
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

9695/71

Paper 7 Comment and Appreciation

May/June 2014

2 hours

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet/Paper

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

If you have been given an Answer Booklet, follow the instructions on the front cover of the Booklet.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

Do not use staples, paper clips, glue or correction fluid.

DO NOT WRITE IN ANY BARCODES.

Answer **two** questions.

You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers.

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

This document consists of **6** printed pages and **2** blank pages.

1 Write a critical commentary on the following passage from the short story *Traitors* by Doris Lessing (born 1919). The narrator and her sister are growing up in Southern Africa.

We had discovered the Thompsons' old house long before their first visit.

At the back of our house the ground sloped up to where the bush began, an acre of trailing pumpkin vines, ash-heaps where pawpaw¹ trees sprouted, and lines draped with washing where the wind slapped and jiggled. The bush was dense and frightening, and the grass there higher than a tall man. There were not even paths. 5

When we had tired of our familiar acre we explored the rest of the farm: but this particular stretch of bush was avoided. Sometimes we stood at its edge, and peered in at the tangled granite outcrops and great ant-heaps curtained with Christmas fern. Sometimes we pushed our way a few feet, till the grass closed behind us, leaving overhead a small space of blue. Then we lost our heads and ran back again. 10

Later, when we were given our first rifle and a new sense of bravery, we realised we had to challenge that bush. For several days we hesitated, listening to the guinea-fowl calling only a hundred yards away, and making excuses for cowardice. Then, one morning, at sunrise, when the trees were pink and gold, and the grass-stems were running bright drops of dew, we looked at each other, smiling weakly, and slipped into the bushes with our hearts beating. 15

At once we were alone, closed in by grass, and we had to reach out for the other's dress and cling together. Slowly, heads down, eyes half closed against the sharp grass-seeds, two small girls pushed their way past ant-heap and outcrop, past thorn and gully and thick clumps of cactus where any wild animal might lurk. 20

Suddenly, after only five minutes of terror, we emerged in a space where the red earth was scored with cattle tracks. The guinea-fowl were clinking ahead of us in the grass, and we caught a glimpse of a shapely dark bird speeding along a path. We followed, shouting with joy because the forbidding patch of bush was as easily conquered and made our own as the rest of the farm. 25

We were stopped again where the ground dropped suddenly to the vlei², a twenty-foot shelf of flattened grass where the cattle went to water. Sitting, we lifted our dresses and coasted downhill on the slippery swathes, landing with torn knickers and scratched knees in a donga³ of red dust scattered with dried cowpats and bits of glistening quartz. The guinea-fowl stood in a file and watched us, their heads tilted with apprehension; but my sister said with bravado: 'I am going to shoot a buck!' 30

She waved her arms at the birds and they scuttled off. We looked at each other and laughed, feeling too grown-up for guinea-fowl now.

Here, down on the verges of the vlei, it was a different kind of bush. The grass was thinned by cattle, and red dust spurted as we walked. There were sparse thorn trees, and everywhere the poison-apple bush, covered with small fruit like yellow plums. Patches of wild marigold filled the air with a rank, hot smell. 35

Moving with exaggerated care, our bodies tensed, our eyes fixed half a mile off, we did not notice that a duiker⁴ stood watching us, ten paces away. We yelled with excitement and the buck vanished. Then we ran like maniacs, screaming at the top of our voices, while the bushes whipped our faces and the thorns tore our legs. 40

Ten minutes later we came slap against a barbed fence. 'The boundary,' we whispered, awed. This was a legend; we had imagined it as a sort of Wall of China, for beyond were thousands and thousands of miles of unused Government land where there were leopards and baboons and herds of koodoo⁵. But we were disappointed: even the famous boundary was only a bit of wire after all, and the duiker was nowhere in sight. 45

Whistling casually to show we didn't care, we marched along by the wire, twanging it so that it reverberated half a mile away down in the vlei. Around us the bush was strange; this part of the farm was quite new to us. There was still nothing but thorn trees and grass; and fat wood-pigeons cooed from every branch. We swung on the fence stanchions and wished that Father would suddenly appear and take us home to breakfast. We were hopelessly lost. 50

- ¹ pawpaw: a kind of fruit
- ² vlei: a small, shallow lake
- ³ donga: a narrow gully or trench
- ⁴ duiker: a small antelope
- ⁵ koodoo: large antelopes

2 Write a critical commentary on *Carpet Snake*, a short story by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920–1993). The story describes an aboriginal family in Australia.

He was a beauty, that ten-foot carpet snake we had as a pet. My father belonged to the Noo-muccl tribe of Stradbroke Island, and the carpet snake was his totem. He made sure he looked after his blood-brother. My mother belonged to a different tribe. The carpet snake was not her totem. She hated old Carpie, because of his thieving ways. She was proud of her fowl-run and of the eggs our hens provided. Carpie liked the fowl-run too; every time he felt hungry he would sneak in, select the choicest fowl in the run, and swallow it. He could always outsmart Mother, no matter what she did to keep her chooks¹ out of his ravenous belly. But, somehow, Mother never was game enough to bring down the axe on Carpie's head. We all knew she was often tempted to do just that. I think two things stopped her: her deep respect for the fact that Dad's decisions were final around the house, and the thought that if she killed in anger, Biami the Good Spirit would punish her. 5 10

We all loved Carpie except for Mother—and the dog. The dog kept well out of Carpie's way, because he was scared stiff of him. He seemed to know that a ten-foot carpet snake can wind itself around a dog and in time swallow it whole. 15

Whenever Mother thought none of us kids was around, she would swear at old Carpie—and Mother's swearing could outmatch that of any bullocky² anywhere in Australia.

One day Mother went away for a short while to hospital. She came home with a brand-new baby sister for us. The day of her homecoming, we were rather overawed as we watched the baby sleeping in her cot. The big black dog looked at the baby, too, and obviously approved of the new arrival. After a while, Mother shooed us out to play, placed the cover gently over the sleeping baby, and went to make herself a cup of tea. Some friends, tribal neighbours, called to welcome her home; playing in our summer-house of tea-tree bark that Dad had built to catch the cool breezes blowing from the bay, we heard the women gossiping and the clink of teacups. When the neighbours left, Mother peeped in with pride on her new baby. 20 25

Suddenly we heard Mother's voice raised in a terrible screech as she raced outside, calling to Dad. Dad read the urgency of that screech, dropped his hammer, and ran. 30

Mother looked as though she were having a fit. She was jumping up and down, running to snatch up the long-handled broom, swearing like a bullocky. We knew something terrible must have happened for Mother to carry on like this. She behaved differently in different sorts of emergencies. We knew this one was serious.

'Stop shouting, woman!' Dad ordered. 'What's wrong?' 35

Mother pointed a shaking finger towards the bedroom. 'Get that gluttonous reptile out of my bedroom!'

Dad went into the bedroom. There, curled up in the cot with the baby, now wide awake and crying, was old Carpie.

Carpie seemed to sum up the situation in no time flat. He quickly slithered off the bedclothes, down onto the floor and out of the door. 40

The dog was trying to do the right thing by the family, taking menacing steps towards the snake and making growling noises in his throat. He was very happy to obey Dad, however, when he called him off.

Finally Mother found her composure, once Carpie had disappeared. 'But you mark my words, you stubborn fellow, that snake could have swallowed my baby,' she told Dad. 45

'Don't be silly, woman, why would he want to swallow your baby when he can swallow your chooks any time he wants to?' Dad retorted, and shot out of the door before Mother could think up a reply. 50

After that old Carpie carried on exactly as before, roaming about the house wherever he pleased. He went on stealing fowls and eggs, and slept anywhere he

liked—though he never again tried to get into my baby sister’s cot. I used to like it when I went off to the lavatory and found him holed up there. He would stretch himself right out across a beam in the ceiling. I used to sit in the lavatory for hours and tell him my innermost secrets, and it was very satisfying the way old Carpie would never interrupt the conversation or crawl away. Mother often accused me of dodging chores by going off and spending such a long time in the lavatory. This wasn’t quite true; all I wanted to do was to share my secrets with Carpie. 55

When Dad died, we lost Carpie. He just seemed to disappear. We never found out what happened to him. Perhaps Biama the Good Spirit whispered to him: ‘Your blood-brother has gone to the shadow land. Your days are numbered. Get lost.’ 60

I like to think he still roams somewhere. Maybe he found a better fowl-run. I hope so. Funny thing about women. When my father died and Carpie disappeared, Mother decided to give away her fowl-run. She seemed to lose interest in it, somehow. 65

¹ chooks: chickens

² bullocky: the driver of a team of bullocks (cattle)

3 Write a critical commentary on the following poem by Kenneth Slessor (1901–1971).

The Night Ride

Gas flaring on the yellow platform; voices running up and down;
 Milk-tins in cold dented silver; half-awake I stare,
 Pull up the blind, blink out – all sounds are drugged;
 The slow blowing of passengers asleep;
 Engines yawning; water in heavy drips; 5
 Black, sinister travellers, lumbering up the station,
 One moment in the window, hooked over bags;
 Hurrying, unknown faces – boxes with strange labels –
 All groping clumsily to mysterious ends,
 Out of the gaslight, dragged by private Fates. 10
 Their echoes die. The dark train shakes and plunges;
 Bells cry out; the night-ride starts again.
 Soon I shall look out into nothing but blackness,
 Pale, windy fields. The old roar and knock of the rails
 Melts in dull fury. Pull down the blind. Sleep. Sleep. 15
 Nothing but grey, rushing rivers of bush outside.
 Gaslight and milk-cans. Of Raptown I recall nothing else.

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Copyright Acknowledgements:

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Question 2 © ed. M Wilding; *The Oxford Book of Australian Short Stories*; Oxford University Press Australia; 1994.

Question 3 © ed. J Thieme; Kenneth Slessor; *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*; Arnold / HarperCollins Publishers; 1996.

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