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General Certificate of Education
Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

8693/11

Paper 1 Passages for Comment

May/June 2012

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, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

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.

The number of marks is given in brackets [] at the end of each question or part question.

This document consists of **7** printed pages and **1** blank page.



Answer two questions

1 In the following passage, from a travel website, the writer describes his first experience wedding in Mongolia.

- (a) Comment on the style and language of the passage. [15]
- (b) The same writer visits another country. He puts an account of his experience of one of its national customs on the same website. Write the opening of the account (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the style and language of the original extract. [10]

Throughout the evening people came to warn me about themselves. They sat on the grass outside my tent, unburdening themselves with confessions. The following day would be difficult, they said. Weddings were boisterous occasions. People became unpredictable. They counselled me about particular individuals, then admitted that they themselves could be as bad as the next fellow. I would be wise to get away early before things got out of hand. 5

In the morning the groom and his supporters, a party of about seven or eight relations, set off to fetch the bride from her *ger*,¹ which lay some 15 miles away. An old Russian truck, the equivalent of the wedding Rolls-Royce, had been specially hired for the occasion. When they arrived, the groom would be obliged to search for his bride, who by tradition must hide from him. It would not be too difficult. The tradition is that she hides under a bed in the neighbouring *ger*. 10

While we waited for their return we were given breakfast in the newlyweds' *ger*. Over the past weeks it had been lovingly prepared by relations. It was like a show *ger* from Ideal Gers. Decorations included a poster of the inspirational figure of Batardene, the national wrestling champion, which had been hung in a prominent position above the marital bed. Biscuits, slabs of white cheese and boiled sweets had been arrayed on every surface in dizzy tiers like wedding cakes. On a low stool stood a mountainous plate of sheep parts, with the favoured cut, the great fatty tail, like a grey glacier on its summit. 15 20

Younger sisters hustled in and out making last-minute preparations. While we were at breakfast the first lookouts were posted to watch for the return of the truck bearing the wedding party from the bride's camp.

By mid-afternoon we were still waiting. Apparently a wedding breakfast would have been given to the groom and his accompanying party at the bride's camp, and complicated calculations were now performed concerning the number of miles to the bride's *ger*, divided by the speed of the truck combined with the probable duration of the breakfast, and finally multiplied by the estimated consumption of *arkhi*, a clear spirit distilled from milk. 25

At four o'clock a spiral of dust finally appeared beyond a distant ridge. When the truck drew up in front of the wedding *ger*, it was clear that the lavish hospitality of the bride's camp had been the cause of the delay. The back of the truck was crammed with wedding guests in such a state of dishevelled merriment that we had some difficulty persuading them to disembark. The bride's mother, apparently convinced that they were at the wrong *ger*, required four men to convey her to terra firma.² The bride's elder sister, shrugging off all assistance, fell headfirst from the tailgate, bounced twice and came to rest, smiling, against a door post. 30 35

Once everyone was down from the truck, the bride and the groom stood respectfully to one side while the wedding party crowded into the new *ger*. The groom was tall and thin with a long, angular face. The bride, as round as he was linear, came up to his waist. Throughout the happy day they behaved like disappointed parties on a first date, never once meeting each other's eyes. 40

For the bride this was part of Mongolian tradition. She was meant to display demure reluctance, deemed to be commensurate with feminine modesty. Her new husband was part of a wider tradition: the nervous, slightly shell-shocked bridegroom familiar in every culture. Their curious distance from the general jollity was made worse by the fact that they remained the only sober members of the wedding party.

Inside the newlyweds' ger, the two families took up positions on either side of the tent like opposing armies. Numbering 50 or 60 people, they were crowded together with the kind of intimacy usually reserved for the morning rush hour on the Tokyo subway. 50

The unexpected presence of me, a foreigner, was seen as a sign of good fortune for the success of the union and I had been squeezed into the lap of one of the groom's brothers. At my back were the sharp knees of a long, disapproving line of grannies and elderly aunts seated on cots. 55

¹*ger*: dwelling (an elaborate tent)

²*terra firma*: solid ground

- 2 The following passage describes the writer's thoughts and feelings about the enthusiasm among male family members. (A shed is an outbuilding where tools are normally stored.)
- (a) Comment on the style and language of the passage.
- (b) Louis's father sits in his shed writing his autobiography. In one section he explains why he feels all men need their own space. Write the section (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the material of the original extract. [10]

Under an old apple tree at the top of the garden, dappled in sunshine, is a small green shed. It sits a few yards from the hedge that separates our tiny patch of garden. Within the shed, presumably far from me, its occupant, Louis, our 13-year-old, is doing whatever it is that the male of the species tends to do in a small shed. Precisely what that is I cannot say, because with sheds, there is an unofficial *omerta*¹ that forbids the owner divulging his activities therein to any female. 5

Louis may or may not be the youngest shed-dweller in Britain today, but he is surely the proudest. Offered *carte blanche*² (within financial, legal and moral reason), the choice of any present to mark his shift into teenagerdom, this 8 × 6 ft building was his first choice. 10

Surely, I suggested, he would prefer something electronic or mildly dangerous, something with wheels? Something flashy and gaudy, possibly something with an apple logo on its outer casing? But no. A shed, and only a shed, would do.

His father took a different view when I relayed the news and the beam of paternal pride was clearly audible even at a distance of 130 miles. "That's my boy," he said, speaking from his own shed. 15

Louis's shed, however, and his father's could hardly be more different. Where Louis's is like a Morris Minor car, being tiny and purely functional, his father's is a luxury Bentley convertible. Technically, it's true, the entire roof doesn't come off (although there is a skylight). Yet it is a powerful and well-equipped machine, electrified and connected to the main water supply. It houses not only a flat-screen television, DVD player, reclining leather armchair, capacious bookshelves and an L-shaped execu-desk, but also a lavatory and what an estate agent might call a *bijou kitchenette*. 20

It arrived 10 years ago, ready made. Ready made, but bespoke in that it was finished according to precise instructions – not until then or since then has my husband applied himself so fully to the tiny details. It was lowered, spinning on the end of a crane, into the bottom of our London garden. Our rear neighbour complained to the council who told her there was nothing she could do. She sold up and moved to Australia. 30

Louis, five at the time, was naturally intrigued by this new dwelling and asked whether it meant that his father was going to live in it. I told him not to be daft, although of course I knew that he had hit on the truth.

For those eight years, Louis has been my shed spy. Where my daily visits with tea and toast are invariably intercepted at the door, Louis is permitted at least some limited access. Each day (during term time when we are in London) when he returns from school, he runs down to the shed and then reports back to me. "He's pretending to be working," is the most common observance, "and he's not in a good mood because he's just had his aces cracked by an imbecile who called with a pair of threes and hit his set on the flop." Louis does seem worryingly *au fait*³ with the terminology of internet poker games. 40

Sometimes, however, he will report that his father is actually working at his computer. More frequently, the news will be that he is shouting at a sportsman on the TV, reading a biography of an American president or rearranging his collection of £1 coins into taller piles. 45

My husband and I had a long talk about all this once when I hadn't seen him for three whole days. He paced the room when I asked him what it all meant and said, "What you must try to understand is that every man is an emotional inadequate and we need weird, ritualistic order in our lives. We need space where we can insulate ourselves from emotional contact with others, particularly our female superiors. This is the true meaning of the shed." 50

So there we have it. Once, long ago, I naively assumed that a shed was a storage space for tools. My husband happens to be the kind of man who would no more allow a garden tool in his shed than a large lump of glowing plutonium. The closest thing to a tool is the dinky little penknife he uses to scrape the filth from the bowls of the tobacco pipes he puffs on, of which he seems to have almost as many as pound coins. 55

¹*omerta*: a rule or code that prevents information being shared

²*carte blanche*: free choice

³*au fait*: familiar

- 3 The following passage describes some thoughts and feelings about the environment that the writer sees the world through the eyes of an animal.
- (a) Comment on the style and language of the passage.
- (b) The writer publishes another article in which she speaks on behalf of another endangered species in the natural world. Write the opening of the article (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the style and language of the original extract. [10]

I am thinking about the end of the world – not because I am religious, but because I am a polar bear, and the world will end for me faster than it will for you, and you'll put some of me in zoos and special chill nature reserves, but what you will really be excited about is oil and trade and who controls the North West Passage.

And I will be a monster because only monsters have no home. 5

When you take my world away from me I'm going to come and live with you. All your civilisation and all your science will be on the outside, along with all your trade and aid. Inside, there will be me. Your inner polar bear – the wild free place white pristine – sun dropped red behind my head – head back jaw open swallowing pounds and pounds of fresh killed life raw clean cold. The dive of me the weight of me. 10

I will be everything you have lost. I will be everything you neglected. I will be everything you forgot. I will be the wild place sold for money.

You see, when I lived far away, you knew I was there, and I kept something for you, even though you had never seen a polar bear or an ice floe. Even though you are not adapted to my conditions. I kept your wild, cold, raw. And the lion keeps something for you, and the mangrove swamp and the coral and the spider and the wren. 15

You think I am a stupid polar bear? Go up into space and look back at this diamond cut planet, polar capped, white whirled. It is one planet, one place, and there is nothing else like it anywhere in the solar system. When you see it whole, you remember that it's not polar bears over there, and snakes over here; it's one place, one strange special place. It comes as a whole or not at all. 20

You will live longer than us – my kind, not just my polar bear kind but all of us who need a home and you so envious that you want all the homes, leaving nothing you can't sell or rent. Enclosure of the whole world ... 25

Climb on my back and I'll carry you to the top of the snow-silent mountains and let you look out over the rim of the earth. Look, beyond us are the stars, and if I reach with my paws I can use the stars as footholds. Higher now, through the witnesses, which I think the stars are – the roof of our life bright with silver eyes. What do they see? This blue planet, and near her, the white moon that holds us in her gravitational pull, so that we spin at the speed of life. Not too fast, not too slow, the speed of life. 30

As I climb through the stars, stretching myself into a constellation, The Great Polar Bear,¹ I wonder how many millions of years it will be before a wiser species than Homo sapiens² inhabits the earth? And I wonder if I will ever come home? 35

When the earth re-evolves herself, after the plagues, the bombs, the wipe-outs, the lights-out, will there be polar bears? And lions? And wrens?

When earth begins again I would like to slide down a chute of stars into an icy untamed sea and swim through the cold to the ice-floe where there will be others like me, not monsters, homed. A place to be. 40

But until then I would rather climb away, not wait for the last piece of ice to melt, but climb into the airless cold of outer space where I too can be a witness to what happens next.

Once upon a time there was a polar bear. He had nowhere to live so he came to live in your head. You started to think polar bear thoughts about iciness and wilderness. You went shopping and looked at fish. At night you dreamed your skin was fur. When you got in the bath you dropped through nameless waters deeper than regret. You left the cold tap running. You flooded the house. You dived into winter with no clothes on. You sought loneliness. You wanted to see the sun rise after a night that lasted as long as all the things you have done wrong. You wanted to see the sun come up and no one to be near you. You wanted to look out over the rim of the world. But you live in the city and the rest is gone. 50

And all the longings and all the loss can't bring back the dead. The most beautiful place on earth was everywhere – a raft in the wilderness of space, precarious, unlikely, our polar bear home. 55

¹*The Great Polar Bear*: a reference to The Great Bear, a group of stars that can be seen in the northern hemisphere

²*Homo sapiens*: the human race (Latin for 'wise man')

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- Question 2 © Rebecca Tyrrel; Man and boy – life in a shed; The Guardian; Saturday 10 July 2010; <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/jul/10/garden-shed-matthew-norman.guardian.co.uk>.
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