

Exercise 4

Read the article by a student called Erin Barker about a competition she took part in that involved picking up rubbish.

The litter-picking competition

Australian student Erin Barker describes her experience of SpoGomi, a sport in which players pick up litter in public spaces

One Sunday morning last month, I spent two hours picking up litter in central Tokyo. I'd never been to Japan before and it was an unusual way of getting to know it. Back home in Australia, my friends Jess, Paul and Caitlin had formed a team to take part in an international litter-picking competition. Competitive litter-picking, known as *SpoGomi*, was established in Japan in 2008 to make people more aware of waste and the damage it causes. It's an issue my friends and I are very concerned about. Unfortunately, Caitlin had to drop out at the last moment, so Jess and Paul were worried they wouldn't be able to go to Japan. They're close friends of mine, and I was keen to help out, so I offered to take Caitlin's place.

Eight teams from different countries entered the competition. Equipped with gloves and large sacks, we had to collect as much rubbish as possible in two hours, with results based on the types of litter and overall weight collected. Officials checked that competition rules were followed. Players couldn't take rubbish from bins and front gardens, which seemed fair enough, but anyone seen jogging lost points, which my friends and I thought was ridiculous. After all, speed was an element of the competition. Another rule was that we couldn't follow other competitors; we had to work out for ourselves where to find the most litter.

Shibuya, the district where the competition was held, is famous for being one of the busiest parts of Tokyo. It has two railway stations, clothes stores, restaurants, night-clubs and millions of people passing through every day. I was amazed when we got there as I'd seen photographs of it and had assumed that early on Sundays it would be full of the previous day's rubbish. It didn't look dirty at all, though, and I realised that finding enough litter to fill our bags would be tough.

We thought we were a pretty good team. We're all young and fit. Paul is tall and strong, and can carry large sacks full of rubbish. Jess and I are smaller, but very fast. Although we study different subjects – history, engineering and medicine – we all have lots in common, and we agreed we'd try our best to win while making sure that we also had fun. I'm pretty sure this attitude is what gave us an advantage over some of our opponents.

Soon after the race started, we realised we wouldn't win if we tried to pick up every single item of rubbish we saw. Some smaller things like cigarette ends earned more points than larger, more obvious things, like pieces of paper. But smaller objects usually take longer to lift up off the street or pavement and put in sacks, so we decided to mainly collect bigger things, like drinks cans and plastic bottles. After two hours, we'd gathered a total of 53 kg of litter, and with different points for different kinds of litter, we came third.

Back in Australia, Jess and Paul asked if I'd join them again in another competition. I said yes, but only with much more training – in litter-picking techniques, for example – than was possible for Tokyo. *SpoGomi* is becoming increasingly popular, especially in Japan, but also elsewhere. I didn't have much opportunity to talk to people from the teams we raced against, but when I did, I learned there's plenty of interest internationally. The idea of doing something about the problem of waste is something I fully support, of course.



Question 12

How did Erin feel about the district where the competition was held?

A impressed by the reputation it had

☐

B surprised at how clean it appeared to be

☐

C excited by the amount of activity going on there

☐

[1]