



Reading 250

You are going to read several book reviews. For questions 1–8 choose from the book reviews A–D. The reviews may be chosen more than once. Do now write complete words or phrases.

In which book reviews the following is mentioned?

- 1 Its particular ideas make it stand out from books with the same broad theme. _____
- 2 The progress of the storyline sometimes takes second place to character development. _____
- 3 It can be read slowly or quickly with equal enjoyment. _____
- 4 It shows great insight into the way people think. _____
- 5 It brings to mind a variety of moods. _____
- 6 It has received other good reviews. _____
- 7 It is difficult to remember who these characters are. _____
- 8 Its title may mislead readers about the content. _____

A Halfway to Africa by Bronwyn Tate

If the words Halfway to Africa conjure up visions of the exotic, forget it. It's a metaphor for where most of us are in our lives - halfway to somewhere more interesting than the place in which we seem stuck, but this is not a gloomy novel either. The characters are ordinary people and Tate has the knack of articulating the awkwardness of social intercourse when difficult decisions are made or when conversation fails. There are dissatisfactions, though. The key characters are two sisters who are friends rather than rivals during their childhood. Tate's portrayal of Monica struck me as inconsistent. She has a university degree and, after her marriage and the birth of her two sons, spends the evening in a darkroom working on her photography.

During the day she cleans other people's houses - for the satisfaction of restoring order out of chaos, rather than for economic necessity. Structurally, this novel has its challenges. We're expected to keep track of a very large number of characters and their relationships to one another as well as the time frame within which a particular chapter operates. This stems partly from the desire to maintain suspense but that's less of a problem if you can read the book in large chunks.

B The Devil's Larder by Jim Grace

As this is a collection of brief short stories connected only by the theme of food and not by characters or plot, the Devil's Larder should not come close to satisfying. I suspect it's only because Jim Grace enjoys an auspicious shake of the talent dice that they do. Such a varied plate of ideas and situations can be partaken of at leisure, but it is delivered with enough pace, momentum and invention that it can be consumed in one go without a touch of indigestion. The tales are rich with the intimate links between eating, ritual and relationships: the piece of dough left on the window for the angels; the masterful letter to a longtime lunch friend; the eating of stolen deer. The backstory of the characters in these tales is revealed in just a few words. Little is wasted on precise geographic location, but sparse descriptions are still evocative. We are not sure either if the narrator is male or female. There are spooky and wry tales, sad and bleak, while the cute and touching ones should meanwhile remind you of what fun he must have had while working on the book. All of them have been written with great style and tone and all are imbued with a loving tenderness.

C Life of Pi by Yann Martel

This ingenious and gently philosophical novel by Martel has enjoyed great critical acclaim, and it is easy to see why. The witty narrative engages from the start, making probing digressions into matters of faith and commonly held belief, and involves an Indian boy, Pi, adrift on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger. During his peculiar isolation on the lifeboat, the young Pi questions the nature of existence. Here Martel offers witty and insightful comments with Pi as his mouthpiece. But Pi/Martel also questions more mundane precepts. It is almost an accepted fact that zoos are anathema to right-thinking people but his witty and eloquent defense of them - how animals in the wild are far from free but live in constant terror - makes for amusing and politically incorrect reading. There is a great tradition of isolation literature and there are multiple isolations here, emotional and intellectual as much as physical, but it is what Pi reflects upon which is uniquely engrossing. Readers will no doubt find Life of Pi to be a highly readable and a pleasingly troublesome book - especially in the hallucinatory ending - that irritates as often as it brings a smile.

D The Emperor of Ocean Park by Stephen L. Carter

Since a publisher broke records by bidding \$4.2 million for it, this book was a legend before it rolled off the press. A sprawling legal thriller set amid the affluent, east-coast African-American community, this is a big book - 650 pages - and takes its own time to get through. The pages teem with characters and subplots and you can't afford to ignore any of them. And beneath the crowded stage, the common ground between all the

players, is the undeniable chasm of loneliness - of being alone in a crowd - that indeed seems to underlie American society and often its literature. Our hero, a law professor at a top-notch university, reflects matter-of-factly at one point on 'how friendless an existence I have managed to create.' Carter's skill lies not just in his superb management of the complex plot, which has as its motif a particularly complicated chess manoeuvre, but in his ability to sketch a state of mind, or a dilemma. For a thriller, the pacing is frustratingly slow at times as Carter indulges his delight in character construction. If you have time on your hands, you could probably relax into this discursive style and simply enjoy the slow escalation of tension and danger.

Источник задания: финал Плехановской олимпиады школьников 2019/20

Reading 250 — Keys

- 1 — C
- 2 — D
- 3 — B
- 4 — D
- 5 — B
- 6 — C
- 7 — A
- 8 — A