

reading bank

Malcolm Gladwell: the ultimate connector

- 1 You are going to read about the writer Malcolm Gladwell. Read the article and put the sentences (1-8) into the text in the best places (a-h).

- 1 What makes Gladwell so successful is simply that he makes his books readable and accessible to everyone.
 - 2 This fact suggests a concerted effort on his behalf to keep his private life just that: private.
 - 3 Meanwhile companies such as HP are trying to sign him on a consultancy basis.
 - 4 and features in *Time* magazine's 'Top 100 influential people' list.
 - 5 Gladwell admits that his research is not original but that he's a popularizer of other people's academic ideas.
 - 6 He was described as obnoxiously competitive by his own father, but regards his Canadian upbringing as being very mellow and relaxed.
 - 7 Nowadays, he describes himself as a Democrat but of course, being a Canadian national, he can't actually vote in the USA.
 - 8 Suddenly, he found he was being stopped by the police for speeding when his driving style hadn't changed.
- 2 Which three of these things has Malcolm Gladwell not done?

- 1 voted in a US election
- 2 written for *American Spectator*
- 3 written for the *New Yorker*
- 4 written two books
- 5 been arrested by the police
- 6 worked as a consultant for HP
- 7 become a public speaker

- 3 Mark the sentences true (T) or false (F).

- 1 Gladwell tries hard to keep his private life from becoming public.
- 2 His childhood provided him with good character traits to be a journalist.
- 3 Gladwell enjoys being well off.
- 4 His writing career began in 1996.

- 5 Gladwell's books are based mainly on business matters.
- 6 He claims he uses other people's research.

- 7 His first book had a great effect on business thinking.
- 8 His second book got him arrested.
- 9 Gladwell embraces the idea of him being a consultant to companies.

- 4 Find words or phrases in the article that match the following definitions.

- 1 in an extremely unpleasant way, especially in a way that offends people (paragraph 1)
- 2 relaxed, calm, and happy (paragraph 1)
- 3 the way that sb looks or behaves (paragraph 1)
- 4 useful or helpful to sb when needed (paragraph 1)
- 5 a statement or an idea that forms the basis for a reasonable line of argument (paragraph 5)
- 6 a word, phrase, or sound that is repeated again and again, especially during prayer or meditation; a commonly repeated word or phrase (paragraph 5)
- 7 organized very carefully or secretly (paragraph 5)
- 8 (of hair) in a mass of tight curls (paragraph 6)

Over to you

- 1 Have you read or would you like to read one of Gladwell's books?
- 2 How important are first impressions? Have you ever made an important decision based on your first impression of someone?

Malcolm Gladwell: the ultimate connector

1 First impressions can be deceptive - he looks like a cross between popstar Lenny Kravitz and comedian Jerry Seinfeld. But Malcom Gladwell has written two best-selling books, is a highly sought-after public speaker, is number twenty-seven in Accenture's ranking of 'Top 50 business gurus', **a** _____. So who exactly is he? An internet search provides plenty of results about his books and inspirational work but very little about the man himself. **b** _____. He was born in the UK to an English father and Jamaican mother but was brought up in rural Canada in a house with no television. **c** _____. This mixture of a laid-back demeanour and his inner ambition has stood him in good stead for a career in journalism. These days he lives in a modest apartment in New York's West Village, and seems rather embarrassed by his monetary success. In fact, he confesses to being baffled by his prosperity. He seems to enjoy his lifestyle, claiming that being a writer gives him plenty of time to think and drink coffee.

2 Politically he has moved across the spectrum: as a child he was a right-winger, but he puts that down to the fun radicalism of youth, explaining that Canada was so left-wing that you could only be a rebel by being on the right. **d** _____.

3 Gladwell started his writing career at the *American Spectator* magazine before moving on to the *Washington Post*, and then in 1996 to the *New Yorker* magazine - a literary and political commentary publication based in New York but with a wide readership throughout the USA. His article for the *New Yorker* on the reduction in crime in New York led to him researching and writing his first book: *The Tipping Point*.

4 e _____. He mixes serious social science research with cleverly crafted characters and anecdotes that anyone can relate to. He draws his inspiration from a range of sources, not just focusing on the business world but on things that affect people's everyday lives. In *The Tipping Point* he wrote about the popularity of Hush Puppies, graffiti on subway trains, and the reasons why the crime rate had dropped in New York. **f** _____. He takes this usually 'dry' research and is able to make it come alive. Gladwell claims this skill makes him the happiest man in the world.

5 Undoubtedly, his real impact has been in corporate culture. His first book has become a must-read for marketing experts and students alike. Its main premise,



that it doesn't matter how many people you reach but who you reach, has become the mantra of advertisers across the world. Marketers are now looking to put on orchestrated word-of-mouth campaigns, trying to influence what Gladwell calls the 'mavens' (people in the know); and the 'connectors' (those with wide social circles).

6 His second book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, also became a best-seller. It was influenced by the changing perception people had of him once he allowed his hair to grow into a frizzy afro. **g** _____. *Blink* describes the strange power of first impressions and how decisions can be made based on them.

7 His writing has influenced high-profile business people, for example, Starbucks' Howard Schultz publicly attributed his company's success to the tipping-point phenomenon, while Ketchum, a public relations company, has created a database that copies Gladwell's models.

h _____. It's not an idea Gladwell seems very fond of, stating that formal consultancy would be a breach of his first commitment: journalism.

8 So it would seem that in many ways Gladwell could be described as the ultimate 'connector' himself. With his best selling books, *New Yorker* column, and \$40,000 speaking appearances he bridges the gap between different aspects of American society, the New York literary world, the scholarly world, corporate culture, and, of course ... the person in the street.

Glossary

- deceptive** likely to make you believe sth that is not true
sought after wanted by many people, because sth is very good quality or difficult to find
guru a person who is an expert / teacher on a particular subject
baffled completely confused
Hush Puppies a brand of practical and comfortable shoes
afro a hairstyle in which the hair forms a mass of tight curls