**A Collection of Essays for the O/L English by RCF**

**Let’s give up the use of polythene**

The environment is a gift given by Mother Nature. The environment consists of many things such as the atmosphere, land, plants, animals and water bodies. There are many ways which pollute the environment. Destruction of forests is a main thing. Polythene too is a main thing which pollutes the environment.

A large amount of polythene is added to the environment in one day. It takes around more than 20 – 30 years for polythene to decay. Polythene is used everywhere. When we go to a shop to buy goods they are given in polythene bags. Many people who work, take their meal in a lunch-sheet and after that they throw it in the bin. Finally all this polythene adds to the environment.

One day when I dug a small pit to put my dead fish, I saw a packet of tea. The manufacture date on the tea packet was in 2003. It has been 13 years but still the packet hadn’t decayed.

We have an environment like this today as our ancestors have protected the environment with much care. It is our duty to protect the environment for our future generations.

When you go to a store, take a cloth bag to put in all the goods. Use a good lunchbox to take your meals. Then we can keep a good environment for our future generations. So everyone should get together and give up the use of polythene!

**The Vesak Festival**

Vesak Poya is the most auspicious day for Buddhists. The Birth of Buddha as Prince Siddhartha, his Enlightenment at the age of 25 and Parinibbaba at the age of 80, happened on a Vesak Poya Day in the month of May. We call these three events ‘Themagula’, the three festivals.

Lord Buddha has taught that Buddhists should follow Dana, Sila and Bhavana. People practice these at home in small scale. On Vesak Poya Day the entire country engages in the above acts. Devotees assemble in temples dressed in white and observe ‘Atasil’ and listen to the Dharma sermons, discussions, bhavana and Buddha Pooja. They spend the whole day with ‘Shraddha’ minds.

Another way of celebrating Vesak is decorating houses with light bulbs, hanging lanterns and hoisting Buddhist flags. Streets are decorated with big, beautiful Vesak lanterns and pandals. These pandals contain Lord Buddha’s life stories and jathaka stories. Nowadays we can see digital pandals too. In many places we can see Vesak zones and temples hold expositions of sacred relics.  
People who don’t observe sil, go to temples and engage in other religious activities. TV channels conduct various Buddhist programmes so people can watch and listen to them.

Some people give free food and drinks to the devotees and others. Such places are called Dansals. This year our president has required that all materials used for dansals and money used for decorations, be given to people affected by floods and landslides.

Lord Buddha has said that helping the distressed, deprived, sick and infirm people is a great meritorious act. By engaging in the above ‘Prathipaththi’ and ‘Amisa’ pooja we can collect more merit. With this merit, we can have solace, peace and happiness in our present lives and also our future lives. Lord Buddha has taught the existence of the rebirth, ‘Sansara’.

**Keeping our water sources clean**

Water is very important for all human beings, animals and plants. Chemicals and other harmful substances pollute water. This would result in the pollution of streams, lakes, rivers and seas, Severe water pollution can kill large numbers of fish and other animals. People who use this polluted water can fall ill.

Humans pollute water in many ways. Insecticides, weedicides and fertilizers used in large quantities in farming are some examples of ways of polluting water. When it rains, these chemicals flow into streams, lakes and rivers. Harmful chemicals, gases and waste materials are also sometimes released from industrial factories into waterways.

We should control ways of water pollution. We can do this by helping to keep our sources of water clean. In agriculture we should not overuse chemicals. Another way of preventing water pollution is to build cleaning treatment plants in factories.

If we stop throwing waste into lakes, rivers and seas they will be clean and beautiful forever.

**Instant Food**  
Instant food or convenience food are the foods that are usually ready to eat without further preparation. Though they are easy to eat, they are not suitable for our health. Because of their busy lifestyles, people have got used to going to shops and buying these instant foods. Various food additives, preservatives and colouring are added to foods like instant noodles, meatballs, sausages and short-eats etc. in some hotels and restaurants, previously made mixtures are used to make food.

There are many harmful effects of eating this kind of food. Day by day, people in our country get non communicable diseases like Diabetes, Cholesterol, High Blood Pressure, Cancer and many more. The life expectancy of these people is gradually decreasing. Though these foods give a pleasant smell and taste, it can cause long term diseases.

Considering the past, people were very healthy because they only ate healthy food which did not contain harmful things, but now nearly everybody in the world has these diseases.

So what should we do to prevent this? We have the ability to cook healthy food instead of eating instant food. Then we will be able to protect ourselves and save the money we spend on instant food. So let us eat healthy and be healthy!

**Let’s go green**

‘Happy is the man who acquires the habit of loving the environment.’ Showing love and affection to the beauty of the environment is called eco-friendliness.

Today Earth is commonly known as the ‘Green Planet’ due to its illustration with many forests of trees. The trees provide a hub of activities for man as well as animals around him. Trees help to maintain the water cycle and also maintain the balance of carbon dioxide and oxygen in the atmosphere. Trees provide timber, fruits, vegetables, medicines, shade and many other useful things.  
Deforestation of trees would create a drought like living place. Today man, in order to construct new factories, houses, farms cut down trees.

If trees are cut down the oxygen we breathe will decrease resulting in an imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide. Deforestation also leads to global warming. Carbon dioxide harms the Ozone Layer so that ultra violet rays might enter the Earth and this results in skin cancer. This will also melt down the icebergs due to excess heat and resulting in land areas sunken by water.  
If people acknowledged the adverse effects of cutting trees, water crisis would be minimized. So let’s spread this green umbrella all over Sri Lanka and practice the saying ‘if you cut one tree plant ten more’.

**An unforgettable trip**  
The trip we made to Kataragama during my school holidays was an unforgettable one. We left home early in the morning and reached Kataragama by evening. Everybody got out and began to unload the baggage. My father got on to the roof of the van and unloaded the pots and pans. We took our bags into the room to unpack our clothes. My mother and aunt went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. After a few minutes I heard them laughing loudly. They seemed to be enjoying the cooking. As we were sleepy and tired we had our dinner and went to bed early.

The following morning, we woke up early and had a bath in the beautiful Menik Ganga. Next, we went to Kiri Vehera and the Kataragama Kovil. We waited patiently in line at the kovil to offer a basket of fruits to the Kataragama Deity. We spent the rest of the day walking around the historic city of Kataragama.

I was very unhappy to see a lot of garbage left carelessly all around the city. I wish that people were more thoughtful of the environment and were more careful when they throw garbage. We all came back to the guest house later in the evening and packed our bags to go back home.

**Caring for elders**  
Who are elders? Where do they come from? Were they born as elders?  
All the elders were once like us… children. They too had a playful childhood. They too had ambitions, as you and I have now. Over time they have grown old but most of them have done an immense service to the society.

An elderly person we see on the street could be a retired teacher who has opened the eyes of thousands of children; or a retired doctor who has cured thousands of sick people. He could be a farmer, a clerk, a soldier, an engineer, a driver, a nurse, a factory worker and so forth. The list is endless. He or she may have grandchildren like us.

Sometimes we treat elders in not so nice ways. We tend to ignore them, ridicule them and even treat them cruelly. When we do that, they feel sad. They feel helpless. At such times they remember their youthful age. Most of them have nobody to discuss their plight. So they can only shed tears. On the other hand, when they realize that we care for them, they feel very happy and content. Can we buy this happiness? No it is priceless.

There are numerous ways we can make them happy. Be helpful, be respectful and above all be kind. They need our love and care. They need a feeling of security. They just need to be a part of the stream of social life that is flowing on and on around them.  
Remember that you and I too will grow old and we too will feel the same. It is inevitable.

**The value of sports and games**  
A sport or a game is a physical activity we engage mostly during our leisure time. These sports are divided into two groups as indoor sports and outdoor sports. Sports like cricket, badminton, volleyball, tennis etc., belong to the outdoor games. Games like chess, table-tennis, carom etc., belong to the indoor sports.

Outdoor sports are very important for our physical well-being while indoor sports mostly help in the intellectual development.  
When we engage in an outdoor sport like athletics, our body muscles burn extra fat using oxygen which helps us to keep trim and fit.  
We can also avoid diseases such as heart attacks, diabetes, high blood pressure etc., by doing these types of sports.  
Indoor sports mostly help us to improve our thinking ability and decision making skills. They are very important for young children as they develop memory skills.  
Sports also teach us the values such as working towards a goal, working as a team, accepting winning and losing equally etc. They are important for developing a well balanced child by character formation at the early stages of their life.