

Answer **either** Question 1 **or** Question 2.

EITHER

1 Read carefully the poem on the opposite page.

How do the poem's words strikingly convey to you the speaker's thoughts and feelings about her life?

To help you answer this question you might consider:

- the ways in which she challenges the idea that she is lonely
- the images of 'loneliness' she creates
- the overall impression of her life which the writing conveys.

Song

You're wondering if I'm lonely:
OK then, yes, I'm lonely
as a plane rides lonely and level
on its radio beam, aiming
across the Rockies*
for the blue-strung aisles
of an airfield on the ocean

You want to ask, am I lonely?
Well, of course, lonely
as a woman driving across country
day after day, leaving behind
mile after mile
little towns she might have stopped
and lived and died in, lonely

If I'm lonely
it must be the loneliness
of waking first, of breathing
dawn's first cold breath on the city
of being the one awake
in a house wrapped in sleep

If I'm lonely
it's with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore
in the last red light of the year
that knows what it is, that knows it's neither
ice nor mud nor winter light
but wood, with a gift for burning

**Rockies*: a mountain range in the USA

OR

- 2 Read carefully the following extract from a novel. In it an English couple, Colin and Mary, are on holiday abroad. They meet a local man called Robert.

How do the writer's words make you feel about Robert and the way he behaves towards Colin and Mary?

To help you answer you might consider:

- the writer's descriptions of Robert
- the way Colin and Mary react to him
- how the writing builds up a feeling of tension.

'That wasn't our first day,' he said loudly. 'Now you're completely confused. It was seeing the queue that made us decide to go to the beach, and we didn't go there till the third day.' Colin had stopped to say this, but Mary kept on walking. He caught up with her in skipping steps.

'It might have been the third day,' she was saying as though to herself, 'but this is where we were.' She pointed at a doorway several yards ahead and, as if summoned, a squat figure stepped out of the dark into a pool of streetlight and stood blocking their path.

'Now look what you've done,' Colin joked, and Mary laughed.

The man laughed too and extended his hand. 'Are you tourists?' he asked in self-consciously precise English and, beaming, answered himself. 'Yes, of course you are.'

Mary stopped directly in front of him and said, 'We're looking for a place where we can get something to eat.'

Colin meanwhile was sidling past the man. 'We don't have to explain ourselves, you know,' he said to Mary quickly. Even as he was speaking the man caught him cordially by the wrist and stretched out his other hand to take Mary's. She folded her arms and smiled.

'It is terribly late,' said the man. 'There is nothing in that direction, but I can show you a place this way, a very good place.' He grinned, and nodded in the direction they had come from.

He was shorter than Colin, but his arms were exceptionally long and muscular. His hands too were large, the backs covered with matted hair. He wore a tight-fitting black shirt, of an artificial, semi-transparent material, unbuttoned in a neat V almost to his waist. On a chain round his neck hung a gold imitation razor-blade which lay slightly askew on the thick pelt of chest hair. Over his shoulder he carried a camera. A cloying sweet scent of aftershave filled the narrow street.

'Look,' Colin said, trying to detach his wrist without appearing violent, 'we know there is a place down here.' The grip was loose but unremitting, a mere finger and thumb looped round Colin's wrist.

The man filled his lungs with air and appeared to grow an inch or two. 'Everything is closed,' he announced. 'Even the hot-dog stand.' He addressed himself to Mary with a wink. 'My name is Robert.' Mary shook his hand and Robert began to pull them back down the street. 'Please,' he insisted. 'I know just the place.'

After much effort over several paces, Colin and Mary brought Robert to a standstill and they stood in a close huddle, breathing noisily.

Mary spoke as though to a child. 'Robert, let go of my hand.' He released her immediately and made a little bow.

Colin said, 'And you'd better let go of me too.'

But Robert was explaining apologetically to Mary, 'I'd like to help you. I can take you to a very good place.' They set off again.

'We don't need to be *dragged* towards good food,' Mary said, and Robert nodded. He touched his forehead. 'I am, I am...'

'Wait a minute,' Colin interrupted.

'... always eager to practise my English. Perhaps too eager. I once spoke it perfectly. This way, please.' Mary was already walking on. Robert and Colin followed.

'Mary,' Colin called.

'English', Robert said, 'is a beautiful language, full of misunderstandings.'

Mary smiled over her shoulder. They had arrived once more at the great residence at the fork in the road. Colin pulled Robert to a halt and jerked his hand free. 'I'm sorry,' Robert said.

They took the left-hand fork and walked for ten minutes during which Robert's boisterous attempts to begin a conversation were met in silence, on Mary's part self-absorbed – she walked with her arms crossed again – and on Colin's faintly hostile – he kept his distance from Robert. They turned down an alley which descended by a series of worn steps to a diminutive square, barely thirty feet across, into which ran half a dozen smaller passageways. 'Down there,' Robert said, 'is where I live. But it is too late for you to come there. My wife will be in bed.'

They made more turns to left and right, passing between tottering houses five storeys high, and shuttered grocers' shops with vegetables and fruit in wooden crates piled outside. An aproned shopkeeper appeared with a trolley-load of cases and called out to Robert who laughed and shook his head and raised his hand. When they reached a brightly lit doorway, Robert parted the yellowing strips of a plastic walk-through for Mary. He kept his hand on Colin's shoulder as they descended a steep flight of stairs into a cramped and crowded bar.

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