

General Certificate of Education
June 2005
Advanced Level Examination



ENGLISH LITERATURE (SPECIFICATION B)
Unit 6 Exploring Texts

LTB6

Tuesday 21 June 2005 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm

In addition to this paper you will require:

- a 12-page answer book;
- your copy of the Pre-Release Material.

Time allowed: 3 hours (including 30 minutes' reading time)

Instructions

- Use blue or black ink or ball-point pen.
- Write the information required on the front of your answer book. The *Examining Body* for this paper is AQA. The *Paper Reference* is LTB6.
- Answer **both** questions.

Information

- You will be assessed on your ability to use an appropriate form and style of writing, to organise relevant information clearly and coherently, and to use specialist vocabulary where appropriate. The degree of legibility of your handwriting and the level of accuracy of your spelling, punctuation and grammar will also be taken into account.
- The maximum mark for this paper is 80.
- Both questions carry 40 marks.

Advice

- You should divide your time equally between both questions.

Educational Experiences

Answer **both** questions.

30 minutes are allocated in the examination to the reading and consideration of the material for this paper.

You may make notes during this time if you wish.

In Question 1 you will be tested on your ability to:

- respond with knowledge and understanding to literary texts of different types and periods, exploring and commenting on relationships and comparisons between literary texts;
- show detailed understanding of the ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings.

- 1 Compare and contrast the ways in which Charles Dickens, in the extract from *Nicholas Nickleby*, and Lorna Sage, in the extract from *Bad Blood*, present experiences of education.

(40 marks)

In Question 2 you will be tested on your ability to:

- communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to literary study, using appropriate terminology and accurate and coherent written expression;
- articulate independent opinions and judgements, informed by different interpretations of literary texts by other readers;
- evaluate the significance of cultural, historical and other contextual influences upon literary texts and study.

- 2 In the light of your reading of Items Two and Three, write about:

- how far at least two of the critical viewpoints in Item Two throw light on the extract from *Nicholas Nickleby* that you have read;
- how far, from your study of English Literature at Advanced Level, you agree with Penelope Lively's view that there is an advantage to reading as 'literary innocents'. You should support your answer with reference to texts you are familiar with.

(40 marks)

END OF QUESTIONS

The following extract is from *Bad Blood*, the autobiography of Lorna Sage, who grew up in the 1950s. *Bad Blood* was published in 2001.

Perhaps I really did grow up, as I sometimes suspect, in a time warp, an enclave of the nineteenth century? Because here are the memories jostling their way in, scenes from an overpopulated rural slum.

First there was dinner money, then the register. Then Miss Myra would hang up a cracked oilcloth scroll with the Lord's Prayer printed on it in large curly letters. She prompted, we mumbled our way through, getting out of sync during the trespasses and catching up with each other to arrive in unison at 'For ever and ever. Amen.' Next we'd be set to copy it out with chalk on jagged slices of slate. If you got to the end you simply started from the beginning again and went on until it was time to stop. You spat on your slate and rubbed it with your finger when you made mistakes, so sooner or later the letters all got lost in a grey blur. Not many in the babies' class learned to read or write by this method. That didn't matter too much, though. Hanmer Church of England School was less concerned with teaching its pupils reading, writing or arithmetic than with obedience and knowing things by heart. Soon you'd be able to recite 'Our Father' and the multiplication tables with sing-song confidence, hitting the ritual emphasis right: 'And *twelve* twelves are a *hundred* and forty-*four*. Amen.'

After a couple of years in Miss Myra's room you moved to her sister Miss Daisy's, and after that to the biggest class, belonging to the headmaster, Mr Palmer. He was a figure of fear, an absentee deity. Offenders from the lower classes were sent to him for the stick and were known to wet themselves on the way. His own class, too, regarded him with dread. He liked to preside over them invisibly from his house next door, emerging when the noise reached a level deafening enough to disturb him, to hand out summary punishment.

The further up the school you went, the less you were formally taught or expected to learn. There was knitting, sewing and weaving for older girls, who would sit out winter playtimes gossiping round the stove, their legs marbled with parboiled red veins from the heat. The big boys did woodwork and were also kept busy taking out the ashes, filling coke buckets and digging the garden. None of the more substantial farmers sent their children to Hanmer school. It had been designed to produce domestic servants and farm labourers, and functional illiteracy was still part of the expectation, almost part of the curriculum.

Not long after I started there, this time-honoured parochial system was shaken up when some of the older children were removed to a secondary modern school over the nearest border, in Shropshire. This thinned out the population and damped down the racket in Mr Palmer's room, although quite a few restive overgrown kids still stayed on until they were fourteen and the law allowed them to leave. Passing the eleven-plus ('the scholarship') was unheard of; and anyway harder than it might have been, since grammar schools in neighbouring counties had quotas for children from the real sticks, i.e. the Maelor district. When my time came, Mr Palmer graciously cheated me through. Strolling past my desk on his invigilation rounds, he trailed a plump finger down my page of sums, pointed significantly at several, then crossed two fingers behind his back as he walked away. So I did those again.

Perhaps the record of failure was starting to look fishy. The world was changing, education was changing, and the notion that school should reflect your ready-made place in the scheme of things and put you firmly back where you came from was going out of fashion even in Hanmer. It was against the grain to acknowledge this, though. The cause of hierarchy and immobility was served by singling out the few children whose families didn't fit and setting them homework. Mr Palmer drew the line at marking it, however. The three of us were given sums to do, then told to compare the results in a corner next morning. If all three, or two of us, arrived at the same answer then that was the correct one. If – as often happened – all three of us produced different answers then that particular long division or fraction retreated into the realm of undecidability. Most of our answers were at best odds-on favourites. I developed a dauntingly Platonic conception of arithmetical truths. The *real* answer must exist, but in some far-removed misty empyrean. Praying ('... and forty-*four*. Amen') seemed often as good a route as any to getting it right.

Sums were my cross. Numeracy was not one of Grandfather's gifts; we never played with numbers, which were a subdivision of dilapidations and no fun at all. I went to school armed against the spit-and-chalk routine – words went on working – but with sums I struggled like the rest, since it was never part of Mr Palmer's plan (the school's plan) to reveal that the necessary skills were *learnable*. If you passed the scholarship, that was because you were somebody who should never have been at Hanmer school in the first place, was his theory.

One day he lined up his class and went down the line saying with gloomy satisfaction 'You'll be a muck-shoveller, you'll be a muck-shoveller...' and so on and on, only missing out the homework trio. As things

Turn over ►

turned out he was mistaken – by the time my Hanmer generation grew up there were very few jobs on the land, the old mixed labour-intensive farming had finally collapsed, farmers had gone over to machinery, and the children he'd consigned to near-illiteracy and innumeracy had to re-educate themselves and move on. Which they did, despite all the school had done to inculcate ignorance. Back there and then in our childhoods, though, in the late Forties, Mr Palmer seemed omniscient. He ruled over a little world where conformity, bafflement, fear and furtive defiance were the orders of the day. Every child's ambition at Hanmer school was to avoid attracting his attention, or that of Miss Myra or Miss Daisy. We all played dumb, the one lesson everyone learned.

We'd have seemed a lumpen lot: sullen, unresponsive, cowed, shy or giggly in the presence of grown-ups. A bunch of nose-pickers and nail-biters, with scabbed knees, warts, chapped skin and unbrushed teeth. We shared a certain family resemblance, in other words. Some of it was absolutely, organically, real: seven or eight huge families accounted between them for nearly half the population of the school. There were brothers, sisters and cousins who slapped, shoved and bossed each other unmercifully, but always stood up for their own flesh and blood (thickened, it was rumoured, by incest) in the end. 'You leave our Doreen alone.' Or else.

Having big brothers or (much better) big sisters – since the big boys had their own separate playground and didn't usually deign to intervene – seemed the first condition for survival in the infants' class. In fact, though, these rough, protective clans were already on the way out. There were quite a few parents who'd worked out that one way of escaping poverty was having fewer children, and a subtle eye could have detected among the mass of rowdy, runny-nosed urchins a small sub-class of better-dressed, prissier and slightly more respectable children. The girls wore hairslides and newly knitted cardigans, the boys were 'nesh' (the Hanmer word for anything from clean to feeling-the-cold to cowardly) and were endlessly tormented. Being an only child – as I was, for the time being – was a mixed blessing at best when it came down to the gritty realities of the playground. The 'nesh' ones I despised and it was entirely mutual, since I was dirty, precocious and had never been treated like a child. And the tribes despised me for being sole, pseudo-clean and 'stuck up'.

So the playground was hell: Chinese burns, pinches, slaps and kicks, and horrible games. I can still hear the noise of a thick wet skipping rope slapping the ground. There'd be a big girl each end and you had to leap through without tripping. Joining in was only marginally less awful than being left out. It's said (truly) that most women forget the pain of childbirth; I think that we all forget the pain of being a child at school for the first time, the sheer ineptitude, as though you'll never learn to mark out your own space. It's doubly shaming – shaming to *remember* as well, to feel so sorry for your scabby little self back there in small people's purgatory.

END OF EXTRACT

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