

Eduqas style

WJEC Eduqas GCSE (9-1) English Language

Component 1: 20th Century Literature Reading and Creative Prose Writing – Practice Paper

C700U10-1 · Practice paper

INSERT

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

Resource Material: 'Thin Ice'

Original text written for Teach io in the style of a mid-20th-century short story (set in the hard winter of 1947). In this extract, twelve-year-old Eileen has to look after her younger brother Terry after school while their mother works at a laundry.

The cold came in the last week of December and did not leave. By the middle of January the canal behind Albion Street had frozen from the lock to the railway bridge, a long grey road of ice with the brown reeds stiff along its edges and the shapes of things trapped beneath it – a bicycle wheel, a pram hood, a drowned shopping bag swollen like a cushion. The coal lorries could not get up the hill. The milk froze in the bottles on the step and pushed their silver caps up like little hats. At school they wore their coats in class, and Mr Bevan made them do star jumps between sums to keep the blood going.

Eileen was twelve, and in charge of Terry from the moment the school bell went until their mother came back from the laundry at half past six. This was not a job she had asked for. Terry was eight and small and sticky, with a crust of something permanently at the corner of his mouth and a voice that went up at the end of every sentence, as though everything he said were a question he expected to be told off for. He was frightened of dogs, the dark, the man who sold coal and the outside toilet, and he was not frightened of anything that could actually hurt him.

Every afternoon that week the big boys had been out on the ice. Eileen watched them from the bridge on the way home: Kenny Pruett and the Doyle brothers and a lad from Wharf Road whose name she didn't know, sliding in long runs with their arms out, shouting, their breath hanging over them in clouds. Kenny Pruett was fourteen and had already been thrown out of one school. He had a way of looking at you as if he had found you on the bottom of his shoe.

'Don't you go on that,' Eileen said to Terry, every afternoon. 'You hear me? It's not safe in the middle. Mam'll kill you.'

'I know,' said Terry, every afternoon, in his question voice. 'I know?'

On the Thursday, Terry's cap blew off on the bridge.

It was a new cap, a red woollen one their nan had knitted for Christmas, and it went spinning out over the parapet like a leaf and landed on the ice twenty yards out, a bright red spot on all that grey. Terry made a noise as though he had

40 been hit. Before Eileen could catch hold of his sleeve he had scrambled down the bank through the frozen nettles and was standing at the edge of the canal, one foot on the ice, testing it the way you test bathwater.

'Terry. Come back.'

'It's holding?' he said. 'It's holding, Eileen?'

45 'Come back here. Now.'

He took another step. Then another. The ice made a sound she had never heard before – not a crack, exactly, but a long low groan, like something very large turning over in its sleep. Terry stopped. He was halfway to the cap. He looked back at her, and his face was white and small, and she could see that
50 he was waiting for her to tell him what to do.

From the far bank, someone laughed. Kenny Pruett was standing by the lock gates with his hands in his pockets. 'Go on, then,' he called. 'Go and get it, titch. It won't bite.'

55 'Shut up,' Eileen shouted, and her voice came out high and strange. 'Terry, don't move. Don't move.'

The groan came again. A thin dark line ran out across the ice from somewhere near Terry's feet, quick as a pencil stroke, and stopped.

60 For a moment nobody did anything. Then Kenny Pruett took his hands out of his pockets.

He did not run. He walked to the edge of the canal quite slowly, as if he had all the time in the world, and lay down flat on the ice on his stomach, and began to slide
65 himself out towards Terry on his elbows, the way soldiers did in films. 'Lie down, titch,' he said. His voice was different now – flat and quiet and very calm. 'Lie down like me. Spread yourself out. That's it. Good lad. Now don't look at the crack. Look at me. Look at my ugly mug.'

70 Terry lay down. Eileen, on the bank, found that she had stopped breathing. Kenny reached the cap first, and she saw him pick it up and stuff it inside his jacket, and then he stretched out one long arm until his fingers closed around Terry's wrist.

75 'Got you,' he said. 'Now we go backwards. Slow. Like a pair of

crabs.'

It took them a long time. When they reached the bank, Kenny stood up, brushed the frost off the front of his jacket and handed Terry his cap without looking at him. Eileen tried to
80 say thank you, but the words stuck somewhere in her chest.

'He's your job,' Kenny said to her, not unkindly. 'Watch him better.' And he walked off along the towpath towards the lock, whistling, as though nothing in particular had happened.

They did not tell their mother. Eileen made Terry promise,
85 crossing his heart and hoping to die, and then she made him say it again, and then she hung his wet socks on the fireguard and put his cap in the drawer and set out the bread and dripping for tea as if it were any other Thursday. When their mother came in at half past six with her hands red and raw
90 from the laundry, she said the house was lovely and warm, and that Eileen was a good girl, and what would she do without her.

Eileen said nothing. Later, lying awake in the cold bedroom with Terry asleep beside her and the window furred white with
95 frost, she thought about the long low groan of the ice and the thin dark line running out from under her brother's feet. She thought about Kenny Pruett lying flat on the ice, saying 'Look at me.' She thought that she would never again be able to see him on the bridge without feeling something she did not have a
100 name for. And she thought, too, that there was a secret in the house now, and that it was hers to carry, and that this, perhaps, was what it meant to be the one in charge.