

Spare a tear for Argentina

LEVEL ONE - ELEMENTARY

Pre-reading activity - Key Vocabulary

The following words and expressions are important for understanding the text. Match the beginnings and endings of the sentences:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 If you suffer from malnutrition ... | a ... you can't take money out of the bank. |
| 2 If you are wealthy ... | b ... many people don't like it. |
| 3 If your bank account is frozen ... | c ... prices are high and money loses its value. |
| 4 If there is high unemployment ... | d ... you don't have enough to eat and you become ill. |
| 5 If there is high inflation ... | e ... you feel very ashamed. |
| 6 If a state company is privatised ... | f ... it is very, very sad. |
| 7 If something is unpopular ... | g ... it is sold by the government to private companies. |
| 8 If you feel humiliated ... | h ... a lot of people have no work. |
| 9 If something is a tragedy ... | i ... you have a lot of money. |

Scan reading

Find the answer to these questions as quickly as possible. The answers are all numbers or dates:

- 1 How many World Cups had Mr Blanco seen as a journalist?
- 2 What is the unemployment rate in Argentina?
- 3 How many children are suffering from malnutrition?
- 4 What was the inflation rate in the late 1980s?
- 5 What was the inflation rate in the early 90s?
- 6 When did the dollar begin to rise?

SPARE A TEAR FOR ARGENTINA

The people of Argentina have been watching the World Cup with great interest. A famous Argentinian journalist, Horacio Garcia Blanco, a reporter at the previous 9 World Cups, was not present at this year's World Cup. Mr Blanco died just two weeks before the World Cup began. He needed a kidney transplant. The operation was expensive but Mr Blanco was quite a wealthy man. The money, he thought, would not be a problem. But the Argentinian

authorities have frozen all the private bank accounts in the country. Mr Blanco was not allowed to take out more than 10% of his money. Because of this he could not pay for his operation and so he died.

For many Argentinians Blanco's story is an example of what has been happening to their country over the past four years. During this time Argentina has changed from a successful country into an economic

disaster zone. Unemployment is 25%, the economy is getting smaller at a rate of 15% a year, and the central bank has no money to defend the currency. Argentina produces enough food to feed its population ten times over, but almost 25% of its children are suffering from malnutrition.

Every day, outside the Presidential Palace, where Evita Peron waved to the crowds from the balcony, there

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are demonstrations against the Peronist president, Eduardo Duhalde. The people in the demonstrations are not young students, but elderly ladies from Buenos Aires' high society. Argentina's middle class is now poor and angry. Very angry indeed.

No one imagined this would happen in the mid-90s, when the Peronist president, Carlos Menem, controlled Argentina's hyper-inflation and introduced many economic reforms. Menem removed exchange controls, privatised large sections of Argentina's state-owned firms and opened up the country to foreign competition. He also fixed the exchange rate against the dollar at one-to-one. As a result, inflation fell from 5,000% a year in the late 1980s

to almost zero in the early 90s.

But there was also a negative side. One-to-one with the dollar was good for Argentina when the US dollar was falling, as it did for the first half of the 90s, because that meant that Argentinian exports to the rest of South America and Europe were very cheap. But from 1995, when the dollar began to rise, everything changed. Argentinian exports became very expensive.

President Duhalde now has to find a way to unfreeze bank accounts, give compensation to the banks for the money they have lost, and also satisfy the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that hyper-inflation will not return to Argentina. The IMF wants to help Argentina but, in

return, Argentina will have to accept some conditions that will be unpopular with its people.

Argentina is a rich and cultured country. It feels humiliated. People believe that the economic situation will get worse before it gets better. History shows us that the combination of a middle class that has lost its wealth and a working class with nothing to lose can easily lead to revolution. That is the real worry. To lose a football match is not a tragedy. What is happening in Argentina now is a tragedy.

The Guardian Weekly 13-6-2002, page 10

Comprehension check

1 Why did Mr Blanco die?

- a because he was poor
- b because his bank account was frozen
- c because he was rich

2 How much food does Argentina produce?

- a enough to feed its population
- b enough to feed its population ten times over
- c not enough to feed its population

3 Who are demonstrating outside the Presidential Palace every day?

- a students
- b young ladies
- c old ladies

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- 4 What happened when President Menem fixed the exchange rate against the dollar at one-to-one?
- a inflation fell to almost zero
 - b inflation increased
 - c inflation fell a little
- 5 What happened to Argentinian exports when the dollar was falling?
- a they were very expensive
 - b they were very cheap
 - c nothing happened
- 6 How do Argentines feel about the present situation?
- a they don't care
 - b they feel sad
 - c they feel very ashamed

Vocabulary – Word-Building

Complete the table using words from the text:

VERB	NOUN
1 to operate	_____
2 to demonstrate	_____
3 to compete	_____
4 to combine	_____
5 _____	defence
6 _____	product
7 _____	imagination
8 _____	introduction
9 _____	satisfaction

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Vocabulary – Prepositions

Fill the gaps using a suitable preposition. Check in the text if you need help.

- 1 People have been watching the World Cup _____ great interest.
- 2 Mr Blanco was not present _____ this year's World Cup.
- 3 Argentina has changed _____ a successful country _____ an unsuccessful one.
- 4 Many children are suffering _____ malnutrition.
- 5 People are demonstrating _____ the President.
- 6 Menem fixed the exchange rate _____ the dollar.
- 7 Everyone hopes hyper-inflation will not return _____ Argentina.
- 8 The IMF's conditions are unpopular _____ the people

If + Will. Complete the sentences with an appropriate phrase.

- 1 If the government in Argentina doesn't do something soon the people will be very unhappy.
- 2 If something similar happens in my country, I will _____ .
- 3 If the IMF helps, life in Argentina will _____ .
- 4 If I meet an Argentinian today, I will _____ .

Discussion point

If countries like Argentina produce enough food to feed 10 times their population, why are children suffering from malnutrition?

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KEY

1 1d; 2i; 3a; 4h; 5c; 6g; 7b; 8e; 9f

2 1; 9 2; 25% 3; almost 25% 4; 5,000% 5; almost zero 6; 1995

3 1b; 2b; 3c; 4a; 5b; 6c

4 1 operation 2 demonstration 3 competition 4 combination 5 defend 6 produce
7 imagine 8 introduce 9 satisfy

5 1 with 2 at 3 from/into 4 from 5 against 6 against 7 to 8 with

6 personal answers (some suggestions below)

2 be very worried

3 get better

4 express my sympathy