

General Certificate of Education
June 2005
Advanced Level Examination



**ENGLISH LITERATURE (SPECIFICATION B)
Unit 6 Exploring Texts**

LTB6/PM

To be issued to candidates on Tuesday 14 June 2005 for examination
on Tuesday 21 June 2005 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm

Pre-Release Material

- To be given out on or after Tuesday 14 June 2005.
- On receipt of this material, you are advised to check carefully that the booklet is complete and that no pages are missing or illegible. There should be 12 pages. If you experience problems you should consult your teacher.
- You should use the time between receiving this material and the examination to familiarise yourself with its contents.
- You are permitted to make **brief** annotations on the pre-release material. Such annotation should amount to no more than cross-references and/or the glossing of individual words or phrases. Highlighting and underlining are permitted.
- You are **not** permitted to bring any additional written material with you into the examination.
- Your teacher is **not** permitted to discuss the pre-release material with you before the examination.
- **You must bring this material with you to the examination.**

Pre-Release Material**Educational Experiences****Contents**

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- Item Two** Extract A: from the introduction (ed. Michael Slater) to *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens.
Extract B: from *Dickens* by Peter Ackroyd.
Extract C: A Critical Perspective, by Jean Evans, on *Nicholas Nickleby*.
- Item Three** from *Oleander Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived* by Penelope Lively.

Item One

The following extract is from *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens, written in 1838. Nicholas Nickleby, the hero of the novel, has been obliged to take up the position of assistant teacher at Mr Squeers' school for boys in Yorkshire (Dotheboys Hall). In return for his agreement to do so, his miserly uncle Ralph has agreed to keep Nicholas's mother and his sister Kate from destitution. Mrs Squeers begins here by contradicting her husband, who has been pretending to Nicholas that the brimstone and treacle about to be administered to the boys is to 'purify the boys' bloods'.

'Oh! nonsense,' rejoined Mrs Squeers. 'If the young man comes to be a teacher here, let him understand at once that we don't want any foolery about the boys. They have the brimstone and treacle, partly because if they hadn't something or other in the way of medicine they'd be always ailing and giving a world of trouble, and partly because it spoils their appetites and comes cheaper than breakfast and dinner. So it does them good and us good at the same time, and that's fair enough I'm sure.'

Having given this explanation, Mrs Squeers put her head into the closet and instituted a stricter search after the spoon, in which Mr Squeers assisted. A few words passed between them while they were thus engaged, but as their voices were partially stifled by the cupboard all that Nicholas could distinguish was, that Mr Squeers said what Mrs Squeers had said was injudicious, and that Mrs Squeers said what Mr Squeers said was 'stuff.'

A vast deal of searching and rummaging succeeded, and it proving fruitless, Smike was called in, and pushed by Mrs Squeers and boxed by Mr Squeers, which course of treatment brightening his intellects, enabled him to suggest that possibly Mrs Squeers might have the spoon in her pocket, as indeed turned out to be the case. As Mrs Squeers had previously protested, however, that she was quite certain she had not got it, Smike received another box on the ear for presuming to contradict his mistress, together with a promise of a sound thrashing if he were not more respectful in future; so that he took nothing very advantageous by his motion.

'A most invaluable woman, that, Nickleby,' said Squeers when his consort had hurried away, pushing the drudge before her.

'Indeed, sir!' observed Nicholas.

'I don't know her equal,' said Squeers; 'I do not know her equal. That woman, Nickleby, is always the same – always the same bustling, lively, active, saving creetur that you see her now.'

Nicholas sighed involuntarily at the thought of the agreeable domestic prospect thus opened to him; but Squeers was, fortunately, too much occupied with his own reflections to perceive it.

'It's my way to say, when I am up in London,' continued Squeers, 'that to them boys she is a mother. But she is more than a mother to them, ten times more. She does things for them boys, Nickleby, that I don't believe half the mothers going would do for their own sons.'

'I should think they would not, sir,' answered Nicholas.

Now, the fact was, that both Mr and Mrs Squeers viewed the boys in the light of their proper and natural enemies; or, in other words, they held and considered that their business and profession was to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be screwed out of him. On this point they were both agreed, and behaved in unison accordingly. The only difference between them was, that Mrs Squeers waged war against the enemy openly and fearlessly, and that Squeers covered his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit, as if he really had a notion of some day or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own mind that he was a very good fellow.

'But come,' said Squeers, interrupting the progress of some thoughts to this effect in the mind of his usher, 'let's go to the school-room; and lend me a hand with my school-coat, will you?'

Nicholas assisted his master to put on an old fustian shooting-jacket, which he took down from a peg in the passage; and Squeers arming himself with his cane, led the way across a yard to a door in the rear of the house.

'There,' said the schoolmaster as they stepped in together; 'this is our shop, Nickleby.'

It was such a crowded scene, and there were so many objects to attract attention, that at first Nicholas stared about him, really without seeing anything at all. By degrees, however, the place resolved itself into a bare and dirty room with a couple of windows, whereof a tenth part might be of glass, the remainder being stopped up with old copy-books and paper. There were a couple of long old rickety desks, cut and notched, and inked and damaged, in every possible way; two or three forms, a detached desk for Squeers, and another for his assistant. The ceiling was supported like that of a barn, by cross beams and rafters, and the walls were so stained and discoloured, that it was impossible to tell whether they had ever been touched with paint or whitewash.

But the pupils – the young noblemen! How the last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good

to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from the mind of Nicholas as he looked in dismay around! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were vicious-faced boys brooding, with leaden eyes, like malefactors in a jail; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness. With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding there!

And yet this scene, painful as it was, had its grotesque features, which, in a less interested observer than Nicholas, might have provoked a smile. Mrs Squeers stood at one of the desks, presiding over an immense basin of brimstone and treacle, of which delicious compound she administered a large instalment to each boy in succession, using for the purpose a common wooden spoon, which might have been originally manufactured for some gigantic top, and which widened every young gentleman's mouth considerably, they being all obliged, under heavy corporal penalties, to take in the whole of the bowl at a gasp. In another corner, huddled together for companionship, were the little boys who had arrived on the preceding night, three of them in very large leather breeches, and two in old trousers, a something tighter fit than drawers are usually worn; at no great distance from them was seated the juvenile son and heir of Mr Squeers – a striking likeness of his father – kicking with great vigour under the hands of Smike, who was fitting upon him a pair of new boots that bore a most suspicious resemblance to those which the least of the little boys had worn on the journey down, as the little boy himself seemed to think, for he was regarding the appropriation with a look of most rueful amazement. Besides these, there was a long row of boys waiting, with countenances of no pleasant anticipation, to be treacled, and another file who had just escaped from the infliction, making a variety of wry mouths indicative of anything but satisfaction. The whole were attired in such motley, ill-assorted, extraordinary garments, as would have been irresistibly ridiculous, but for the foul appearance of dirt, disorder, and disease, with which they were associated.

'Now,' said Squeers, giving the desk a great rap with his cane, which made half the little boys nearly jump out of their boots, 'is that physicking over?'

'Just over,' said Mrs Squeers, choking the last boy in her hurry, and tapping the crown of his head with the wooden spoon to restore him. 'Here, you Smike; take away now. Look sharp!'

Smike shuffled out with the basin, and Mrs Squeers having called up a little boy with a curly head, and wiped her hands upon it, hurried out after him into a species of wash-house, where there was a small fire and a large kettle, together with a number of little wooden bowls which were arranged upon a board.

Into these bowls Mrs Squeers, assisted by the hungry servant, poured a brown composition which looked like diluted pincushions without the covers, and was called porridge. A minute wedge of brown bread was inserted in each bowl, and when they had eat their porridge by means of the bread, the boys ate the bread itself, and had finished their breakfast; whereupon Mr Squeers said, in a solemn voice, 'For what we have received may the Lord make us truly thankful!' – and went away to his own.

Nicholas distended his stomach with a bowl of porridge, for much the same reason which induces some savages to swallow earth – lest they should be inconveniently hungry when there is nothing to eat. Having further disposed of a slice of bread and butter, allotted to him in virtue of his office, he sat himself down to wait for school-time.

He could not but observe how silent and sad the boys all seemed to be. There was none of the noise and clamour of a school-room, none of its boisterous play or hearty mirth. The children sat crouching and shivering together, and seemed to lack the spirit to move about. The only pupil who evinced the slightest tendency towards locomotion or playfulness was Master Squeers, and as his chief amusement was to tread upon the other boys' toes in his new boots, his flow of spirits was rather disagreeable than otherwise.

After some half-hour's delay Mr Squeers reappeared, and the boys took their places and their books, of which latter commodity the average might be about one to eight learners. A few minutes having elapsed, during which Mr Squeers looked very profound, as if he had a perfect apprehension of what was inside all the books, and could say every word of their contents by heart if he only chose to take the trouble, that gentleman called up the first class.

Obedient to this summons there ranged themselves in front of the schoolmaster's desk, half a dozen scarecrows, out at knees and elbows, one of whom placed a torn and filthy book beneath his learned eye.

'This is the first class in English spelling and philosophy, Nickleby,' said Squeers, beckoning Nicholas to stand beside him. 'We'll get up a Latin one, and hand that over to you. Now, then, where's the first boy?'

'Please, sir, he's cleaning the back parlour window,' said the temporary head of the philosophical class.

'So he is, to be sure,' rejoined Squeers. 'We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby; the regular education system. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of book, he goes and does it. It's just the same principle as the use of the globes. Where's the second boy?'

'Please, sir, he's weeding the garden,' replied a small voice.

'To be sure,' said Squeers, by no means disconcerted. 'So he is. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, ney, bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottinney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows 'em. That's our system, Nickleby: what do you think of it?'

'It's a very useful one, at any rate,' answered Nicholas significantly.

'I believe you,' rejoined Squeers, not remarking the emphasis of his usher. 'Third boy, what's a horse?'

'A beast, sir,' replied the boy.

'So it is,' said Squeers. 'Ain't it, Nickleby?'

'I believe there is no doubt of that, sir,' answered Nicholas.

'Of course there isn't,' said Squeers. 'A horse is a quadruped, and quadruped's Latin for beast, as everybody that's gone through the grammar knows, or else where's the use of having grammars at all?'

'Where, indeed!' said Nicholas abstractedly.

'As you're perfect in that,' resumed Squeers, turning to the boy, 'go and look after *my* horse, and rub him down well, or I'll rub you down. The rest of the class go and draw water up till somebody tells you to leave off, for it's washing day tomorrow, and they want the coppers filled.'

So saying he dismissed the first class to their experiments in practical philosophy, and eyed Nicholas with a look half cunning and half doubtful, as if he were not altogether certain what he might think of him by this time.

'That's the way we do it, Nickleby,' he said, after a long pause.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders in a manner that was scarcely perceptible, and said he saw it was.

'And a very good way it is, too,' said Squeers. 'Now, just take those fourteen little boys and hear them some reading, because you know you must begin to be useful, and idling about here won't do.'

Mr Squeers said this as if it had suddenly occurred to him, either that he must not say too much to his assistant, or that his assistant did not say enough to him in praise of the establishment. The children were arranged in a semicircle round the new master, and he was soon listening to their dull, drawling, hesitating recital of those stories of engrossing interest which are to be found in the more antiquated spelling books.

In this exciting occupation the morning lagged heavily on. At one o'clock, the boys having previously had their appetites thoroughly taken away by stir-about and potatoes, sat down in the kitchen to some hard salt beef, of which Nicholas was graciously permitted to take his portion to his own solitary desk, and to eat there in peace. After this there was another hour of crouching in the school-room and shivering with cold, and then school began again.

TURN OVER FOR ITEM TWO

Turn over ►

Item Two**Extract A:**

The following extract is taken from Michael Slater's introduction to *Nicholas Nickleby* in the Penguin Classics edition.

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Extract B:

The following extract is taken from Peter Ackroyd's biography, *Dickens*, published in 1990.

At the end of his labours on *Nicholas Nickleby* Dickens told his friends that it “had been to him a diary of the last two years: the various papers preserving to him the recollection of events and feelings connected with their production”. This may be Dickens's own understanding of the fact that his novel reminded him of the circumambient world in which it was written – his moods and difficulties over certain sections, the locales where he composed them, and so forth. But it raises, too, the question which bedevils *Nicholas Nickleby* perhaps more than any other of his novels. To what extent, and for what purposes, did Dickens base his characters upon “real” people? There is the obvious case of Squeers and Dotheboys Hall, since the description of both provoked many threats of libel writs from various real Yorkshire schoolmasters; notably, it seems, from William Shaw himself who eventually came to realise the folly of suing the famous “Boz”.¹ Many scholarly articles have been devoted to exploring the precise degree of truth and fiction in Dickens's account of that Yorkshire school, with the perhaps predictable conclusion that in some cases he exaggerated, in some cases he under-emphasised, and in some cases faithfully recorded, the reality. Of his exaggerations there can be little doubt, since the physiognomies of Mr Squeers and his spouse are clearly based upon the grotesques of the Hogarthian² tradition; it also seems possible that he exaggerated the moral villainy of the schoolmaster since, after the publication of *Nicholas Nickleby*, various voices were raised in William Shaw's defence – all to the effect that he was, in the context of his period and of his profession, by no means the worst of a motley collection. Yet there are also parts of the narrative which are very firmly modelled on the actual conditions of the period, not least in the absurd advertisements which the Yorkshire schoolmasters (in fact Shaw himself was a Londoner) placed in the public prints. Shaw's own advertisement includes the fact that “YOUTH are carefully instructed in the English, Latin and Greek languages . . . Common and Decimal Arithmetic; Book-keeping, Mensuration, Surveying, Geometry, Geography and Navigation . . . No extra charges whatever, Doctor's bills excepted. No vacations, except by the Parents' desire.” It is clear from examination of the surviving exercise-books from Bowes Academy that his pupils were in fact proficient only in handwriting and in the mere copying by rote from various text-books, but no doubt it was the absurdity of including “Navigation” in the list of special subjects that prompted Dickens's own version of the advertisement in which the subjects include “fortification, and every other branch of classical literature”. The somewhat ominous last sentence of Shaw's real advertisement must in turn have prompted Dickens's “No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled”. There is a clear connection here, then, between Dickens's observations and his subsequent composition, just as the episodes on his trip to the North were re-employed in the novel itself.

¹ Dickens sometimes wrote using ‘Boz’ as a pseudonym.

² Hogarth was an eighteenth century painter.

TURN OVER FOR EXTRACT C

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Extract C:**A Critical Perspective, by Jean Evans, on *Nicholas Nickleby***

When we look at *Nicholas Nickleby* we find that Dickens seems very far from accepting the prevailing ideologies of his society. He is highly critical of the way in which his society ‘educates’ its children and of the fact that ‘the young noblemen’ in Squeers’s school, although they come from families able to pay school fees for them, are stunted in growth both physically and mentally by long ‘endurance of cruelty and neglect’. Dickens uses the tool of satire to ridicule the educators of his day through such features as Mrs Squeers’s administration of the ‘delicious compound’ of brimstone and treacle in order to suppress the boys’ appetites and thus save on the food bill.

Dickens’s strong views on the inadequacies of his society can be explained in a number of ways, for instance as a result of his own suffering as a child through his father’s imprisonment for debt and his own resultant necessity to work in a blacking factory or through his natural sensitivity and keen observation of the sufferings of those around him. However, although Dickens’s exposé of the evils of education in early Victorian society may seem quite radical, he is dealing not with the failure to educate all children in a humane and appropriate way but only with the inadequate education provided for the unfortunate fringes of the bourgeois and aristocratic world of the time.

There has also been considerable critical debate about the effectiveness of this criticism of the educational system. Some critics have felt that the humour of his portrayal of the Dotheboys Hall School in *Nicholas Nickleby* lessens the effect of real suffering that might have been achieved through more serious treatment. On the other hand, comic treatment is arguably one of the most effective ways to underline a serious message and that Dickens was genuinely concerned with the appallingly bad schools of the time is shown in the following account of a lecture he gave on the subject, referred to by John Manning in his book *Dickens on Education*:

Dickens’s statement on the cheap Yorkshire schools is mild compared with the damning he gave them in *Nicholas Nickleby*, but its matter-of-fact tone is no less convincing. There is no mistaking his views: ‘I do not like, and I did not like some years ago, cheap distant schools, where neglected children pine from year to year, under an amount of neglect, want, and youthful misery far too sad even to be glanced at in this cheerful assembly’.

Another critical debate has centred on the extent to which Dickens’s characters are caricatures rather than appearing to be fully rounded individuals. In seeking to deal with the real evils of his society, it may be argued that Dickens fails to create fully rounded characters to carry his message. In either case the characters are literary constructs, although they may at times have been based on people who were Dickens’s contemporaries. However, Dickens denied having based Mr Squeers on a real teacher, although a number of Yorkshire schoolmasters claimed that they were Dickens’s model for the character. Dickens goes on to say that the reason for some teachers’ claims ‘may arise from the fact that Mr Squeers is the representative of a class, and not of an individual. Where imposture, ignorance and brutal cupidity, are the stock in trade of a small body of men, and one is described by these characteristics, all his fellows will recognise something belonging to themselves, and each will have a misgiving that the portrait is his own’.

Item Three

The following extract is taken from Chapter Five of Penelope Lively's autobiography, *Oleander Jacaranda*, in which she describes her education and writes about the way in which children read fiction. *Oleander Jacaranda* was published in 1995. The extract refers to Lucy, who is Penelope Lively's nanny and was responsible for her education.

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Extract B: Extract from *DICKENS* by Peter Ackroyd, published by Sinclair Stevenson/Vintage. Used by permission of The Random House Group Limited.
Extract C: JEAN EVANS, *A Critical Perspective on Nicholas Nickleby*, with reference to *Dickens on Education*, MANNING, JOHN (University of Toronto Press), 1959.

Item Three PENELOPE LIVELY, *Oleander Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived* (Viking) 1994, pages 108–109. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd. Copyright © Penelope Lively, 1994.

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