Tattoo: Reading

Last Sunday I was sitting at a street café enjoying a cup of coffee when my friend Mark, getting too hot in the afternoon sun, rolled up his sleeves. I then found something out about him I didn't know before – he had a tattoo! 'Why yes,' he said to my surprised reaction, 'in fact I have many tattoos – on my arms, legs, chest and back!'

So when did this start? 'It must be about ten years ago now,' Mark said. 'I was travelling around Asia and tattoos were becoming very fashionable. I thought the designs looked really nice and I chose a leaping dolphin – (1) **it** seemed appropriate as I was on an island in the middle of an ocean.' Yes, it's certainly quite fashionable now – especially among the young. When I was young tattoos were associated with sailors, bikers and men working at the funfair.

Why has (2) **this** changed? 'I suppose it's seen as doing something different, a little risqué or radical and that appeals to young people. And in Asia it's both easier and cheaper to get a tattoo than, say, the US. (3) **There,** even a very small tattoo can cost $50. And did you know that it wasn't until 1999 that New York City lifted its ban on tattooing!' Mark explained.

But as my friend reminded me (4) **this** is not the first time by any means that tattoos have been fashionable. Although it's not certain exactly where tattooing started there is lots of evidence that for millions of people throughout time it has been one of the most popular forms of permanent body art. It's been suggested that tattooing may have started in Egypt because tattoos were found on Egyptian mummies from about 2000 BC.

'Ancient Maori warriors,' Mark continued 'used to paint their faces with charcoal before a battle. They then began to make the lines permanent rather than reapplying the charcoal for each battle. In Borneo men were covered in images of plants and creatures. (5) **This** provided both camouflage and protection against evil spirits. And in the South Seas Islands, particularly Samoa, tattooing continues to be an art form since it was first noted in the 19th century.'

It seems that the first documented evidence of tattooing in Britain was in 787 AD when it was outlawed by the British Council of Churches as a pagan practice. (6) **This** didn't stop people, including royalty. King Harold's body was only identified after the battle of Hastings in 1066 by his tattoos. In the late 19th century, tattoos were popular among wealthy socialites. Lady Randolph Churchill, mother of Winston Churchill, had a small tattoo of a coiled snake around her wrist. Even Queen Victoria herself was rumoured to have a small, discreet tattoo. It wasn't until later, as costs fell, that tattoos became more commonly associated with sailors and criminals.

And what came after the dolphin? 'Well, I continued the marine theme with different kinds of fish, then an octopus and a starfish. These are all on my left leg. I then decided to have a school of barracuda swimming over my left shoulder and the top of my arm. These took a few weeks to have done. I also have a huge shark on my back, chest and other arm. (7) **That** also took a long time.'

Does it hurt to have a tattoo? 'It depends! If you're feeling relaxed, then usually not. But if you're tired or nervous then you're more sensitive to pain. I met somebody who told me that they feel asleep during the tattooing – so it certainly didn't bother (8) **them**! And it also depends where. Most people start with the top of the arm as this is usually fine, but if the tattoo is over a bone, for example on your foot, then (9) **that**'s a different matter! And it can be very swollen afterwards too.'

Is it safe? 'If it's done in a licensed place, then yes. This means that precautions are taken at every stage such as fresh needles for each person, everything sterilized and unused ink being thrown away and not returned to the bottle. Apparently,' Mark added, 'before the advent of antibiotics in the 1940's there was an alarming rate of infection sometimes leading to the death of the tattooed – fortunately (10) **that**'s no longer a problem.'

And if you had any advice for someone who's thinking about getting a tattoo, what would (11) **that** be? 'Don't be too serious about it! The people who regret having had a tattoo are (12) **those** who thought for ages about what would be most appropriate and then chose the name of their girlfriend or boyfriend, or the name of their favourite pop group. Then ten years later their lives have changed and those influences are less meaningful. They're then stuck with something they don't want. So have one, but do it for fun!'

Finally, where did the word *tattoo* come from? 'It's from the Tahitian word *tattau* which means – wait for it – 'to mark'!' he laughed.

Tattoo: Reading Tasks

1   Match the words with their definitions.

scar	a red or brown mark on a person's skin that has been there since they were born
birthmark	a small dark brown mark on the skin, sometimes slightly higher than the skin around it
tattoo	a mark that is left on the skin after a wound has healed
mole	a small, pale brown spot on a person's skin, especially on their face, caused by the sun
freckle	a picture or design that is marked permanently on a person's skin by making small holes in the skin with a needle and filling them with coloured ink

2   Which of these do you have? Do you like them? Why / why not?

3   Do you think the following information about tattoos is true or false?
   a   Tattoos have become more fashionable recently.
   b   Tattooing was banned in New York City until 1999.
   c   Maoris used to tattoo their faces for camouflage.
   d   Only lower class people used to have tattoos.
   e   Having a tattoo is very painful.
   f   Having a tattoo is a dangerous thing to do.
   g   Tattooing should be taken seriously.
   h   *Tattoo* is an old Portuguese word.