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US teen visits Baghdad to do his homework

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31 December, 2005

THE ARTICLE

US teen visits Baghdad to do his homework

A 16-year-old American schoolboy is counting his blessings today following the school project of a lifetime - a solo trip to Baghdad. Farris Hassan's unbelievable and dangerous journey was to complete a homework assignment to write an editorial on an international topic. An interest in "immersion journalism" and his Iraqi ancestry fueled a craving for a more in-depth analysis of his topic. He arrived in Baghdad on December 18 after being denied entry for several days due to the tightened security surrounding Iraq's national elections. He soon became the center of attention at food stalls as he endeavored to survive with the aid of his phrase book. He eventually capitulated to a fear of his alien surroundings and sought refuge in the war zone office of the Associated Press.

Farris told journalists he had to "go the extra mile...or a few thousand miles" to ensure his homework was accurate. In an essay he penned before his escapade, he wrote: "I know I can't stop all the carnage and save the innocent. But I also know I can't just sit here." He also said: "Going to Iraq will broaden my mind. We...live such sheltered lives. I want to experience...the same hardships ordinary Iraqis experience everyday, so that I may better empathize with their distress." He concluded: "I want to live my days so that my nights are not full of regrets. Therefore, I must go." His mother is extremely relieved at the news her son is homeward bound. She said Farris "is very driven" but "showed a lack of judgment" in going to Baghdad. She will also keep his passport under lock and key from now on.

WARM-UPS

1. HI FROM BAGHDAD: Sit with your back to your partner. Have an imaginary telephone conversation. You both secretly went to Baghdad. Tell each other why you went, what you are doing and how you are surviving. Is it dangerous?

2. DANGEROUS PLACES: In pairs / groups, talk about dangerous places. Where are the most dangerous places in the areas below? What makes them dangerous?

- a. The world?
- b. Your part of the world?
- c. Your country?
- d. Your city / town?
- e. Your neck of the woods (your neighborhood)?
- f. Your house?

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Sixteen-year-olds / schoolboys / counting / blessings / homework / journalism / phrase books / carnage / sheltered lives / distress / regrets / passports / locks

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. I'M A JOURNALIST: You are now a journalist. Your editor has asked you to choose from the assignments below. Rank them in order of preference. Compare your lists with your partner's.

- a. A report on Baghdad children playing soccer.
- b. An in-depth interview with Mongolia's leader.
- c. To join soldiers in Zimbabwe who are tracking armed elephant poachers.
- d. A top-secret interview with Osama Bin Laden in his mountain cave.
- e. Chase a story about a high-profile drug trafficker in the Colombian jungle.
- f. Investigate the mysterious disappearance of 1,237 teddy bears in your town.

Your editor has decided you must go with your partner(s). Agree on a new, joint order of preference.

5. SHELTERED LIVES: Do you live a sheltered life? Are you exposed to any dangers on a daily basis? Answer these questions with your partner(s). Compare the safety / dangers of your life with the lives of people in other countries.

6. JOURNALISM: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with journalism. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. A U.S. schoolboy went to Baghdad alone to research his homework. T / F
- b. The schoolboy went to Iraq to fuel an interest in Iraqi archaeology. T / F
- c. The schoolboy spoke fluent Arabic and passed for a Baghdad resident. T / F
- d. He sought refuge in the war zone office of a famous news agency. T / F
- e. The boy said he wanted to go the extra 100 meters to do his report. T / F
- f. He went to Iraq so he could empathize with the distress of Iraqis. T / F
- g. The boy has nights full of regrets about going to Iraq. T / F
- h. The boy's mother will not let him have access to his passport. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. counting his blessings | gave in |
| b. craving | killing |
| c. center of attention | sanctuary |
| d. capitulated | desire |
| e. refuge | adventure |
| f. go the extra mile | determined |
| g. escapade | thanking his lucky stars |
| h. carnage | understand |
| i. empathize with | focal point |
| j. driven | try harder |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. the school project | carnage and save the innocent |
| b. his Iraqi ancestry fueled a | office of the Associated Press |
| c. He soon became the center | to a fear of his alien surroundings |
| d. He eventually capitulated | showed a lack of judgment |
| e. sought refuge in the war zone | craving for a more in-depth analysis |
| f. In an essay he | under lock and key |
| g. I know I can't stop all the | penned before his escapade |
| h. Going to Iraq | of attention at food stalls |
| i. Farris is very driven but | will broaden my mind |
| j. She will also keep his passport | of a lifetime |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

US teen visits Baghdad to do his homework

A 16-year-old American schoolboy is counting his _____ today following the school project of a lifetime - a solo trip to Baghdad. Farris Hassan's unbelievable and dangerous journey was to _____ a homework assignment to write an editorial on an international topic. An interest in "_____ journalism" and his Iraqi ancestry fueled a _____ for a more in-depth analysis of his topic. He arrived in Baghdad on December 18 after being _____ entry for several days due to the tightened security surrounding Iraq's national elections. He soon became the center of attention at food stalls as he _____ to survive with the aid of his phrase book. He eventually capitulated to a _____ of his alien surroundings and _____ refuge in the war zone office of the Associated Press.

endeavored

immersion

sought

blessings

craving

complete

fear

denied

Farris told journalists he had to "go the _____ mile...or a few thousand miles" to ensure his homework was _____. In an essay he _____ before his escapade, he wrote: "I know I can't stop all the _____ and save the innocent. But I also know I can't just sit here." He also said: "Going to Iraq will broaden my mind. We...live such sheltered lives. I want to experience...the same _____ ordinary Iraqis experience everyday, so that I may better empathize with their _____." He concluded: "I want to live my days so that my nights are not full of regrets. Therefore, I must go." His mother is extremely relieved at the news her son is homeward _____. She said Farris "is very _____" but "showed a lack of judgment" in going to Baghdad. She will also keep his passport under lock and key from now on.

bound

carnage

distress

extra

driven

penned

hardships

accurate

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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Farris told journalists he had to "go the extra mile...or a few thousand miles" to _____ his homework was accurate. In an essay he _____ before his escapade, he wrote: "I know I can't stop all the _____ and save the innocent. But I also know I can't just sit here." He also said: "Going to Iraq will _____ my mind. We...live such sheltered lives. I want to experience...the same hardships ordinary Iraqis experience everyday, so that I may better _____ with their distress." He concluded: "I want to live my days so that my nights are not full of regrets. Therefore, I must go." His mother is extremely relieved at the news her son is homeward _____. She said Farris "is very driven" but "showed a lack of _____" in going to Baghdad. She will also keep his passport under lock and key from now on.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'school' and 'project'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "SHELTERED LIVES" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about our sheltered lives and whether we would benefit from being exposed to more risks.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| • counting | • mile |
| • complete | • innocent |
| • fueled | • broaden |
| • denied | • regrets |
| • aid | • driven |
| • sought | • passport |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Have you ever "gone the extra mile" to complete your homework?
- c. Do you ever "go the extra mile" in your daily life?
- d. Do you think Farris Hassan has a death wish?
- e. Do you admire him for his courage and tenacity?
- f. Do you think you could have done what he did when you were sixteen?
- g. What do you think his schoolmates and teachers will say?
- h. Do you think Farris will become a journalist after his escapades in Iraq?
- i. Does he sound like your average 16-year-old to you?
- j. Do you think there are lessons for us all in Farris' actions and words?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What crazy things did you do when you were sixteen?
- d. Would you like to drop everything and do something adventurous and dangerous?
- e. Do you think you live too sheltered a life?
- f. Where would you like to go or what would you like to do to broaden your mind?
- g. Do you want to "live your days" so that your "nights are not full of regrets"?
- h. What questions would you like to ask Farris?
- i. What do you think his answers would be?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

SHELTERED LIVES: Do we really live such sheltered lives? Are there more dangers and risks in our lives than we think? In pairs / groups, write down all the possible dangers and risks involved in the following mundane routines:

	RISKS AND DANGERS
Showering	
Eating breakfast	
Going to work / school	
Sitting at your desk	
Engaging in your hobby	
Going shopping	
Studying English	

Discuss how real these risks and dangers actually are and whether you will now worry about them. Talk about any stories you have heard about these things happening in real life.

Change partners and tell your new partner(s) what you discussed with your old partner(s). Will you do anything differently now to avoid these risks and dangers?

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on this story. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. MY PROJECT OF A LIFETIME: Write an essay about a major lifetime project you would like to undertake. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Who had the most mind-broadening project?

4. LETTER: Write a letter to Farris Hassan. Tell him what you think of his escapades. Ask him some questions about his adventure. Show your letters to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. F d. T e. F f. T g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. counting his blessings | thanking his lucky stars |
| b. craving | desire |
| c. center of attention | focal point |
| d. capitulated | gave in |
| e. refuge | sanctuary |
| f. go the extra mile | try harder |
| g. escapade | adventure |
| h. carnage | killing |
| i. empathize with | understand |
| j. driven | determined |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| a. the school project | of a lifetime |
| b. his Iraqi ancestry fueled a | craving for a more in-depth analysis |
| c. He soon became the center | of attention at food stalls |
| d. He eventually capitulated | to a fear of his alien surroundings |
| e. sought refuge in the war zone | office of the Associated Press |
| f. In an essay he | penned before his escapade |
| g. I know I can't stop all the | carnage and save the innocent |
| h. Going to Iraq | will broaden my mind |
| i. Farris is very driven but | showed a lack of judgment |
| j. She will also keep his passport | under lock and key |

GAP FILL:

US teen visits Baghdad to do his homework

A 16-year-old American schoolboy is counting his **blessings** today following the school project of a lifetime - a solo trip to Baghdad. Farris Hassan's unbelievable and dangerous journey was to **complete** a homework assignment to write an editorial on an international topic. An interest in "**immersion** journalism" and his Iraqi ancestry fueled a **craving** for a more in-depth analysis of his topic. He arrived in Baghdad on December 18 after being **denied** entry for several days due to the tightened security surrounding Iraq's national elections. He soon became the center of attention at food stalls as he **endeavored** to survive with the aid of his phrase book. He eventually capitulated to a **fear** of his alien surroundings and **sought** refuge in the war zone office of the Associated Press.

Farris told journalists he had to "go the **extra** mile...or a few thousand miles" to ensure his homework was **accurate**. In an essay he **penned** before his escapade, he wrote: "I know I can't stop all the **carnage** and save the innocent. But I also know I can't just sit here." He also said: "Going to Iraq will broaden my mind. We...live such sheltered lives. I want to experience...the same **hardships** ordinary Iraqis experience everyday, so that I may better empathize with their **distress**." He concluded: "I want to live my days so that my nights are not full of regrets. Therefore, I must go." His mother is extremely relieved at the news her son is homeward **bound**. She said Farris "is very **driven**" but "showed a lack of judgment" in going to Baghdad. She will also keep his passport under lock and key from now on.