



Cambridge Lower Secondary Checkpoint

ENGLISH

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Paper 1 Non-fiction

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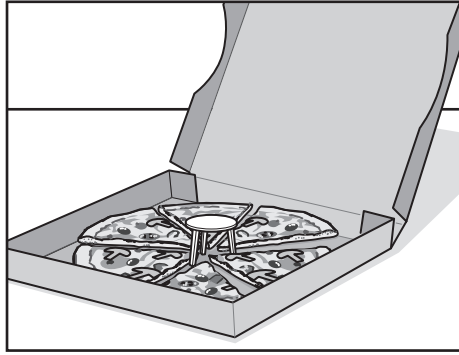
1 hour 10 minutes

INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading text.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.



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Small things considered: the pizza tripod

During a US radio show that was discussing the design of everyday objects, the host invited the audience to phone in with their favourite examples. One caller hesitatingly began describing an object that she was not sure anyone else would appreciate but which she marvelled at when she had a pizza delivered, to eat at home, and opened the box: the ‘thingy’ that keeps the top of the box from getting stuck to the melted cheese. Though she did not know what it was called, the white plastic tripod she described was immediately recognisable to the listeners. 5

The caller’s enthusiasm for the object made it clear that she thought the pizza-box insert was the epitome of good design. She told of washing and saving the little tripods, hoping someday to find new uses for them. No one called in to ask for a better description of the throwaway thing, or to give its actual name. But such identification was not needed for it to be recognised, admired for its ingenuity, and appreciated for its purpose. 10

After the show was broadcast, another listener, an artist, sent an email, saying that she also admired the design of the white plastic objects, which she called ‘triangle platforms’. She described shortening their legs and using them as spacers between stacked paint palettes in her storage box. She had also used them for a different purpose, turning them upside down to support spherical objects for display. Things are often used for purposes other than their intended design. 15

Another fan of the plastic tripods finds them ideal for holding eggs, to which she applies sequins, beads, and other festive trimmings to make decorations. For this admirer, the simple devices are definitely not throwaway items. In fact, on the website explaining her utilisation of these objects, they are described in an ironic way: 20

‘The plastic tripod is very expensive, costing somewhere around \$10 US, but it is worth it for the ease of working with the eggs. It’s probably the packaging that makes the tripod so expensive. It comes packaged with a carry-out pizza. The pizza and the cardboard box protect the plastic tripod, though some would assert that the box and tripod protect the pizza. Regardless, the pizza and box can be discarded in some ecologically sound manner and the tripod used to hold the egg as a work in progress.’ 25

However you look at it, the pizza-box platform is a fine example of something designed to be very functional. It is not, though, something most of us would think to put on display in our windows – or something that has a purpose that is apparent out of context. 30

No object is ever truly without a name. In fact, the plastic tripod is sold as a ‘pizza saver’ by the family business that provides hotels and restaurants with this item, as well as other items, such as plastic spoons and toothpicks. The three-legged speciality item, offered in the catalogue as a tripod to ‘keep the top of the pizza box from sticking to the cheese’ is indeed a benefit to fussy pizza lovers, and its tiny feet barely disturb the toppings. As a designed object, however, it 35

might be criticised for being too blandly functional and cheap looking. It is not difficult to imagine some critics objecting to its lack of style, others to the fact that it is made of plastic, and still others to the way strings of cheese stick to the spindly legs. Admirers of the little box-top-propping scaffolds might respond by saying, 'So, design something better.' In the case of the pizza saver, most people will say, 'Who needs something better? It works just fine.'

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Nothing is perfect. The pizza saver, like the typical flat box in which it is found, is efficient but not especially beautiful. The squat tripod does the job it was designed to do, but if it were first encountered in a kitchen drawer, that job would not be obvious.

Design is nothing if not decision making. Someone somewhere at some time had to make decisions about what the pizza-box device would look like. In order for it to be made, someone had to decide on the number, shape and size of its legs and how they would be joined. Someone had to specify the material to be used and its colour. The resulting design, which sufficiently satisfies the requirement of preventing the box top from touching the pizza, is certainly good enough for the modest role that it plays in the real world. That the pizza-box tripod can also serve, albeit unintentionally, for holding round and ovoid objects for display and decoration just makes its design all the more satisfying. Indeed, though it may never win awards, admirers appreciate its beauty.

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