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INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

This 2-page Insert contains the passages for comprehension. Please detach it and fill in your particulars in the boxes above. You will have to submit this Insert separately at the end of the examination.

Passage 1: Tess Lamare argues that a belief in serendipity is no longer relevant.

- 1 Sir Isaac Newton, blessed by an apple when formulating his laws of gravity, enjoys a reputation as one of mankind's greatest minds but was one of the most difficult to work with. In the same vein, Greek polymath Archimedes figured out his principle of buoyancy in a '*Eureka!*' moment. Indeed, the list of serendipitous discoveries in science is long, but modern researchers used to precise methods and collaborating, look at serendipity with jaundiced eyes. In their experience, those who spot an abnormality under controlled conditions are the ones who make meaningful revelations. 5
- 2 Fervent supporters of serendipity dismiss those who mistrust serendipity as incapable of latching onto the opportunities on offer in the achievement of their goals. They claim this flagging faith in serendipity has blunted the competitive edge which helped mankind survive crises. Unlike astute individuals such as Ikea's founder, Ingvar Kamprad, who capitalised on a moment of epiphany – using flat-packed furniture to reduce transport costs – the general public is too timid to weather the storms of life by leveraging serendipitous breaks and taking bold action. 10
- 3 It is ludicrous to think of serendipity playing any real part in our lives given the hectic pace and demands of modern lifestyles. Thankfully, we have replaced unproductive chance with purposeful design. Take for example our use of search engines where we can locate whatever we want in minutes. We do not want to waste time trawling through the internet to discover what else we could be interested in, not when artificial intelligence allows us to delight in tailored experiences all of the time. 15
- 4 There are a number of reasons why a reliance on serendipitous encounters is no longer popular. Our desire for immediate gratification has dampened our willingness to engage in chance-taking in our relationships since digital tools enable us to acquire social circles with little effort. In decisions like finding a lifelong partner, we should not trust databases even if they can match us to our supposedly right partners in seconds. What if we have forgotten to key in a critical requirement? What if our supposed soulmate is using a fake profile? Life should be a tapestry of happy outcomes brought about by careful planning. 20 25
- 5 Furthermore, those who place their faith in serendipity are not as cheery as they make themselves out to be. Participants in a research project 'Do the Happy Go Lucky?' who profess a belief in serendipity indulged in habits like 'awfulising' – a tendency to overestimate the seriousness of events. Encouraged by TikTok videos like the 'Lucky Girl Syndrome' which promote the life-changing power of positive thinking, they also dodge stressful situations. They believe that with serendipity by their side, everything will turn out well. Yet, which major global problems have ever been solved so simplistically? 30
- 6 While there is something attractive about depending on serendipity, we would be exaggerating the merits of the *Eureka* moment and over-estimating the frequency of bungling discovery. Though the thought of being rewarded for unintentional discoveries is alluring, to leave life solely to serendipity is inadvisable in an ambiguous world. 35

Passage 2: Simon Chan argues we need to restore a belief in serendipity.

- 1 Billionaire Bill Gates might well have led a very different life had the Mother's Club in his primary school not furnished a rudimentary processor or paid for expensive computer time using garage sale proceeds before computers became commonplace. Gates was introduced to the micro-computer, wrote his first software programme on that basic terminal and the rest, as they say, is history. Even though serendipity is the provider of opportunities to achieve greatness, hard work and talent have been highlighted as key ingredients in this and many other success stories. 5
- 2 Indeed, the value of serendipity should not be underestimated. The disproportionate numbers of the world's wealthiest people comprising those born in affluent nations vis-à-vis developing ones, lend credence to the Ovarian Lottery, a concept financial wizard Warren Buffett alluded to when asked for his thoughts on success. In the rags-to-riches stories that we all love, the underdogs have a defining moment when things start going their way. A talent scout stumbles upon the performance of a busker and catapults him to global fame. A small publishing firm takes a chance on an ordinary teacher's first attempt at writing and jumpstarts a wildly successful fantasy series. 10
- 3 Unfortunately, society appears intent on downplaying the value of serendipitous encounters. Instead, diligence has taken centre-stage. The loss of enthusiasm for serendipity is fuelled by the perception that not only is it at odds with problem-solving, it also weakens our ability to use time well and contradicts the commonly held belief that we are directors of our own destinies. Be it shopping for groceries, seeking leisurely diversions or making an all-important career move, it is clear that we have lost our appetite for serendipitous discovery which once powered profitable pursuits and alleviated monotony in our lives. 15 20
- 4 This rejection of serendipity is unfortunate as our preference for the predictable is crippling our ability to cope in a shifting world. Fearing the limiting effects of remote work, executive officers demand their employees return to the office as they seek to regain the advantages that serendipity once provided. Remote work might have increased business efficiency but random encounters at the water-cooler or photocopier necessary to ignite ingenuity in formulating ideas and resolving problems have become rare. With the reduction of successfully engineered workplace encounters, corporations will no longer reap the award-winning fruits of serendipitous engagement. 25
- 5 In addition, for those who turn their noses up at serendipity, their loathing for themselves increases when they stumble. In particular, athletes who deny serendipity are unable to accept setbacks in competitions as temporary lapses. By not believing in the magic of serendipity and expecting only bad things to happen, they squander the opportunity for personal development, and along with it, the possibility of transformation that can help them achieve their aspirations. 30
- 6 Convinced by the immediate returns of productivity, we have become accustomed to processes and procedures that run like clockwork. If everyone allows that unplanned change or two to their current routines, the probability of a serendipitous occurrence increases exponentially. Who knows what such encounters might bring? 35