**Cambridge English B for the IB Diploma: Teacher resource**

**Audio scripts**

**Audio track 11**

**Host:** On today’s episode of ‘Psychology Today’, Professor Lauren Waters is here to talk about her research on virginity pledges. Virginity pledges – also known as ‘purity pledges’ – began in the late eighties and became very popular in the nineties, especially among Evangelical Christians in the United States. It’s a hotly debated topic these days because our president earmarked two hundred million dollars for school programmes that advocate abstinence before marriage. But all politics aside, virginity pledges have had an impact on the physical and mental health of those young individuals who have taken them. Lauren, thank you for joining us.

**Lauren:** Thank you for having me.

**Host:** You have been researching this topic for over two decades. What would you say to a fourteen-year-old girl who tells you that she is considering taking a virginity pledge?

**Lauren:** Well, I would ask her: “Why are you making this promise?” And I’ve asked girls and boys this question before. But they often give me the response that’s been read to them by pastors and parents. They say: “True love waits.” They have a commitment to God, their parents and themselves. And I respect that. It’s noble, ideal and pure. They think: “I want sex to be special. I want my marriage to be special. Sex will be special if I wait until marriage. Marriage will be special if I’m a virgin on my wedding night.”

**Host:** It sounds perfectly logical, but your research suggests it’s a fantasy. I mean, most people do not wait until marriage, isn’t that right?

**Lauren:** Well my team was not responsible for that research, but most studies have put the number at ninety-five. Ninety-five percent of married Americans have had sex before getting married. And the pledge is a bit of a fantasy too. After all, eighty-eight percent of those who take a virginity pledge break it.

**Host:** Wow, that’s a clear majority. And how many young Americans take a virginity pledge?

**Lauren:** About one hundred thousand youngsters take the ‘True Love Waits’ pledge every year in the United States. That’s the most popular pledge. It’s organised through churches and there’s a purity ball, a ring, an oath and of course a contract. But many more are influenced by abstinence programmes that are taught in public school, which come without all these extras. And surprisingly they are almost as effective in dissuading teenagers from having sex until the age of eighteen.

**Host:** So, just to understand you correctly, eighty-eight percent of pledgers have had sex before marriage, but most of them had not had sex before turning eighteen years old?

**Lauren:** Yes, well, actually less than half. About forty per cent make it to eighteen years old without having had sex. And this is where religious groups and conservatives claim progress. They say: “At least we kept some of our children ‘pure’ until eighteen.”

**Host:** If eighty-eight percent of them are breaking their promise to God and their family, then there must be a lot of young people feeling disappointed in themselves. There’s another level of guilt and shame.

**Lauren:** We’ve worked with three universities, interviewing more than a thousand young individuals between the ages of twelve and twenty-four over the span of twenty years or more. And over fifty percent of pledgers – these are youngsters whom we know for sure took a pledge – they deny ever having taken the pledge. In other words they lie to us in the interviews. Or some brush off the pledge nonchalantly, saying they didn’t take it seriously. Which is understandable. Think about it – some of them were as young as twelve years old when they took the pledge. They were more concerned with ponies and mermaids than boys at the time.

**Host:** It’s no wonder they lie about having taken the pledge.

**Lauren:** Well they feel that they were lied to, so why shouldn’t they lie about it? That’s how they justify their denial.

**Host:** It makes sense.

**Lauren**: I’m reluctant to talk about education and politics, but the facts on sex ed in the United States are rather abysmal. Did you know that only nineteen states even require schools to teach a form of sex ed that is based on science? Twenty-five states have adopted these ‘abstinence-only’ programmes, which are funded by the two hundred million dollars you mentioned earlier. And many states just ignore the subject all together.

**Host:** I was not aware of this. But it seems there’s certainly room for improvement. I’d like to thank you for your time and your insight into this topic on virginity pledges.

**Lauren:** You’re most welcome.