

Going under

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Pre-reading A: Predicting the content

Read the headline and the sub-heading below. What do you think the article is going to be about?

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Britain is well-known for its very wet climate. We are used to suffering week upon week of rain. So why have a few heavy showers caused such devastation around the country this summer?

Aida Edemariam reports
July 24, 2007

2 Pre-reading B: Key words

Match these keywords from the text with the definitions below.

devastation
sewers

a downpour
ploughs

evacuated
absorb

run-off
crops

drainage
sandbags

1. _____ a very heavy shower of rain
2. _____ removing liquids from something
3. _____ digs up the land in lines, using machines
4. _____ very serious damage
5. _____ excess water that cannot sink into the ground
6. _____ made to move away (from a dangerous place)
7. _____ strong bags filled with sand, used to keep water out
8. _____ a system of pipes underground to carry waste water away
9. _____ take in liquid a little at a time
10. _____ plants grown for food

Now read the article, check the words in context, and see if your prediction was correct.

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- 1 Anyone trying to take a train to or from the southwest of England this weekend might think they had accidentally walked into a disaster movie. Trains were announced, but never arrived, as more and more lines went out of service. And the people who had to watch their homes and businesses flooded, couldn't believe that a downpour so short should cause such damage, or that such scenes should be occurring at all.
- 2 Their disbelief is justified. This, after all, is a country famed for its wetness. Rain is our national weather. Snow – well, we all know what happens when Britain gets a few millimetres of snow. Excessive heat, like last summer's, causes difficulties, too – but rain? Given our wide experience, surely we should lead the world in rain management.
- 3 Alas, it seems not. Thousands of people had to be evacuated over the weekend, thousands more are trapped in their homes. That's thousands to add to those still unable to go home after floods in the north of England last month, which killed eight people – and millions of pounds to add to a national insurance bill eventually expected to top £2.5 billion. Evesham, in Worcestershire, the worst-hit town this weekend, had floods of up to five metres. And it isn't over yet: as this was printed there were warnings that flood waters weren't expected to peak until tonight, and Oxford and Bedford and Gloucestershire were preparing themselves to be the next major areas hit. Everyone is asking how such short bursts of rain – just one hour in London, slightly longer in places such as Oxfordshire – could have such devastating results.
- 4 In fact, the answer lies partly in how quickly it all happened. Brize Norton in Oxfordshire had 121.2mm of rain between midnight Thursday and 5pm Friday – a sixth of what it would expect for the whole year. South Yorkshire got a month's worth of rain on June 25. And it has been raining for weeks now, "and the ground is very wet, so immediately you get rainfall, you get run-off", explains professor Adrian Saul, of Sheffield University.
- 5 It isn't just that the ground cannot absorb so much so fast – drainage systems can't either. "When you design a system you have to plan for possible dangers, and generally the plans are enough to protect our communities," says Saul. "It's very lucky that the Victorians built the systems as big as they did. Especially in London, they imagined that there would be change, and that has protected London ever since." But they were built when London's population was a quarter of what it is now – and last Friday, they simply didn't hold up.
- 6 "Our sewers are not designed to deal with so much water flowing through them," says Nicola Savage, a spokeswoman for Thames Water. And they are not designed for the way we treat them nowadays. We each, personally, use far more water than ever before. The public also tend to "use the sewers as a rubbish bin," Savage adds. "People put nappies down toilets, sanitary products, tights. In particular, we need to encourage people not to be pouring stuff down the sink – for example, fat, oil and grease. The sewers were never designed to cope with this sort of material."
- 7 Saul is also involved in £5.6 million project which is investigating how farmers can control the flow of water off land. Farmers can decrease run-off if they plough across hills, rather than down them, and carefully placed trees can help stop flooding. And the more animals walk over a piece of land, the harder the ground becomes, and the less water it can absorb. That will damage crops, and there will be a shortage of food. And if intensively farmed animals get no drinking water for 48 hours, thousands will die, and the price of meat will rise.
- 8 Scientists are also investigating how individuals can help reduce a problem that, in fact, they have helped create: by extending their houses,

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paving driveways, and building car parks. All this decreases the amount of soft ground to absorb water, and increases the amount of run-off into drains and rivers. "In essence, anything that runs off the house should be stored locally," says Saul. Instead of going straight into the sewerage system, rainwater can be collected – in storage tanks under driveways, for example – and used to flush toilets or run washing machines. Small trenches called soakaways can be dug in gardens and filled with stones, to trap the water and release it into the ground a bit more slowly. Every little helps.

- 9 For although what Britain has experienced over the past month is, as experts explain, some very unusual weather events, our changing climate means that there may soon be more of them, more frequently. Today Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire are having to get out the sandbags and evacuate the citizens. Tomorrow, next month, next year – who knows?

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3 Comprehension check

Re-read the text more carefully, and decide whether the following statements are *True (T)* or *False (F)*.

1. People in Britain were not surprised by the floods.
2. Insurance costs will be very high.
3. One reason for the floods was that a huge amount of rain fell in a very short time.
4. The sewers in London were built by Victorian engineers.
5. The public have been putting the wrong kinds of things down the toilet.
6. Farmers could help prevent flooding if they ploughed their land up and down hill.
7. Food will probably cost less after the floods.
8. If people keep covering more land with buildings and concrete, we may see more floods in the future.

4 Vocabulary development 1

Find words in the text that mean the following. Paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. *too much, very great* (para 2)
2. *kept somewhere, like a prisoner* (para 3)
3. *to reach its highest level* (para 3)
4. *often do this, as a habit* (para 6)
5. *succeed in working with* (para 6)
6. *covering (the ground) with hard material like concrete or bricks* (para 8)

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5 Vocabulary development 2: Word formation

All these words appear in the text, some as nouns, some as verbs (or adjectives), and some as both.

1. Give the NOUN form of each of the VERBS given. Some you can find in the text; others you can try to remember, or predict.

	verb	noun
1.	devastating	devastation
2.	evacuated	
3.	announced	
4.	manage	
5.	drained	
6.	flooded	
7.	stored	
8.	prepare	
9.	expect	
10.	warn	

2. How many different NOUN endings are there here? What are they?

6 Language development: So and such

1. See if you can remember (or guess) which word goes in each gap: *SO* or *SUCH*. Then scan the text again quickly to check.

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. _____ short | 5. _____ as Oxfordshire |
| 2. _____ damage | 6. _____ devastating results |
| 3. _____ scenes | 7. _____ much water |
| 4. _____ short bursts | 8. _____ fast |

2. What can you discover about the way to use *so* and *such*?

7 Discussion

1. Have there been floods in your country recently?
2. Have there been other changes in the weather?
3. Do you think these changes are probably because of global warming?
4. What is your government doing to help prevent global warming? What do you think it should do?
5. What do you think individuals in your country should do to help?
6. How have you changed your own behaviour to help reduce the danger?