How did that go? Are you feeling more confident about the ability to translate seemingly difficult ideas into simpler language? We hope so. Of course, we don't want you to think that difficult texts are always "really" about a totally simple idea. If that were true, writers would usually just write using the simple ideas. As you become more adept at reading in the humanities, you will be able to make even more sense of the details that we are telling you not to worry about just now. And it is worth learning to read better (and smarter). Of course, you already believe that; this is why you are here.

Reading Zone 8

Read the next passage, using pre-reading and the questions as guidelines for reading the passage. You'll find your speed improves as you can disregard the information that you already know you won't need. Still, don't time yourself—you shouldn't be concerned with speed through textbooks yet. This is a long passage, so pre-reading is very important. You can check your answers to the questions on page 244.

> Gauguin left France on 3 July 1895, never to return. He had presided over a failed sale of his earlier work and had left the majority of his paintings in the hands of at least two obscure men, Auguste Bauchy and Georges Chaudet. Together with his literary agent Charles Morice, his faithful friend Daniel de Manfried, and later, Ambroise Vollard, his dealer, these men kept Gauguin informed about his business affairs in France and made it possible for him to enjoy periods of prosperity amid bouts of depression, illness, and poverty. Because they oversaw Gauguin's financial well-being from afar, the many letters he wrote to them are full of information about financial matters and the state of his health. When these letters are read as an ensemble, his life sounds more miserable than it was, and almost masks the brilliant paintings, drawings, and prints that survive him.

During the eight years that elapsed between Gauguin's final departure from France and his death on the distant island of Hiva Oa in the Marquesas, he was in the hospital at least four times, often for prolonged periods; claimed to have attempted suicide once and perhaps succumbed to its temptations in 1903; built three houses; fathered at least three children; edited one newspaper and wrote, designed, and printed another; completed three book-length texts; sent paintings and drawings to many European exhibitions; finished nearly 100 paintings; made over 400 woodcuts; carved scores of pieces of wood; wrote nearly 150 letters; and fought both civil and ecclesiastical authorities with all the gusto of a youth. He was only fifty-four years old when he died, but he had lived his life with such fervor and worked so hard when he was healthy that we must remember the achievements even as we read the litany of the failures and miseries in the chronology.

Unfortunately, none of the great monographic exhibitions devoted to Gauguin since his death has done justice to this extraordinary phase in his working life. By the time the French organizers of the 1906 exhibition had begun their work, a good many of the most important paintings had already left France for private collections in Russia and Germany. Indeed, without the paintings bought by Karl Ernst Osthaus, Sergei Shchukin, and Ivan Morosov, it is difficult to understand the late Gauguin fully, and many of these paintings were not in France to be loaned to the 1906 Gauguin exhibition. Only the 1903 exhibition held in Vollard's gallery a few months after Gauguin's death had a generous enough selection of major paintings and transfer drawings to give full measure to the achievement of the artist in his last years. Yet even this large exhibition was insufficient for a full understanding of his oeuvre from 1896 to 1903 because it contained almost exclusively works made in the last three years of his life.

There are several important ways in which Gauguin's oeuvre from the last Polynesian period can be differentiated from that of the first. During the first trip, Gauguin's

work took two different directions, both of which were recognized by critics of the 1893 exhibition. First, he represented scenes of daily life just as his hero, Delacroix, had done in Morocco; second, he created idealized illustrations of Polynesian tales of religious and mythical events about which he read. Both these enterprises were characterized by a sort of ethnographic focus on Tahiti before its colonialization. Indeed, hints of the colonial presence are so rare in the paintings that, even when they do exist, one must be sensitized to recognize them.

Neither of these ethnographic concerns was so evident in Gauguin's work of the last Polynesian period. Indeed, Gauguin returned to Tahiti with his mind full of new ideas about comparative religion, politics, and social philosophy. He also took with him an even larger stock of photographs and reproductions of other works of art than he had in the years 1891 to 1893, and, as many scholars have pointed out, he made considerable use of this material. Two of the photographs often referred to were of the Javanese temple of Borobudur.

The Tahiti to which Gauguin returned in 1895 had become even more colonial in the two years since he had left, and there is little doubt that Gauguin disliked most of the "progress" that he saw. Yet we must also remember that Tahiti had changed in those years perhaps less than Gauguin himself had, and that given his earlier experience, the painter could have predicted what he was going to find on his return. His late paintings, traced and transferred drawings, and sculpture lack the vivid directness of the work from his earlier, ethnographic phase. In these years, he was more interested in the creation of works of art that transcended the particular place in which they were made. His late work is more obviously mediated than the earlier, and he created works of art as if to decorate a new mythic universe. His overt worldliness, his conflation of religious traditions of East, West, and Oceania, of ancient and modern, must have seemed strange to the majority of Eurocentric Parisians for whom his art was made. Today, in an age of rampant international capitalism, his world view is easier to find relevant and even important.

1. From 1895 to 1903, Gauguin's artistic activity can best be described as
   (A) impoverished
   (B) alien
   (C) ethnographic
   (D) frenzied
   (E) transcendental

2. It can be inferred from the passage that the word "oeuvre" means
   (A) style
   (B) area of obsession
   (C) overtness
   (D) work
   (E) openness

3. Which of the following statements is best supported by the passage?
   (A) Paul Gauguin was impressed by the physical beauty of Tahiti.
   (B) Paul Gauguin believed in civil reform.
   (C) Paul Gauguin committed suicide.
   (D) Paul Gauguin was not confined to one area of expression.
   (E) Paul Gauguin, in his later years, abandoned Europe due to religious pressure.

4. Paul Gauguin's later work was
   (A) obsessively involved in ethnography
   (B) casually informed by ethnography
   (C) revered in Europe
   (D) informed by philosophical issues
   (E) imitative of Javanese life

5. Gauguin's exhibition of 1893 was marked by
   (A) scenes from daily life
   (B) ideas of comparative religion, politics, and social philosophy
   (C) the lack of the vivid directness of earlier work
   (D) photographs of the Javanese temple of Borobudur
   (E) an abandonment of the island of Hiva Oa as a subject

Reflection

For any question you got wrong, go back and leave notes next to each answer choice indicating why it is correct or incorrect. It's important that you not only practice, but also reflect on your performance! This way, you'll see what issues give you trouble and gain a better understanding of how to improve.