

AQA style

GCSE English Language

Paper 1: Explorations in creative reading and writing – Practice Paper

8700/1 · Practice paper

INSERT

The source(s) that follow are for use with the question paper. Do not write on this insert.

Source A

This extract is from the middle of a short story, 'The Scar Grounds'. Original text written for Teach io in the style of 21st-century literary prose fiction. Jess, aged thirteen, is out at sea on her grandfather's fishing boat, the Kittiwake.

The fog came in off the sea at a little after three, and it came the way her grandfather had always said it would: not drifting, not rolling, but all at once, like a door closing. One moment Jess could see the whole curve of the bay, the red roofs
5 of Saltby piled up the cliff, the white finger of the lighthouse on the point. The next there was nothing but a soft grey wall, so close she felt she could lean against it. The gulls that had followed the Kittiwake all afternoon went quiet. Even the water changed its voice, slapping more gently at the hull, as though it
10 too had been told to whisper.

'Right,' said her grandfather. 'Right, then.' He said it twice, which was once more than he usually said anything.

Jess was thirteen that summer and had been coming out with him on the boat since she was small enough to sit in the fish box.
15 She knew the names of the ropes and the moods of the engine, and she knew, too, the way Grandad Arthur stood at the wheel: feet planted wide, cap pushed back, one hand resting on the spokes as lightly as if he were holding the hand of a child. He had fished this coast for fifty-one years. Her mother said he could
20 find his way home blindfold. Jess had always believed it.

Now she watched him take off his cap, look into it, and put it back on.

'Grandad? Which way's the harbour?'

He did not answer. He was staring at the compass in its little
25 brass housing beside the wheel, and his face had an expression she had never seen on it before, a kind of polite puzzlement, as if the compass were a stranger who had greeted him in the street and he could not remember where they had met. His hand moved on the spokes, turning them a little to the left, then a little to the
30 right, then back again. The engine muttered. The fog pressed closer, beading on the rail, on the oilskins, on the fine hairs of Jess's arms, until everything she touched was cold and wet and faintly salt.

Then the engine coughed, and coughed again, and stopped.

35 The silence that followed was enormous. Without the engine there was only the creak of the boat, the drip of the fog from the wheelhouse roof, and somewhere far off – impossible to say

where – the slow groan of the foghorn on the point, sounding once every half-minute like some vast animal turning over in its sleep.

40 Jess counted the gaps between the groans without meaning to. Thirty. Thirty. Thirty. It came from the left, she thought. Then it came from behind them. Then it seemed to come from everywhere at once, and from inside her own chest.

'Grandad.' She heard her voice go high and thin, and hated it.

45 'Grandad, the engine.'

'She does that,' he said vaguely. 'She does that sometimes, your gran.'

Jess's gran had been dead for four years.

50 For a moment Jess could not move. It was as if the fog had got inside her, filling her up, making her slow and heavy and stupid. Then something else rose underneath it, something hard and clear, and she found she was already moving: down into the cramped engine space, where the smell of diesel was thick enough to taste, her fingers finding the fuel switch exactly where he had shown her
55 a hundred times on a hundred bright, easy mornings. Off. Count to five. On. She climbed back up and pressed the starter, and the engine caught, spluttered, and settled into its old, grumbling rhythm. She had never in her life loved a sound so much.

60 She took the wheel. Her grandfather let her, stepping aside with a small, courteous nod, the way he might have made room for someone on a narrow pavement. Jess looked at the compass. North-west, he always said, coming home from the Scar grounds. Keep her north-west and listen for the bell. She turned the spokes until the needle settled, trembling, on its mark, and held it there, and
65 held it there, though her arms ached and her eyes stung from staring into nothing.

It was a long time before she heard it: thin and sweet and very faint, the harbour bell on its buoy, rocking in the swell. Then, out of the grey, a darker greyness gathered itself into the
70 end of the harbour wall, close enough to touch, its stones furred with green weed and gleaming wet. Jess eased back on the throttle. The Kittiwake slid between the piers as gently as a hand into a pocket.

75 Her grandfather was watching her. The puzzlement had gone from his face, and in its place was something she found harder to look at – a kind of sad, clear knowledge, as if he had come back from a long way off and seen exactly where he had been.

80 'Fifty-one years,' he said quietly. 'And it took a slip of a lass
to bring me home.' He reached out and rested his hand on top
of hers on the wheel, and his fingers were cold, and they were
shaking. 'You'll not tell your mother,' he said. It was not quite
a question.

85 Jess looked at the wet stones of the harbour wall and did not
answer. Behind them, out in the fog, the foghorn groaned again,
and again, and again, counting out the time that was left.