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TOEFL

Transcript Audio 4





Teacher: Welcome to our science class! Today we are going to have a lecture about corks. I am going to begin it with a question. Do you know where you can get a real cork? Does anybody want to guess? Camille, please.

Camille: I thought the corks were all manufactured.

Teacher: You are not the only one, Camille. Actually, some of them are manufactured in a plastic material, but the original ones are natural. We are going to learn about it now. Cork is the outer bark of a certain tree, the cork oak, whose botanical name is *Quercus suber*. Two-thirds of all the world's cork comes from this tree which is found in Spain and Portugal. All these trees together would cover an area of 4 million acres, or the size of New Jersey State. Any doubts?

Camille: Yes, Professor. I am curious about the harvest process. How does it happen?

Teacher: The harvest of this material first happens when the tree is 20 years old. The next stripping takes place nine years after the first one. This goes on every nine years for a hundred years or so. It means that it takes a long time to produce cork, but the source of supply lasts quite a while, too. The stripping happens in the months of July and August. A cut is made in the base of the trunk and another cut just below the first branches. Then the bark is pried off. An average tree can yield about 50 pounds of cork. By the way, the collected cuts do not damage the tree at all. Actually, they seem to benefit it. Are you following the whole process?

Camille: Yes, professor, but I have a doubt. Is the cork ready to use just after the harvest?

Teacher: No, no, no.... After stripping, the cork is seasoned and then boiled in order to soften it and to take out the acids in it. Then it is dried in flat sheets and then shipped worldwide. In the ancient times, people used cork as life savers for floating in the sea or lakes, but nowadays we have several different uses for it, for instance: cork bottle stoppers, pipe covering, shoe fillers and many more. Since cork is a poor conductor of heat, it is often used to keep heat out of freezer rooms and refrigerators and in air conditioning. It is also used for soundproof rooms in hospitals and studios.