

**GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION
ENGLISH (Specification 1900)**

2431/02/RBI

Unit 1 Non-Fiction, Media and Information
(Higher Tier)

READING BOOKLET INSERT

**Tuesday 2 June 2009
Morning**

Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes



INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- The reading material in this INSERT is for use with the questions in Section A of the question paper.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

- This document consists of 4 pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

Non-fiction

Sri-Lankan born television presenter, George Alagiah, writes about his experiences when he first came to England at the age of 11 in 1967.

How I became an Englishman

That morning, I learned to laugh at myself – or, at least, to pretend to laugh at myself – and in so doing acquired one of the most important skills in the armoury of an outsider trying to fit in. We weren't allowed to shower every day so my moment of revelation – so to speak – must have come a few days into my first week at boarding school.

'Can I borrow some shampoo?' one of the boys was asking the chap next to him. 'Get your own. If I can remember to bring mine, so can you.' 'You've got loads there, the bottle's full. Go on, give us a bit.' 'No, my mum says this one's got to last me till half-term.' 'Oh diddums, we don't want to upset mummy, do we?'

It was my first taste of the sarcasm that was to be a prominent feature of most boarding house arguments. You learned very quickly never to invoke your mother as a defence against anything.

I offered the boy some of my shampoo. It all calmed down. And that's when my problem began. There had to be something else for everyone to talk about. 'Why haven't you got a line like this?' I realised the question was addressed to me.

The boy was pointing at his waist where he had a distinct tan line. It was the autumn term and everyone had come back from their holidays; and they were nicely browned except for the bit where they wore swimming trunks. I became the centre of attention.

And that was the last place I wanted to be. 'Don't you go for a swim where you come from?' somebody else chipped in. 'Well, I can't really swim,' I said, relieved to have found the right gear to get my mouth into action. 'What, you've never been in a pool?' 'Yes, I have.' 'Then what do you wear when you go in a pool?' 'I wear swimming trunks.' 'Then why don't you have a line like the rest of us?'

This time the boy said it with an exaggerated tone of exasperation, as if he had just been put in charge of an idiot. He looked around. He was on a winning run and he knew it. How could I explain that we were brought up never to hang around in the sun? How could I explain that we had no need to tan ourselves in order to feel that we looked good?

How could I explain that I had never had a communal shower before and that I had never seen a tan line before? Above all, how could I explain that I wanted all of them to stop looking at me? 'I don't know,' I said lamely.

I was embarrassed, but I was not angry. I was hurting but I couldn't show it. I wanted to run but I dare not.

I wanted to cry but I knew that if I started I wouldn't be able to stop. So it was easier to pretend it didn't matter. I just stood there smiling, but wishing I could disappear in the steam that had, by then, engulfed the washroom. Those first few days at school were the start of a crash course in being English.

The list of things I had to get used to ranged from the culinary to the comical. There was food that tasted as if it had been brought to the table before the cook had time to put a vital ingredient in it (to me, even the breakfast Weetabix were strange – like bricks made out of sawdust) and the loo seats that made you jump because they were so cold.

Virtually everything I did, I was doing for the first time. There were new clothes, new friends, new habits, new lessons and a strange new vocabulary to get used to.

Media

Peter Mayle, who has lived in France for 15 years, reflects on British attitudes to the French. He explains that the French are not really arrogant and aloof – they just appreciate what they've got.

What Are the French Really Like?

The fact is, quite a few of the nationalistic clichés about the French are accurate. Naturally, I can't speak for the French, but I certainly feel qualified to speak about them, having spent several years observing them on a daily basis and at close quarters. Like many people of my age and background, I had a bundle of preconceived notions about the French and their way of life. When I came to live in France, one of my early discoveries was that so many of these turned out to be true, from the trivial (they really do say 'Oh la la', as anyone who listens to French rugby commentaries will know) to the more important matters which follow.

Let's start with a fundamental part of the French character that infuriates the English even as it provokes sneaking feelings of admiration. I refer, of course, to the French superiority complex. They consider their language to be the most elegant, their culture to be the most refined, their diplomacy to be the most diplomatic, their wines to be the most aristocratic, and their gastronomy to be the most subtle and interesting. Then there are the physical glories of France – the mountains, the beaches, the forests, the châteaux of the Loire, the City of Light, Catherine Deneuve. Most of the French people I've met have a deep regard for their country – although never, ever for the way it's run – and I've lost count of the number of times I've been told that God lives in France. I suppose all this can create the impression that the French look down their noses at the rest of the world, which I don't think they do. They simply appreciate what they have.

Is it true, as we all like to believe, that France is the world capital of bureaucracy? I remember the 13 months that I spent trying to obtain my first *carte de séjour* [identity card], and the difficulty of establishing my identity with only my passport as proof when, as I now know, nobody takes you seriously in France unless you can produce an electricity bill. I remember the paperwork, the subsequent official inspection and the meticulous, vine-by-vine count when I replaced some elderly vines with younger versions of the same variety. And I remember the look of alarm on the face of the *maçon* [stone mason] when I asked him to enlarge a small window at the back of the house without the appropriate written permission from some distant central authority.

Despite, or maybe partly because of, these national idiosyncrasies, I find France a wonderful place to live, and I would never willingly live anywhere else. For me, the most pleasant surprise of all has been the people, and here I find that the clichés aren't true. It is often said that the French are aloof, suspicious of strangers and not very fond of foreigners, criticisms that I'm sure reflect many visitors' first social contact on French soil. This is likely to be with that daunting figure, the Parisian waiter. He is bored, he can't understand what you say, and his feet hurt. Consequently, he treats you with a mixture of disdain and barely suppressed irritation, and you might very easily feel that he represents the attitude of all his fellow Frenchmen. He doesn't. In fact, he is just as grumpy with his compatriots, and probably with his wife as well.

Outside Paris, the English are usually treated with courtesy. Their halting French is listened to with patience, their curious habits (milk in the tea, warm beer) accommodated. An Englishman may never be truly one of the French family, but unless he's very unlucky, he will eventually find himself accepted. I used to be somewhat sensitive about my nationality, and I could never quite escape the feeling that I was no more than a permanent and possibly unwelcome tourist. Then one day, a neighbour with whom I was having a drink put my mind at rest. 'You are English,' he said, 'which is of course unfortunate. But you should know that most of us down here prefer the English to the Parisians.'

After that, I felt much better.

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