

WELSH JOINT EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
General Certificate of Secondary Education



CYD-BWYLLGOR ADDYSG CYMRU  
Tystysgrif Gyffredinol Addysg Uwchradd

150/06-A

**ENGLISH**

**HIGHER TIER**

**PAPER 2**

P.M. FRIDAY, 10 June 2005

**Resource Material for use with Section A**

# FREE AT LAST

After 17 years resisting the seductive charms of the motor car while forgoing the indignities and insults of public transport, Candida Crewe has finally admitted defeat...

I am in a furious temper. To my horror and shame, my husband and I have bought a car. I have managed without one for almost my entire adult life. I had one when I had just passed my driving test, aged 21. I kept it for a year then flogged it, feeling that it was a pointless extravagance for a single girl living in central London.

Some years later, still in central London but pregnant with my first child, I was warned ominously by friends that I would no longer be able to manage on just tubes, buses and taxis. Appalled at the potential expense of buying and running a car, and the cost to the environment besides, I resisted.

When my second child came along, I was told that my anti-car stance would no longer be tenable, that life would be simply impossible without one. Some friends got quite cross with me, as if they minded that I might cope without one of the basics of modern life while they so obviously could not, as if I were taking some kind of moral high ground. In all honesty, I suppose I did feel a certain smugness about it, about having not given in to the insidious, all-pervasive pressure of the motor culture. I liked being able to rise above it and disapproval only served to make me all the more determined not to sell out and shell out. When my second son was born, I invested in a double buggy, made the decision not to feel guilty about taking cabs and hiring cars when absolutely necessary and became the proud owner of an old lady's tartan shopping trolley, which I wheeled daily to and from the supermarket.

There were, of course, moments of frustration – buses taking forever, tubes

sitting for hours in tunnels, taxis ordered efficiently in advance simply not turning up, me and the children cold, hungry and tired, longing to get home. These occasions sometimes even prompted tears, oaths and declarations of 'Right, that's it! I'm off to the car showroom tomorrow.'

But we never took the plunge. Somehow the frustration of the carless always disappeared and was forgotten until the next time. In between we walked a lot and managed perfectly well, feeling perfectly smug. We didn't want to give in because we knew once we got a car, there would be no going back; like everyone we knew, we wouldn't be able to live without it.

Then, last summer, I became pregnant with my third child. My friends rubbed their hands with glee. Now you'll have to give in, they chimed. Defensive, I dug my heels in further. Why should that be, I wondered, and, with lips pursed, I kept wheeling the buggy and shopping trolley up and down the street, as my stomach expanded and my walk began to resemble that of a penguin.

But then, a few weeks ago, my husband took our eldest son swimming. The journey to the pool is a simple one. Or should be. They waited 25 minutes for the bus. When it came, my husband discovered he had no money on him. He had to go to a cashpoint and wait another half an hour for the next bus. Coming home, the tired three-year-old fell asleep at a bus stop with no shelter or seats. It was raining. My husband's back began to ache. Forty five minutes passed. Not a bus in sight. After another 15 minutes, he stopped a taxi. When he got home, at some ridiculous hour, he was furious.

The following day, we'd been invited to a children's party and we decided to treat ourselves to a taxi, in which our two-year-old was sick. We were mortified. Later that afternoon we took the precaution of booking a taxi home well before the candles on the cake were blown out, but when we went out to meet it, it did not come and did not come. The four of us were exhausted, and felt humiliated as we watched all the other guests dwindle away in their smart cars. Half an hour later, the taxi appeared. The opportunist driver had taken another passenger first and came back for us at his leisure. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. 'We are getting a car,' my husband hissed, and I knew this time he meant it.

It felt like a cop-out but I could see the logic. A car offered the convenience and freedom I had never before experienced.

Post-car, I have become embarrassingly lazy. The beloved tartan shopping trolley gathers dust in the cellar. These days I kid myself I need the extra shopping that only the car will accommodate, and anyway it's raining. Within days of taking possession of our new four-wheeled friend, I have become the person I vowed I never would – the car dependent. I am ashamed of myself and my hypocrisy. And yet, it has transformed my life. We might have traffic jams and parking problems, but who cares? We have been liberated from the torture that is public transport and we are mobile. We are free. Carless for 17 years, car-dependent in one week. It didn't take long, did it?



Candida Crewe – “liberated from the torture that is public transport”