

## Soap operas

WORKSHEET A

It happens over and over again in the fictional district of Walford in east London. One of the residents of Albert Square says something dramatic or discovers something unexpected, there is a brief moment of silence, then a drumbeat, then a familiar theme tune – the final moments of any episode of *Eastenders*, one of Britain's most popular TV soap operas, are always like that.

First broadcast in 1985, *Eastenders* is still going strong; there are four half-hour episodes every week and they all regularly attract around eight million viewers (out of a total British population of sixty million). On Christmas Day in 1986, when the storyline was particularly exciting, a record thirty million people tuned in.

However, *Eastenders* is neither the longest-running nor the most popular British soap; both those honours go to *Coronation Street*, which follows the lives of fictional characters in the northern English city of Manchester. It has been on air since 1960 and its recent audiences have been very slightly higher than those for *Eastenders*. What both shows have in common is that they are set in working-class areas and feature social and economic problems in many of their storylines – they tend to be gritty rather than glamorous.

The soap opera was born in the United States in the 1930s with the first radio broadcasts of fictional dramas that were set in one place and consisted of a series of episodes that each featured the same characters. The word 'soap' comes from the fact that most of the advertising slots in these radio dramas were bought by companies selling soap and other domestic products, the reason being that the shows went out in the daytime and many of the listeners were housewives. 'Opera', meanwhile, was because of the dramatic or melodramatic content – which is often still the case with *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*.

These days, of course, soaps are mainly for TV and are produced all over the world. Some are successfully exported (not only English-language productions but also, for example, many from Brazil and Mexico) while others are never watched outside their country of origin.

The cultural impact of soaps has been much discussed. Some have been praised for dealing with important social issues in a positive and sensitive way – a well-known example in Britain was when *Eastenders* introduced a character with AIDS in the early 1990s. Others have even been credited with changing the way people communicate – for example the huge success of Brazilian soap operas in Portugal has apparently led some Portuguese people not only to adopt Brazilian Portuguese words and expressions but also Brazilian gestures.

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WORKSHEET B

### Exercise 1

Here are some simple definitions for words that appear in the text on Worksheet A. Find the words they refer to and fill in the gaps.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (noun) a space or hole you can fit something into, or a specific period of time in which it has been arranged that something will happen
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) showing much stronger emotions than are necessary or usual
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (noun) the place or moment where something begins to exist
4. \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) invented for a book, play, film or TV programme
5. \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) showing life as it really is, even when it is not pleasant or attractive
6. \_\_\_\_\_ (noun) a movement of the body (for example with the hands) that communicates a feeling or an instruction
7. \_\_\_\_\_ (adjective) relating to people's homes and family life
8. \_\_\_\_\_ (verb) be made of (particular parts or things)
9. \_\_\_\_\_ (noun) a woman who does not work outside the home and whose main job is cooking, cleaning, looking after children etc. (Often seen as a slightly old-fashioned word.)
10. \_\_\_\_\_ (noun) the progression of events in a book, film or TV programme

### Exercise 2

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't say (D).

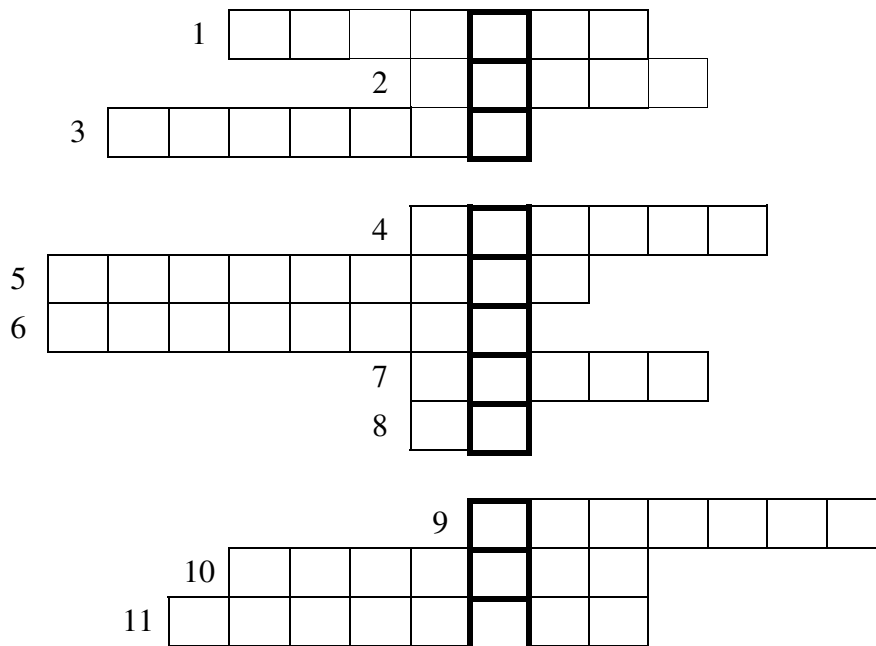
1. *Eastenders* is Britain's longest-running soap opera.
2. *Eastenders* is often praised for the way it deals with important social issues.
3. *Coronation Street* is set in a working-class area of an English city.
4. Four episodes of *Coronation Street* are broadcast every week.
5. *Eastenders* can be melodramatic.
6. English-language soap operas are not the only ones watched outside their countries of origin.
7. Soap operas made in Portugal are popular in Brazil.
8. There is music at the end of *Eastenders*.

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WORKSHEET C

### Exercise 3

Complete the crossword below. If all the horizontal words are correct, the three vertical words will be the name all the characters in *Eastenders* give to the pub in Albert Square where many of the most important events in the soap opera take place.



1. The popularity of Brazilian soap operas has apparently led to some Brazilian Portuguese words being \_\_\_\_\_ in Portugal.
2. Lots of British people know the \_\_\_\_\_ tune of *Eastenders*.
3. Each \_\_\_\_\_ of *Eastenders* lasts half an hour.
4. The characters in *Eastenders* live in a fictional \_\_\_\_\_ in east London.
5. Neither *Eastenders* nor *Coronation Street* is a \_\_\_\_\_ soap opera.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ for *Eastenders* on Christmas Day 1986 was thirty million.
7. *Eastenders* \_\_\_\_\_ sensitively with the issue of AIDS in the early 1990s.
8. *Eastenders* has been \_\_\_\_\_ air since 1985.
9. *Coronation Street* has recently had slightly more \_\_\_\_\_ than *Eastenders*.
10. The first radio soap operas were broadcast in the \_\_\_\_\_.
11. The adverts in the first radio soap operas were often for soap or other domestic \_\_\_\_\_, hence the name.