



The Race to Be First

Read the passage and answer the questions. (CEFR B1–B2)

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1 Time zones look like natural facts, but they are political decisions. Until 1994, the island nation of Kiribati was cut in two by the International Date Line, so its eastern and western islands lived on different days. Government offices could share only four working days a week. To solve this, Kiribati moved the whole country to the western side of the line, and its eastern islands simply skipped December 31, 1994.



2 The change had a valuable side effect. Kiribati's eastern islands became the first land on Earth to enter the year 2000, and the government renamed Caroline Island "Millennium Island" to attract attention. In December 1999, more than 70 singers and dancers traveled to the tiny island with about 25 reporters to greet the first sunrise of the new millennium. Tonga, New Zealand, and Fiji protested, because each had hoped to be the first to see the new millennium.

3 Samoa made a similar move in 2011 for economic reasons. Its main trading partners were Australia and New Zealand, yet Samoa was almost a full day behind them. By skipping December 30, it joined their side of the line. These stories remind us that even midnight is, in part, a human invention.

Comprehension

1. What is the main point of the passage?

- (A) Time zones and dates are partly human decisions shaped by politics and economics.
- (B) The International Date Line was drawn by scientists and has never moved.
- (C) Kiribati is the most beautiful place to welcome the new year.
- (D) Samoa and Kiribati are close trading partners.

2. What problem did Kiribati have before 1994?

- (A) The country had no calendar of its own.
- (B) The islands could not see the sunrise on New Year's Day.
- (C) Government offices on the two sides could share only four working days a week.
- (D) Tourists could not find the islands on maps.

3. Why did Samoa skip December 30 in 2011?

- (A) It wanted to be the first country to see the year 2012.
- (B) Tonga and Fiji asked Samoa to change.
- (C) Its islands were cut in two by the date line.
- (D) It wanted to be on the same day as its main trading partners.

4. Why did Tonga, New Zealand, and Fiji most likely protest?

- (A) They wanted to keep the old date line for scientific reasons.
- (B) Being the first to see the new millennium would bring them attention and visitors.
- (C) Kiribati had sent too many reporters to their islands.
- (D) They did not want to trade with Kiribati anymore.

5. In paragraph 1, the word "skipped" in "its eastern islands simply skipped December 31, 1994" is closest in meaning to

- (A) celebrated twice
- (B) remembered
- (C) made longer
- (D) went past without having

6. What is the writer's purpose in telling the stories of Kiribati and Samoa?

- (A) To show that even the time we call midnight is partly decided by people.
- (B) To warn readers not to travel across the date line.
- (C) To explain how to calculate time differences.
- (D) To praise Kiribati for its New Year's Eve parties.



Vocabulary, Paraphrase & Summary

Match the words with the definitions. Then rewrite and summarize.

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|--------------------|---|
| 1. time zone | a. a country that buys from and sells to another country |
| 2. political | b. an area of the world where people use the same time |
| 3. nation | c. connected with governments and the way power is used |
| 4. side effect | d. a country with its own government and people |
| 5. attract | e. an extra result that you did not plan or expect |
| 6. millennium | f. to make people want to come, look, or take part |
| 7. protest | g. a period of one thousand years |
| 8. trading partner | h. to say or show strongly that you do not agree with something |

Paraphrase — say it in your own words

1. “Time zones look like natural facts, but they are political decisions.”

Hint: Use "Although" and change "political decisions" to "decided by governments".

2. “Tonga, New Zealand, and Fiji protested, because each had hoped to be the first to see the new millennium.”

Hint: Start with "Each of the three countries wanted" and use "so".

3. “These stories remind us that even midnight is, in part, a human invention.”

Hint: Use "show" and change "a human invention" to "something people created".

Summary

Summarize the passage in about 50 words.



Debate & Opinion Essay

Prepare for a debate. Then write your opinion (100–150 words).

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Motion: Countries should be free to change their time zones for economic reasons.

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- Samoa was almost a full day behind its main trading partners, so changing sides helped its businesses work on the same days.
- A time zone is a human decision, so each country should choose the one that helps its people most.
- Kiribati's change solved a real problem for its government and also brought the world's attention to its islands.

Add your own reason:

AGAINST 反対

- Changing the date can confuse people, airlines, and computer systems, and the costs can be high.
- One country's change can upset its neighbors, as the protests from Tonga, New Zealand, and Fiji showed.
- Time should follow the sun and people's daily lives, not only the needs of business.

Add your own reason:

Opinion	<i>I believe / I think that ...</i>
Reason 1	<i>First, ... For example, ...</i>
Reason 2	<i>Second, ... In fact, ...</i>
Counter	<i>Some people say ... However, ...</i>
Conclusion	<i>In conclusion, ...</i>