road. It is a collection of ways—by land and by sea—that joined the West and the East more than 2,000 years ago. The Silk Road was first made around 120 BC in China and ran all the way to the Mediterranean Sea.

It is called the Silk Road because silk was the most important thing to be carried and sold. At the time, silk was only made in China. This beautiful cloth was highly valued by rich people all over Europe. Silk is light, yet also strong and warm. To Europeans, it was almost magical.

Once it first came to Europe, rich people there wanted more and more silk. The movement of goods to and from China and the West grew quickly, as sellers travelled there and back again for thousands of kilometers. They carried silk and tea from China; they took European gold, valuable stones, and glass when they went the other way.

The Silk Road brought great change to the world. As different countries met, ideas moved from person to person, and cultures started to change. One example is the movement of religion. Buddhism, which began in India, moved to China, Korea, Japan, and Central Asia at that time.

The Silk Road also brought death to millions of people. New illnesses travelled across Asia and Europe along with the travelers. One of the deadliest was the Black Death. This killed more than 100 million people in Europe and Asia—about 20% of the world’s people at that time.

The Silk Road brought many great things to the world. Many people became rich, and people’s lives changed. However, like any change, it also brought unhappiness. Now China has started rebuilding the Silk Road. What changes will that bring?

**Reading 12 Kowloon Walled City**

In 1993, the government of Hong Kong destroyed an area known as the Kowloon Walled City. This small part of Hong Kong was the most densely populated place on earth. By 1990, more than 50,000 people lived inside an area of 26,000 m2. That’s about the same size as four football fields.

People lived in tall buildings that were up to fourteen stories high. These buildings grew from year to year. If there was no space, people would simply build another floor on top. The buildings were poorly made, unsafe, and so close together that almost no sunlight reached the ground.

Most of the people who lived in the Kowloon Walled City were poor, and the area was known for being dangerous. Because it was difficult for the police to enter, people there often did not follow the laws of Hong Kong. There were drugs, crime, and sex workers. Many outsiders were afraid to go there at night.

However, most people who lived there were not bad people. Most were ordinary people trying to live. Many had come from other parts of China and just wanted to work hard and feed their families. Inside the city, there were small businesses such as stores and food shops. There were also many illegal doctors and dentists. It was a difficult life, but for many people, it was home.

After the Kowloon Walled City was destroyed, the government of Hong Kong built a beautiful park in its place. Most people were happy to see the end of such an unhealthy, dirty, dangerous place. However, for many of the people who lived there, there was also sadness. The Kowloon Walled City was where they had grown up with their friends and family. For these people, it was the end of a way of life.

**Reading 13 The Happy Birthday Song**

*Happy Birthday* is a short song with a long and interesting history. Today it is one of the most loved songs in English. However, did you know that this song was written with a different name and for a very different reason?

Nobody knows who wrote the lyrics for *Happy Birthday*, but the music was written by two American teachers, Mildred and Patty Hill. In 1893, Mildred wrote the well-known song, and her sister Patty added some simple words. They called their new song *Good Morning to All*. They used it to begin class each day: “Good morning to you / good morning to you / good morning dear children / good morning to all.”

The Hill sisters put *Good Morning to All* in a song book in 1893. Thirty-one years later, a man named Robert Coleman included it in another song book, with the lyrics changed to “happy birthday to you.” No one knows who wrote the new words, but the song quickly became used at birthday parties. Soon, businesses started using the song as well.

In 1935, another Hill sister, Jessica, asked a music company to help protect the music to *Happy Birthday*. The music company made a deal so that no one could sing *Happy Birthday* for money without asking them first. This deal is still in law. We can sing *Happy Birthday* to our family and friends, but we can’t sing the song in public or use it in something that makes money, such as a movie or an ad.

Today, the music company still owns *Happy Birthday*. Each year, the song brings in about two million dollars. Half of that money goes to the music company and half to the family of the Hill sisters. Their simple classroom song has become a worldwide hit.

**Reading 14 Harry Potter**

*Harry Potter* is a series of books written by an English woman named J.K. Rowling between 1997 and 2007. It is the bestselling book series in history. When it was first written, the first Harry Potter book was rejected by eight different book companies, and Rowling almost gave up. However, the ninth company accepted the book, and it soon became a bestseller.

The books are about a young boy in England whose parents died when he was a baby. He was sent to live with his aunt and uncle, who were not kind to him. One day, Harry gets a special letter from a magic school. Soon, he finds out that he is a wizard and can do magic. At the magic school, Harry meets two other students, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, and the three become good friends. Harry learns that a very bad wizard named Voldemort killed his parents and that now Harry and his friends must try to find and kill him.

Some parts of the story are funny. Other parts are sad. But the books are always exciting. People say that the Harry Potter books made kids want to read for fun again, like they used to before movies and computer games. On the other hand, some others have said that Harry Potter is bad for children. These people don’t like the mention of magic in the stories and say that such stories are not good for children.

Whatever you may think of Harry Potter, it is hard to argue with its success. J.K. Rowling has sold almost 500 million books, and this has made her one of the richest people in the world. There are movies, video games, and countless toys based on the stories. Today, not even Voldemort could make Harry Potter go away.

**Reading 15 Alice in Wonderland**

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is one of the most loved children’s books of all time. It tells the story of a young girl named Alice, who stops doing her school work in order to follow a rabbit down a rabbit hole. Through the hole, Alice enters an unusual world called Wonderland. In this world, she meets many talking animals and other unusual people and animals.

The book’s writer is Lewis Carroll. In fact, this was not his real name. His real name was Charles Dodgson. One day, Dodgson took a boat ride down the Thames River in England with three little girls who were friends of the family. To keep them happy, he made up a story in which Alice, one of the children, was the main character in the story. They enjoyed the story very much.

Dodgson later wrote down the story and gave it to Alice as a present. He also gave the story to a friend. This friend read it to his children, and they loved it too. He suggested to Dodgson that he make a book from his story. Dodgson then wrote more parts to the story and sold it as a book. It quickly became a bestseller.

One of its first readers was Queen Victoria. She asked for a collection of all of Lewis Carroll’s works. She was surprised to find that there were many works on mathematics. In fact, Charles Dodgson was also a well-known mathematician. We can see this in the many puzzles that appear in his books.

Since the story first appeared, it has been sold in over fifty languages and has had several movies based on it. Today, the book *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is often sold together with the next book about Alice, *Through the Looking Glass.*

**Reading 16 Street Art**

People have been making graffiti for thousands of years. Explorers have found them in ancient Egypt, in Roman cities, and even on prehistoric cave walls. Today, we can see colorful spray-painted graffiti on the walls of almost every major city around the world. Some see graffiti as a kind of art, but many others call it vandalism. People who don’t like graffiti say that it is simply vandalism. They may have a point; after all, if you paint your house, you would not like it if someone came at night and painted whatever they wanted on your wall—especially if they painted words you don’t agree with or an image you don’t like. It’s true that graffiti does damage people’s property.

On the other hand, graffiti can be artistic, funny, or have an important message. This kind of graffiti is loved by many people. The mysterious artist Banksy, for example, has become very well known for his or her graffiti. Banksy’s work often carries a sharp political message; for example, “If at first you don’t succeed, call an airstrike.” Banksy’s art pieces are sometimes removed and sold for a lot of money.

People who support graffiti art say it adds beauty to a place. This is especially true in the poorer, dirtier places where graffiti is most common. In such places, graffiti can give a voice to young people. Supporters of graffiti say that we should help young artists, not try to stop them.

Maybe the most important thing to remember about graffiti is that it is not all the same. In some situations, graffiti can be beautiful—but in others, it is nothing more than vandalism. Just like any other art, some graffiti is good, and some graffiti is bad. We should look at each piece with an open mind.

**Reading 17 Online Education**

Online education is a kind of distance education. Online courses are offered through the internet using video, file-sharing apps, email, and other technologies. This is good for students who live too far away from a school, who work full-time, who cannot move around easily, or who simply want to study from home.

Distance education is not a new idea. People have been taking courses through the mail for many years. In the early forms of distance education, the teacher would mail out work for students to watch or read. Students would then mail their completed work back to the teacher. It was very slow. The internet has greatly helped this. It is now much faster and easier to study by distance.

However, some people worry that online education is not as good as studying in a school with other students and teachers. These people believe that face-to-face work will always be an important part of learning. They also say that it is too easy to set up an online school, so many online courses are not very good.

Supporters of online education admit that these problems may have been true in the past. However, they say, as technology has become better, so has online learning. Students and teachers today are much more comfortable using video chats and social media to talk with others and to learn from each other. There are also better government rules to make sure online education is good.

Today, there are many very good online courses to choose from, and most students do at least part of their coursework online. Most universities offer some courses or whole degrees which are 100% online. In fact, there are now some completely online universities—that is, universities which do not have any classrooms at all.

**Reading 18 The End of Aging**

In recent times, discoveries in medicine and technology have meant that humans now live longer than before. For example, in 1960, the average person in developed countries lived to be about 70 years old. By 2010, the average had gone up to over 80 years. Today, it is not unusual for many people to reach their 90th birthday and beyond.

It isn’t just that we are living longer. We are living better, too. New technologies, better healthcare, information about how to live, and better eating not only make our life longer, but also make it better as well. A healthy 60-year-old today is often happier and does more than a 60-year-old who lived in the early 1900s.

In fact, our life is getting better so quickly that a group of scientists now say that the next step is to end aging completely. This group, called the anti-aging movement, believes that we can use drugs and technology to make our lives far longer than most people today can even imagine. One of its leaders, Ray Kurzweil, has said that soon humans will be able to live forever.

Another leader of the anti-aging movement, Aubrey de Grey, believes that most of the technology needed to slow down aging is already here. He says that the human body is like a machine; we can continue to change parts and keep it working. But first, we must stop thinking of aging as something that we can’t stop. Instead, he says, we should fight aging in the same way that we fight cancer.

Many scientists agree with these ideas. In fact, most scientists today think it is possible to make the average human life last around 90 years. What they don’t agree on yet is how long it will take to reach this goal.

**Reading 19 Octopus Intelligence**

The octopus may look strange with its eight legs and small body, but it is in fact one of the smartest animals in the world. Interestingly, the octopus is an animal without a backbone. Although we know of many smart animals with backbones, such as dogs or cats, the octopus is the only animal without a backbone which is so smart.

Scientists say that octopuses can learn information and then use it in new ways. For example, they sometimes climb inside fishing boats and hide in tanks full of crabs, one of their favorite foods. They have also learned how to steal fish from traps.

One well-known example happened about 100 years ago at an aquarium in England. An octopus came out of its tank at night, climbed into another tank nearby, ate the fish that was in that tank, and then moved back into its own tank. This happened several times before aquarium workers discovered what was happening. In another well-known story, Inky, an octopus in New Zealand, got out of his tank, went down a pipe, and found his way back to the sea.

Octopuses are also able to play. In one study, scientists wanted to know if two octopuses would play together the same way that dogs or cats do. They put an empty bottle into an octopus tank, and soon the two octopuses were shooting water at the bottle. They pushed the bottle backwards and forwards between them just like kids playing with a ball. This shows that octopuses can use the things around them for reasons other than survival.

These stories may not seem like much when we see what we humans can do. For animals, however, they put the octopus at about the same level as many others we think of as very smart.

**Reading 20 Self-Driving Cars**

Driving is dangerous. Every year, in almost every country in the world, people die in car accidents. In 2013, more than one million people worldwide died because of car accidents. That means one person every 25 seconds, or six or seven deaths by the time you finish reading this page. How can we find an answer to this problem? Many people think that the answer will be computer-controlled self-driving cars.

In the United States, 81% of road deaths are caused by humans making mistakes. Self-driving cars, however, don’t make mistakes. They are not careless, they don’t get tired, and they never need to stop. They always follow the rules of the road, and they decide what to do thousands of times faster than even the best human driver. These computer-controlled cars can talk to the internet and talk with other cars around them in real time, so they always know where they are and how long it will take to get to where they’re going.

However, self-driving cars are not perfect—not yet. For example, tests show that the cars sometimes have trouble when driving at night or in bad weather. Also, although computers don’t make mistakes, they cannot think either. Human drivers, when faced with an unexpected situation, can usually think of something to do. A computer, on the other hand, may not be able to decide what to do and may do nothing.

Self-driving technology is getting better and better every day. The question is no longer if self-driving cars will take over, but when. People now believe that in a few more years most cars on the road will be self-driving. Soon after that, all cars will be self-driving. At that point, driving will become something to be enjoyed only on special roads, like horse riding is today.

**Reading 21 One World Currency**

The history of money started when people needed to pay for things that they wanted. Early forms of money included animals, food, and valuable stones. Today we use paper money, or currency. Currency has no value by itself like cows or food do, but it shows value. Each country protects the value of their own currency—for example, the peso in Mexico, the won in Korea, the lira in Turkey, the dollar in Canada, and so on.

However, the value of one currency is always going up or down compared to the other currencies. This can cause difficulty for business between countries and for people who travel a lot. For this reason, people sometimes suggest that the whole world should use just one single currency. This world currency would have the same value whether you are in Japan, Mexico, Korea, Turkey, or any other country.

There are some clear good points to a single world currency. First, people would not need to use different money when they travel. Also, it would be easy to understand the price of things in other countries or when shopping online. It could also make selling goods between countries easier and help smaller countries.

On the other hand, there are some problems. Perhaps the biggest is that countries would not be able to change the value of their own currency, which they sometimes do now. Another problem might be feelings of nationalism. People in many countries today like their own currency and do not want to change it.

Actually, we already have one good example of what could happen if we changed to a single world currency. Before the European Union, each European country had their own currency. Today, most have changed to the euro, while some, like Sweden and Switzerland, continue to use their own currencies.

**Reading 22 Nintendo**

In the early 1980s, video games were everywhere. The video game market was huge as game centers came into the home. The largest company at the time was Atari, controlling most of this three-billion-dollar business. In 1983, however, the video game business went through very hard times, and two years later it had lost 97% of its value. Many video game companies closed, but one carried on. It went on to bring the video game business back to life, almost by itself. That company was Nintendo.

Nintendo introduced the Nintendo Entertainment System, known as “NES” or “Famicon,” in 1985, and soon the company was making a lot of money again. The reason for this was games. Before this time, anyone could make computer games, so many of the games were not well made and not much fun. Nintendo, however, closely controlled who could make their games. This way they could make sure that the games were very good.

Since 1985, Nintendo has continued to be one of the most important companies in the video game business. In that time, they have sold many game systems and games. One reason they continued to do well is that they have changed again and again, always trying to find what users want. Their best game systems, like the Game Boy and the Wii, have brought something new to gaming.

Nintendo has also made some of the best-known games in the world. The best known is the Mario series of games. That cute little man and his friends have become so well known that when the Japanese prime minister went on stage at the closing of the 2016 Olympics, he dressed as Mario to ask everyone to come to Tokyo in 2020. Perhaps this shows that Nintendo really has become the biggest name in games.

**Reading 23 The Business of Sport**

In 1880, members of St. Mark’s Church in the city of Manchester, UK, were worried about problems in their city. Young men who couldn’t find work were drinking too much and fighting with each other. The answer, they decided, was to keep these young men busy by playing a sport, so they started a soccer club. Over time, this club grew and changed to become one of the best soccer clubs in the world, Manchester City.

It has been a long time since sport was just something to keep young men healthy and out of trouble. Sport is now a billion-dollar business, where making money is often more important than winning. Now, companies pay large amounts of money to put their names in the stadiums where teams play. Other companies also pay to have their names put on the team uniforms, and players can make more money in one week than most people make in ten years.

It’s not only soccer. Money now rules all major sports. For example, the Olympics has businesses that pay to advertise their goods during the games. This sometimes means that the Olympics becomes connected with places that sell cheap, unhealthy food. It also means that sports players are not only trying to win a gold medal. They are trying to win real gold too.

To be fair, money in sport has also helped sport. Players now are much better than they used to be. They are paid enough money to train full-time and harder and longer than before. This has made for better and more exciting games. The problem with this is that it has also made sport a serious business.

Perhaps it would be better if all this money was taken away, and then everyone could go back to just playing for fun.

**Reading 24 The Tulip Bubble**

Supply and demand are the main reasons why the price of something goes up or down. When there is high demand but low supply, prices go up; when there is low demand but high supply, prices go down.

With most goods, prices stay at a reasonable level—not too high, not too low. Sometimes, however, when there is very high demand and supply can’t catch up, prices can rise out of control. This is called a bubble.

Bubbles are dangerous because they can “pop” at any time, causing prices to drop. One of the earliest bubbles happened in Holland over flowers. It shows that bubbles can happen for almost anything.

In the 1630s, people were very excited about tulips in Holland. They had recently been brought to Europe, so they were new and exciting. Demand for the flowers went up quickly, and people saw a chance to make money. Many of them borrowed money to buy tulips, then sold them the next day for a higher price. They could pay back what they borrowed and keep the extra money. It seemed like a good plan.

From 1634 to 1637, the plan worked well. The price of tulips went up and up. By February 1637, one tulip cost ten times more than a worker made in one year. Many people became very rich. However, the situation could not continue.

One day, no one bought any tulips. This caused uncertainty, and the price of tulips suddenly dropped. Many people lost all their money. Some lost their homes. Reality had returned to the tulip market.

 Since Holland’s tulip bubble, there have been many others. Perhaps the best-known recent bubble was the “dot-com” bubble of 1997–2001, when even the largest technology companies lost up to 80% of their value within a few months.

**Reading 25 Walking for Exercise**

People exercise in different ways. Some lift weights or join a dance class. Others ride bicycles or play a team sport. However, one of the best ways to exercise is also the simplest: walking. Studies show that walking helps to lose weight, makes the heart stronger, and makes you less likely to become ill. It is also easy to do since most of us already do it every day.

Perhaps the best thing about walking is that it burns fat without making your body work too hard. Running or playing sports also burn fat, but you have a higher chance of hurting yourself. For example, running and jumping sports can cause trouble for your legs.

Another good thing about walking is that it makes your heart stronger. With a strong heart, you are less likely to have heart trouble. One study shows that walking for thirty minutes a day can make you thirty percent less likely to have heart trouble.

Doctors suggest any amount of walking for your health. However, the best is to walk for thirty minutes a day, every day. You should be able to walk comfortably. If it feels too easy, walk faster; if you get out of breath, slow down. Walking does not have to feel like work. Make it fun. Take your dog with you, or ask a friend to come along. Some people get all the walking they need simply by climbing the stairs at work or school. At night, take a walk instead of using the computer.

The main point is that it is not necessary to join a gym or spend money to be healthy. Any exercise is good for you, and walking is already something that most people do every day. Why not make it a bigger part of your life?

**Reading 26 Catching a Cold**

Colds are the most widespread illness on earth. Almost everyone will catch a cold during their life. People like teachers and doctors sometimes catch several colds in one year. A cold can last from one to two weeks and is the main cause of visits to the doctor and missed days from school and work.

Some people do not understand how we catch colds. It is not true that you can catch a cold from cold weather. Most people catch colds during the fall and winter, but this is not because the weather is colder; it is because people spend more time at home near each other.

Colds spread mostly from touching. You can also get sick by touching anything a sick person has touched, such as a phone or door. On the other hand, when people cough, it is not as easy to catch their cold. This is because the virus does not live very long in the air. It must live on something like books, door handles or a computer keyboard. Keeping your hands clean is an important way to stop getting a cold. When you come into your house after shopping, for example, wash your hands.

Another reason that winter is the time for colds is because there is less water in the air, which helps cold viruses to live longer. Dry air also makes the inside of our noses drier, which is helpful for the virus.

Although there is nothing to kill a cold, you can help your body to get better. First, take medicine for headaches and coughing. Second, drink lots of water; coughing and a runny nose happen when your body tries to push out the virus. Most importantly, rest; your body needs to be at full strength to help it fight the virus.

**Reading 27 Herbal Medicine**

Plants which are used for health and well-being are often called herbs. Thousands of years ago, people used herbs to fight diseases and stay healthy. In North America alone, people used more than 3,000 different herbs. Today, people throughout the world still use herbs for health reasons. In fact, many of the medicines we use today came from herbs.

Usually, when people talk about herbal medicine, they mean medicine which is not made or tested by science. For this reason, in many countries, doctors are not allowed to give herbal medicines to sick people. However, most people around the world have tried some kind of herbal medicine at least once. In fact, many of these herbs are sold in supermarkets and used as food.

Garlic, for example, is often used in cooking. It is said to fight heart disease and the cold. Ginseng is another well-known herb. It is said to be good for blood pressure and help the body fight disease. Another plant, ginger, may help if you have stomach trouble. Some flowers are also used as herbal medicines. Herbal medicine is often used to make you sleep better, to help you feel less worried, and to fight disease.

Today, it is easy to buy herbal medicines from around the world using the internet. For this reason, it is important to remember that some herbs are powerful and can damage the human body. Also, some herbs which you can buy in one country may not be allowed in another, which could get you in trouble with the police.

Herbal medicines have been around for thousands of years and will continue to be used by many people. However, we should always be careful when choosing what to put into our bodies. Sometimes, the medicine can be worse than the disease..

**Reading 28 Generic Medicine**

Doctors often tell people to take medicines which are made by large drug companies. However, sometimes there is also a generic medicine which does the same job. The generic medicine is the same but is made by a less well-known company.

Some people want to use these generic medicines because they are usually less expensive. Because generic medicines are made in the same way, they should do the same job as the better-known medicines. So why pay more?

Generic medicines are cheaper than other medicines because they do not include the costs of discovering the medicine. To make a new medicine, drug companies must first pay scientists to study a disease and to suggest a new medicine to fight it. Then, they must spend money testing the new medicine to make sure that it is safe and that it works. If these tests do not work, the money is wasted. That is why, once a company does find a good medicine, they will set a high price for it. They are trying to get back not only the money that they spent on this medicine, but also some of the money they spent on all their testing.

Generic medicine makers, on the other hand, simply use medicines that have already been discovered and tested. For this reason, they do not spend as much money to make medicines. This is why generic medicines are usually not sold right away; the companies that want to make them must wait a number of years before they can make the same medicine.

When the generic medicine is available to buy, doctors are usually quick to tell people about it. Taking generic medicines can save people a lot of money. Still, some people like the well-known medicines because they feel that they can trust them more.

**Reading 29 The Space Race**

 After World War II, the two most powerful countries in the world were the United States and the Soviet Union. Although they had worked together during WWII, now they were not friends. In fact, they started fighting a “cold war” when WWII ended. One of the ways they fought with each other was through technology; both countries wanted to show that they were the most powerful and had the best technology.

The space race was started by the Soviet Union in 1957 when it sent up the satellite Sputnik 1. It was the first time that humans put a satellite around the Earth. This surprised the United States. Four years later, the Soviets did it again when they sent the first person into space. That man, Yuri Gagarin, became a hero in the Soviet Union.

The United States could not believe it. They needed to do something bigger and better. President Kennedy, in 1962, promised that the United States would put a man on the Moon by 1969. It was a brave statement, and many people did not believe it was possible.

However, on July 20th, 1969, Apollo 11 safely landed on the Moon. Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the Moon, with the well-known words, “That’s one small step for [a] man, a giant leap for mankind.” It was what the United States needed. They had won this part of the space race.

In the end, the Soviet Union never sent a person to the Moon, so the space race ended with the Americans winning. However, both countries have continued to travel into space since then. Today, many countries—and even companies—are going into space. Most people believe that a new space race has already started: who will be the first to reach Mars?

**Reading 30 Moons for Living On**

 We have learned a lot about life on Earth. We know that terrible disasters often happen, and when they do, they can cause lots of deaths. We now know that such a disaster killed the dinosaurs and that there were many others.

So, some people worry about whether humans can continue to live on Earth. They want humanity to be able to live on other planets. That way, if something serious happened on Earth, we would be able to live somewhere else. To do that, we would need to build homes on other planets, but where?

The Moon and the planets Mars and Venus are the nearest to Earth, but they are not very good for human life. Although we will surely visit Mars and the Moon again, it may be difficult to build a place to live there. To do that, we would need a place where we can make air and water, grow food, and find different kinds of materials for making things.

Recently, scientists have discovered that some of the large moons around Jupiter and Saturn may be good places for humans to live. Saturn’s moon Titan, for example, has a lot of oxygen and is made of rock and ice, just like Earth. Although it is very cold (about -180º C), it also has many useful materials.

Jupiter’s moons both have a lot of oxygen and water under ice. While they are far from the sun, they both have a hot center; this keeps the water inside from becoming ice and could be used for power.

zzThese moons are far from Earth, so they are not easy to reach. Even if we did get there, we cannot be sure that we could live there. Still, perhaps we should try—our children may thank us for it!

**Reading 31 Are We Aliens?**

 Over the past hundred years, books, movies, and games have told us stories about people from other planets. In many of these stories, the aliens come to Earth from the planet Mars. It is an interesting idea, but perhaps even more interesting is the fact that life from Mars may be real—and it may already be here on Earth!

Professor Steven Benner at Harvard University is one person who thinks this may be true. Benner has suggested that all life on Earth, including humans, could have come from Mars. He thinks life on Earth came from RNA, an important part of life. However, the young Earth was not a suitable place for RNA to grow, unlike young Mars. So, Benner suggested that maybe, billions of years ago, RNA formed on Mars and was carried to Earth on rocks.

Today we know a great deal about Mars. For example, we know that it used to have air and water and that it has many things necessary for life. We have not found life there, but if there was life on Mars, it was probably very small and very simple, like viruses. If these very small lifeforms took a ride on rocks from Mars, they could then have grown and changed here on Earth, becoming all the living things around us.

 We have found many rocks from Mars on Earth. They are rocks which break off and fly into space when Mars is hit by another large body. Imagine shooting into a rock wall. Small pieces would break and fly off. They may fly far away. Some of these rocks from Mars flew all the way to Earth.

If Benner’s idea is true, billions of years ago these rocks from Mars may have carried the first life to Earth.

**Reading 32 The Big Bang**

Where do we come from? This is a question that humans have thought about deeply for as long as we have been living. Many people think that the answer can be found in religion; that is, that the Earth and all life on it were made by a god. Scientists have a different idea; they believe that it all began with a bang—the Big Bang.

In the 1920s, many scientists were looking at the stars, but only two of them would shape all thinking about where the universe came from. One of them was Georges Lemaitre, a Belgian. Lemaitre suggested that the universe is growing bigger and bigger and that everything is moving away from everything else.

Lemaitre said that at the beginning of the universe, everything must have been very small and packed tightly together. All matter and energy were packed into a very small point, which then blew up like a great bomb. This big bang sent everything in the universe shooting away from everything else very quickly.

At the same time, in the United States, another scientist, Edwin Hubble, was also making some important discoveries. Hubble showed that, in fact, stars far away from Earth were moving away from each other at the same rate. This discovery helped other scientists to look more closely at Lemaitre’s ideas, and together, both men—Hubble and Lemaitre—became very well known among scientists.

The two men helped change science in the 1900s. Today, there is a lot of scientific information which supports the Big Bang. This does not mean we understand it well. While we do not yet understand all of the things we need to know—for example, what caused it, or what was there before it—we do know that that the universe started with a bang.

**Reading 33 Lifelong Learning**

 In the United States, there is a well-known saying: “You are never too old to learn.” Ocie King and Gustava Burris are perfect examples. King completed her university degree at age 94; Burris got her high school degree at 97. These two women are part of a growing number of lifelong learners in the US.

Lifelong learners are people who keep on studying long after they have finished the expected number of school years. Some, like Burris, had to leave school early so they could get money to help their families. Others, like King, had to stop because of an illness. Other people did not have enough money or had to fight in a war.

Lifelong learning is also known as continuing education. It includes everyone from people who want to learn a new language to those who want to complete a university degree. Lifelong learners may also be taking training courses to do better in their jobs. In 2014, more than 1.5 million Americans were taking some kind of continuing education course, and that number continues to grow every year.

Most lifelong learners take courses related to their work. They want to learn something new that will help them get a better job. Other courses are those related to fun such as music or art. In recent years, school degree programs, like the ones King and Burris took, have also had more older students.

Lifelong learning is expected to grow even more around the world. As people live longer lives, as online learning becomes easier, and as technologies such as self-driving cars take over jobs, more and more people may choose to return to school. Although many will want to learn a new job, many others, like King and Burris, may do it for the interest and the love of learning.

**Reading 34 Extreme Body Modification**

 Body modification means changing the look of the face or body, often by cutting out, coloring, or changing the shape of a person’s skin. One kind of body modification, cosmetic surgery, is done to help people to look normal again. Cosmetic surgery is also for people who simply want to look more beautiful. For example, these people may want to change the shape of their nose, change the shape of their eyes, or become thinner.

Most people think that everyone agrees about beauty. In other words, we believe that models and movie stars are the most beautiful, and the rest of us should try to look like them as much as possible. However, other people believe that beauty means looking different from everyone else. Some may even use extreme body modification to stand out from others. For example, believers in extreme body modification may try to change their bodies so that they look very strange or look like an animal. They may use cosmetic surgery and tattoos, or they may cut body parts like their tongue or fingers. They may even put things under their skin to make new shapes or add holes to their skin.

One person who is well known for his extreme body modification is Erik “Lizardman” Sprague. Sprague has made himself look like a lizard by getting a full-body tattoo like green snake skin, a snake’s tongue, and pointed teeth. He is an artist and says that, since he doesn’t hurt anyone, people should let him make his own choice to change his appearance.

Some doctors do not agree with this way of thinking. They say that this type of body modification can be dangerous. They say that anyone who wants to have their body changed in this way should first go and talk to a doctor.

**Reading 35 Vegetarianism**

 Recent figures show that more than 375 million people in the world are vegetarian. These people do not eat the meat of any living thing. Many people go even further and do not eat things that come from animals, such as eggs and milk, or wear clothes made from animal skins. This is called veganism, and the people who practice it are vegans. Being a vegan or vegetarian has become more and more common in recent years.

Although the number of vegans in the world is still quite small, there are more vegetarians than you may think. The country with the largest number of vegetarians is India. The reason for this is the Hindu religion. Hindus believe that people should try not to hurt other people and animals. Its followers believe that we should not kill animals for meat, and we should not keep animals to produce food like eggs and milk. Thirty-one percent of India’s 1.2 billion people are vegetarians.

There are many reasons why people choose not to eat meat. Some people stop eating meat for health reasons. People who do not eat meat live longer and are less likely to have health problems such as heart trouble and cancer. Others stop eating meat to help protect the earth. It takes more land, water, and work to take care of animals for food than it takes to grow plants, and the larger the animal, the worse it is.

While there are many good things about being a vegetarian, it can also be a bit difficult. Eating out can be hard, and visiting friends and family can cause problems, especially as some people do not agree with the vegetarian lifestyle. However, many people all over the world are vegetarians, and many believe that their number will continue to grow.

**Reading 36 How Children Learn**

 Scientists used to think that people’s minds did not change anymore after they were born. Now we know that children’s minds actually keep changing during their first three or four years of life. That is why children learn more between ages zero and four than at any other time in their lives.

A young child’s mind is like a computer. It is always getting and storing the information it learns, such as names, colors, and words. Even though the child cannot yet talk, they are listening to the way others speak, and the child is learning their words. Children are able to learn many different languages at this age. If they hear a language enough, they will speak that language when they begin to talk. If they hear two languages, they will be able to speak both languages.

It is interesting to think about just how much young children learn. They learn how to walk and how to eat by themselves. They learn how to tell others what they want by pointing and using their hands. They learn how to look at pictures and recognize family members. They learn which things are safe to touch and which things are not. They learn the names of things such as “dog,” “cat,” “table,” and “book.”

To older people, these things seem easy. This is because they cannot remember learning them. But as people get older, learning becomes more difficult. People cannot remember things as well because their minds have stopped growing. Watch a class of college students trying to learn a new language. Then watch a class of young children doing the same thing. The young children may not seem to be paying attention, but the computers in their heads are always at work. These young boys and girls are learning machines.

**Reading 37 The Norse Creation Story**

 Every religion in the world has its own story of how the world was made. Perhaps one of the most interesting stories comes from the old Norse religion. The Norse people believed that, before there was the earth, the sky, or any living things, there was only an empty space between a world of fire and a world of ice.

In time, the fire and the ice came closer and closer together. When they finally reached each other, the fire turned the ice to water. The drops from the ice fell into the empty space and became Ymir, the first of the giants. As it grew, the giant Ymir drank the milk of a special cow. Water from Ymir’s body then dropped to form other giants. At the same time, the cow ate the ice, which also became water and became Buri, the first of the gods.

Buri had a son named Borr, and Borr had a son named Odin and two others. Odin and his two brothers killed the giant Ymir and made the world from its body. From Ymir’s skin, Odin made the land; from the blood, Odin made the sea. Odin made the trees from Ymir’s hair, and the sky from the giant’s head. Finally, Odin made a man and a woman and built a wall around their home, which is the earth.

Do you understand this story? If not, you are not alone. Even people who study these things do not agree about the meaning. Some say that there is one important idea: that for the Norse, death is necessary to make life. If this is true, it seems like a useful way of thinking for the old Norse people, many of whom lived between worlds of ice and fire. Today we know these people as the Vikings.

**Reading 38 Hinduism**

 The Hindu religion is common in India and nearby countries. It is the third-largest religion in the world, with over one billion followers. It has also been called the oldest living religion in the world. It is believed that the beginning of Hinduism goes back over 3,500 years.

Most Hindus believe in many different gods, not only one. However, they believe that there is only one “truth,” called the Brahman, which brings all things in the universe together. Some people see the Brahman as a god above the other gods, but most Hindus don’t think of it as a god. They believe that the Brahman is a force which keeps the universe together.

Hindus follow many special books. The two most important are called the Vedas and the Upanishads. The Vedas are the stories about the gods, about the beginning of the world, and about how to live a good life. The Upanishads are about the Brahman and about how to reach spiritual freedom.

Hindus believe in a circle of birth and rebirth. This is the idea that every living thing will come back again after death, maybe as another person or maybe as an animal. They also believe that there are four main goals to life: living a good life, living a meaningful life, living a physical life, and living a spiritual life. A person who can reach all of these four goals can break the circle of birth and rebirth and reach spiritual freedom.

In the 1800s, Hinduism started to change as a result of British rule in India and communication with the modern world. In the 1900s, many ideas from Hinduism became more and more well known in other countries. For example, the exercise known as yoga comes from Hinduism and is now popular all over the world.

**Reading 39 Atheism**

 Atheism is the lack of belief in god. Atheists don’t agree with religious explanations about how the world was made. They want to look at things with a scientific mind and find how life developed. In other words, atheism is not a belief; it is non-belief.

Atheists say that when the first religions began, many thousands of years ago, people did not understand the world very well. They did not know why things such as earthquakes or tsunamis happened, so people made up stories about gods. Now that people have a better understanding of the world, we do not need these old stories.

British actor Ricky Gervais, who is an atheist, has said: “If we took any religious book and destroyed it, in a thousand years it wouldn’t come back just as it was. But if we took every science book and destroyed them, those facts would all be back. Science would make all the same discoveries again.” Gervais thinks this is how we can know that science is true.

Most atheists do not want to stop religion. They know that many people believe in religion and this makes them feel better. However, atheists do believe that no one should be pushed toward a religion. They do not want religion to be part of law or government.

One of their ideas is that religion does not seem to make people act better. For example, Japan—a country where most people are non-religious—is known for low crime rates and well-behaved people. On the other hand, many religious countries have much higher crime rates.

Most atheists agree with religious ideas such as “Love your neighbor as yourself.” They think that stories in religious books are often beautiful and helpful to think about. Where they don’t agree is that these stories are fact.

**Reading 40 Noah’s Ark**

 Noah’s Ark is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. It is an important story in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish religions. The story tells of a great flood which kills all people on earth except for one family chosen by God. This great flood covered the whole world to the top of the highest mountain.

In the story, God is unhappy with the people he has made because they have become bad and violent. One day, God appears to the only good man, Noah, and tells him that he will soon clear the earth by flooding it. He says to Noah, “Build a great boat— an ark—and fill it with two of each animal, one male and one female. When it starts to rain, get in the ark with your family. You will be saved, but everyone else will die.”

Noah and his sons built the great ark as God had asked them. While they worked, everyone else laughed. They said that Noah was crazy for building a boat on dry land. However, when the ark was complete and filled with animals, it started to rain. Soon the whole world was under water. Everyone but Noah and his family died.

After forty days and forty nights, the rain stopped. Noah sent out a bird to see if it could find land. Many days passed. One day, the bird came back with a small green branch. Noah knew that the water was going down. Soon they could see dry land, and God told Noah to let the animals out. Then God promised Noah that he would never send a flood like that again.

Although there is no sign of a flood which covered the whole world, it is interesting that many other cultures also tell stories of a great flood.