

AE Academic English **UK**

The Terracotta Army



Reading to Writing Summary

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Teacher's Notes

Lesson Contents	
1.	Instructions.
2.	Text: The Terracotta Army: Guardians of an Emperor's Legacy
3.	Summary note-taking page.
4.	Summary notes suggested answers.
5.	Summary task page.
6.	Sample summary for comparison (without in-text citations).
7.	Critical thinking questions.
8.	Critical thinking suggested answers for comparison.

Instructions

Option 1 [Medium] **** [B2/C1]

1. Distribute the text a week /day before the test. Students read, check vocabulary & meanings.
2. Test day: distribute a **new copy of text** and the **summary question**.
3. Set 1 hour to read the text, take notes and write a one-paragraph summary of 200-250-words.
4. Feedback¹: take in and mark [use our correction code*].
5. Feedback²: distribute **completed outline & model answer**. Students compare with their own work.
6. Summary marking: **should contain at least 4 main ideas with support – see summary key points**.
7. Extra: critical thinking questions / group discussion (30 minutes).

Option 2 [More challenging] **** [C1]

1. Set 1 hour to read the **text** and write a one-paragraph summary of 200-250-words.
3. Feedback¹: take in and mark [use our correction code*].
4. Feedback²: distribute **completed outline & model answer**. Students compare with their own work.
5. Summary marking: **should contain at least 4 main ideas with support – see summary key points**.
6. Extra: critical thinking questions / group discussion (30 minutes).

Link for Additional Material

Correction code	www.academic-englishuk/error-correction
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The Terracotta Army: Guardians of an Emperor's Legacy

By A. Watson (2025)

The Terracotta Army is one of the most extraordinary archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century. It was found in 1974 near Xi'an, in Shaanxi Province, and it continues to fascinate both scholars and tourists. The site contains thousands of life-sized clay soldiers, horses, and chariots that were buried more than two thousand years ago. It forms part of the vast mausoleum complex of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China, and it demonstrates the enormous resources invested in his burial (Portal, 2007). The discovery is not only remarkable for its size but also for the insight it gives into the scale of state power and organisation in the third century BCE. The project required huge planning, labour and resources, all of which show how seriously the emperor viewed his passage into the afterlife.

Qin Shi Huang ruled from 221 to 210 BCE after conquering the warring states and creating China's first centralised empire. He was determined to consolidate his authority and to project his power beyond death. Ancient texts describe the construction of his tomb as a monumental task involving hundreds of thousands of workers. The mausoleum was designed to reproduce the world of the living underground, complete with palaces, rivers of mercury, and a protective army (Yuan, 2014). It reflected both political ambition and deep beliefs about the afterlife. The author argues that by replicating his empire below ground, the emperor hoped to continue ruling eternally, surrounded by symbols of wealth, authority, and cosmic order.

In 1974, local farmers accidentally uncovered pottery fragments while digging a well. This chance discovery led to systematic excavations by archaeologists, who revealed an enormous underground army. To their surprise, there had been no surviving historical records of such a force. Since then, three main pits have been excavated, containing more than 2,000 figures, though it is estimated that over 6,000 remain buried (Ledderose, 2001). The scale of the find stunned the world and provided unprecedented insight into Qin dynasty society. It also highlighted how archaeological evidence can complement or even challenge historical texts, since the written record alone gave no hint of the army's existence.

The figures were created using sophisticated methods that suggest large-scale workshop production. They were made from local clay, shaped in separate sections such as heads, torsos, arms, and legs, which were then fired and assembled. Workshop marks carved into the statues show that different teams of artisans collaborated, reflecting an early form of mass production (Quinn, 2017). Once assembled, the figures were painted with bright mineral pigments, though most of this colour disappeared quickly after excavation (Portal, 2007). The technology and organisation required for such work demonstrate the advanced capabilities of the Qin state. The combination of individuality and uniformity in the army illustrates both artistic skill and strict state control.

The Terracotta Army was intended to serve as guardians of the emperor in the afterlife. It represented his belief that the social and military order he established on earth would continue after death. The soldiers also symbolised authority and control, reminding both contemporaries and future generations of the emperor's absolute power. Many scholars argue that the army was not only a funerary provision but also a form of political propaganda that reinforced the legitimacy of the Qin dynasty (Yuan, 2014). This dual role, both spiritual and political, explains why such immense resources were dedicated to its creation.

Excavation of the site has revealed major conservation challenges. These are especially evident in the rapid deterioration of pigments on the figures, which can flake away within minutes of exposure to air. Archaeologists have therefore slowed the pace of excavation, preferring to leave some pits untouched until better preservation techniques are available. Chemical stabilisation methods and careful environmental controls have been introduced, but conservation remains a constant concern (Portal,

2007). The Terracotta Army highlights the difficulty of balancing discovery with protection. At the same time, conservation work has advanced scientific understanding of ancient pigments and materials, influencing methods in other fields of archaeology.

Today the mausoleum complex is one of China's most important cultural sites. It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987 and has since attracted millions of visitors from around the world (UNESCO, 1987). Exhibitions of the Terracotta Warriors have toured internationally, raising global awareness of China's ancient history. Beyond tourism, the site has become a symbol of cultural identity and national pride. For scholars, it provides invaluable evidence about early imperial China, while for the public it continues to inspire awe and imagination (Portal, 2007). The Terracotta Army thus stands not only as a relic of the past but also as a living bridge between ancient heritage and modern global culture.

Reference List

Ledderose, L. (2001) *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Portal, J. (ed.) (2007) *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*. London: The British Museum Press.

Quinn, P. (2017) 'Building the Terracotta Army: Ceramic craft technology and organisation of production at Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum complex', *Antiquity*, 91(360), pp. 966–979. doi:10.15184/aqy.2017.95.

UNESCO (1987) *Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor*. World Heritage List. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/441/> (Accessed: 28 August 2025).

Yuan, Z. (2014) *Terracotta Warriors and the First Emperor of China*. New York: Abbeville Press.

Summary: Key Points

Task: Take notes on the key points of the text.

1. Main idea:	
Support:	
2. Main idea:	
Support:	
3. Main idea:	
Support:	
4. Main idea:	
Support:	
5. Main idea:	
Support:	
6. Main idea:	
Support:	
7. Main idea:	
Support:	

Summary: Key Points (Suggested Answers)

Task: Take notes on the key points of the text.

1. Main idea: Discovery & Significance
Support:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovered in 1974 near Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. • Contains thousands of life-sized clay soldiers, horses, chariots. • Part of Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum (Portal, 2007). • Shows resources, organisation, state power.
2. Main idea: Qin Shi Huang & Mausoleum Design
Support:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruled 221–210 BCE, unified China. • Built tomb as reproduction of empire: palaces, rivers of mercury, protective army (Yuan, 2014). • Monumental task, hundreds of thousands of workers. Reflected ambition + afterlife beliefs. • Goal: eternal rule with wealth, authority, cosmic order (Yuan, 2014).
3. Main idea: Archaeological Excavations
Support:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers uncovered pottery in 1974. Archaeologists revealed → underground army. • No historical record of such a force. • 3 main pits: >2,000 figures excavated; ~6,000 remain (Ledderose, 2001). • Discovery gave new insights into Qin society; archaeology complements/challenges texts.
4. Main idea: Craft & Technology
Support:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local clay; built in sections, fired, assembled, painted (Portal, 2007). • Workshop marks → team collaboration, organised mass production (Quinn, 2017). • Bright pigments (now mostly lost) (Portal, 2007). • Balance of individuality + uniformity → skill + state control.
5. Main idea: Purpose & Symbolism
Support:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guardians in afterlife. • Belief in continuation of order after death. • Symbol of power, authority, control. • Political propaganda reinforcing Qin legitimacy (Yuan, 2014). • Dual role: religious + political.
6. Main idea: Conservation Challenges
Support:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pigments flake away quickly when exposed. • Excavations slowed; some pits left untouched. • Conservation methods: stabilisation, climate control (Portal, 2007). • Highlights balance between discovery & protection. • Conservation advanced study of pigments, archaeology.
7. Main idea: Legacy & Tourism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1987 (UNESCO, 1987). • Millions of visitors annually (ibid); International exhibitions raised awareness. • Symbol of Chinese identity + pride; Inspires scholars + public (Portal, 2007); • Bridge between ancient heritage & modern culture.

Summary

Task: Write a 200–250-word summary on the key features of the text using your notes to help you.

Word Count: _____

Sample Summary for Comparison

The Terracotta Army, discovered near Xi'an in 1974, is part of the vast mausoleum complex built for Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of a unified China. The scale and sophistication of the site reflect the organisation, resources, and political power of the Qin state. Qin Shi Huang aimed to recreate his empire underground for use in the afterlife, constructing palaces, rivers of mercury, and an army to protect him spiritually. Archaeologists have uncovered three main pits containing more than 2,000 life-sized figures, with many thousands more still unexcavated. Their absence from surviving historical texts shows how archaeology can reveal aspects of the past that written records do not document. The figures were created from local clay in modular sections, fired, assembled, and painted. Workshop marks indicate a highly organised production system similar to early mass manufacturing, while variations in facial features demonstrate intentional individuality. Scholars argue that the army fulfilled both spiritual and political roles, protecting the emperor after death while reinforcing the authority of the Qin dynasty. Conservation remains a major challenge, particularly the rapid loss of pigments when the figures are exposed to air, so excavation has proceeded cautiously. Since being recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, the Terracotta Army has become a global symbol of China's cultural heritage and historical legacy.

Word count 218

⇒ How does your summary differ from the sample? Complete the table with the similarities and differences. Consider *coverage of main points, balance of ideas, conciseness, clarity and use of examples*.

	Summaries
Similarities	
Differences	

Critical Thinking Questions

i) What's the stance of the author? What is the evidence for this?

[2 points]

ii) Is this a credible article? Yes /no – why/why not?

[2 points]

iii) Highlight four ideas in the text you would use for an essay titled: *Do you agree that the Terracotta Army's symbolic meaning is as significant as its archaeological value? Support your answer with relevant examples.*

[4 points]

iv) Highlight two areas in the text that you question, disagree with or lack evidence.

[2 points]

Critical Thinking Questions Suggested **Key** for Comparison

i) What's the stance of the author? What is the evidence for this?

The author's stance is broadly **positive**, presenting the Terracotta Army as a discovery of global importance that combines archaeological, political, and cultural significance. The text frames the site not only as a funerary monument but also as a source of historical insight and national identity. Evidence includes:

- *The description of the mausoleum as a vast reproduction of the empire, reflecting both ambition and beliefs about the afterlife (Yuan, 2014).*
- *The emphasis on the army's symbolic role as political propaganda reinforcing imperial power (Yuan, 2014).*
- *The account of archaeological excavations revealing thousands of figures and challenging the limits of historical texts (Ledderose, 2001).*
- *The conclusion that the site functions today as a UNESCO World Heritage site and symbol of national pride (UNESCO, 1987; Portal, 2007).*

[2 points]

ii) Is this a credible article? Yes /no – why?

Yes, it is a credible article. The text is written in an academic style and supports its claims with references to recognised scholars and organisations. It provides detailed, sourced information on history, archaeology, and conservation. Credibility is reinforced by:

- *References to authoritative works such as Portal (2007), Ledderose (2001), and Quinn (2017).*
- *Balanced coverage of multiple perspectives: afterlife beliefs, propaganda, archaeology, and conservation.*
- *Inclusion of UNESCO (1987), a globally recognised cultural authority.*
- *Use of recent scholarship (e.g. Quinn, 2017) showing awareness of up-to-date research.*

[2 points]

iii) Highlight four ideas in the text you would use for an essay titled: *Do you agree that the Terracotta Army's symbolic meaning is as significant as its archaeological value? Support your answer with relevant examples.*

1. **Afterlife Beliefs** → The army was intended to guard the emperor underground, reflecting Qin Shi Huang's conviction that the social and military order on earth would continue after death (para. 5).
2. **Political Propaganda** → Scholars argue the soldiers symbolised authority and control, reminding contemporaries of the emperor's absolute power and legitimising the dynasty (para. 5).
3. **Archaeological Discovery** → The chance find in 1974 revealed thousands of figures never recorded in historical texts, showing how archaeology can provide new insight into ancient society (para. 3).
4. **Craft & Organisation** → Workshop marks, modular production, and mass teamwork reveal the state's technological capacity and strict organisation (para. 4).

[2 points]

iv) Highlight two areas in the text that you question, disagree with or lack evidence

P2 (Qin Shi Huang & Mausoleum Design)

Q: The text states the mausoleum recreated the entire world of the living, including palaces and rivers of mercury (Yuan, 2014). But how reliable are these descriptions if most of the tomb

remains unexcavated?

→ *To what extent can we trust ancient texts when archaeological evidence is still incomplete?*

P3 (Archaeological Excavations)

Q: The text notes there were “no surviving historical records of such a force,” yet earlier it mentions ancient texts about the emperor’s tomb. Does this suggest the records described only the mausoleum in general, not the army itself?

→ *How can we distinguish between what ancient texts recorded and what archaeology has newly revealed?*

→ *Could historical records have been lost, suppressed, or overlooked rather than entirely absent?*

P4 (Craft & Technology)

Q: The figures are described as combining individuality and uniformity. Is there sufficient evidence to show this balance was intentional, or could it be a by-product of production methods?

→ *How do we know whether artisans aimed for individuality or whether it resulted accidentally from handcraft variation?*

P6 (Conservation Challenges)

Q: The article notes pigments flake away within minutes of exposure (Portal, 2007). Has enough scientific detail been provided to explain why, or is the claim too general?

→ *Should the text include more evidence on the chemical causes of deterioration to strengthen this point?*

[2 points]

[Any 2 of these, but this is obviously subjective so accept any credible student answers].