bridging the gap

# THE FREE GUIDE TO THE OXFORD ENGLISH APTITUDE TEST (ELAT)

# 2021

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# QUESTIONS

**What will the question be like?**

You will be given six texts to read; they could be poems, extracts from a novel or play or even a letter. They will be about a page long, and they will share a common theme; past themes include death, poverty and families. The exam paper will ask you to

*"Select two of the passages (a) to (f) and compare and contrast them in any ways that seem interesting to you, paying particular attention to distinctive features of structure, language and style".*

**So how do I go about doing this?**

The first challenge is selecting which texts to write about. I would recommend discussing two in which you can find at least one similarity and one difference; if the texts are too different then it will be harder to compare them, but looking at a few differences adds variety to the essay.

The examiner wants you to discuss the similarities and differences of the writers' presentation of the common theme; maybe writer A presents families as idyllic while writer B depicts a more dysfunctional relationship? Look at the methods which the writers use to explore these themes; perhaps writer A has written a sonnet about families to create a sense of love and harmony, whereas writer B's use of free verse emphasises the chaos of family life.

**How do I actually write the answer?**

After annotating the two texts, I'd recommend making a table to compare them, writing down the similarities and differences, and the methods used to present these ideas. It can be as brief as this:

| Text A | Text B |
|---|---|
| · Families- idyllic- sonnet | · Families- dysfunctional- free verse |
| · Speaker's personal response to families- shown through metaphors | · Speaker's personal response to families- shown through similes |

As you can see, the first point focuses on structure and the second focuses on language. I'd recommend using similar methods as points of comparison in the two texts to make sure you keep on track with comparing them.

Once you've made this rough plan, it's time to start writing. The first part of the essay should be (surprise!) the introduction. You don't want to spend ages on this but as it's the first thing the examiner reads, it's important to make an effort. I'd recommend outlining your line of argument by writing 1-2 sentences on the texts' similarities and the same number on their differences.

Your essay's first paragraph should look at the first text; you've probably done lots of close reading in your English lessons and this is no different; outline your main idea for the point of comparison, then describe the methods used by the writer to show this and how their methods create this effect. Then do the same in the next paragraph for text B, with a connecting sentence to compare them. Repeat this for your second point, which should discuss how the texts are different.

If you find it easier to compare them in the same paragraph, you can do that - whichever is most comfortable for you. The key is comparison, so as long as you are clearly analysing the similarities and differences between the two texts, backing up your points with analysis in a way that flows through the essay, you have some freedom in how you structure it.

In your conclusion I wouldn't recommend bringing in any new ideas because you won't be able to develop them in enough detail. Instead, summarise whether the two texts are more similar or more different, and describe what the writers' main ideas behind the text appear to be.

Don't worry if you're still not sure where to start; the exam board has published some sample essays to get a rough idea of how to go about answering the questions. They can be found at: Preparing for ELAT | Cambridge Assessment Admissions Testing. There's also some past papers on the same website which I did to practise so that I (sort of) knew what I was doing in the real thing. The key is practice - you will get gradually more comfortable with the structure of the exam as you do more papers.

Finally, remember that the ELAT is only one part of your application; if you don't think it went well then you've still got lots of ways of making up for it, such as your personal statement and the sample of your written work, so it isn't the end of the world if something doesn't quite go to plan!

# READING

**There are no hard and fast rules for what you need to find in a text, because every text contains different features. Start with this in mind: be excited about what you'll find that others won't, because there will be something!**

You're less likely to see things anew if you reread a text over and over without giving your mind a break. So when you open the paper and have 6 texts ahead of you, read all 6 in order, then go back and reread, the second time with a pen to annotate.

Don't annotate all 6, it's a waste of time. Be judgmental: about form, style, content, date - whatever. Make yourself a shortlist of maximum 3 before you go back to annotate, but ideally go straight for your chosen 2, otherwise you're going to use up valuable brain energy thinking about a text you won't use.

First of all, highlight/underline very simply, identifying features that you know specialist terms for. It's absolutely worth name-dropping assonance, alliteration, irony, metaphor, simile, irony, imagery, and poetic forms and rhythms. This isn't the be all and end all but it's a good gentle start.

Then read your passage again and analyse what the writer is saying. None of the passages, even if it's prose non-fiction, are blandly descriptive like GCSE coursework: they're making a wider point. Identify it, and highlight/underline a few quotes which you think get to the heart of this meaning.

Make sure to think about whether you're reading poetry, prose (and then within that fiction or non-fiction) or drama and use key terms appropriately. There are different considerations for each type of text. For instance, narrative voice and character will be important in prose, identifying who the speaker is and any stanza forms are useful starting points for poetry, and for drama you're looking again at character and the dynamics of the dialogue - for instance, does one character control the conversation? - and usually some stage directions too. Different types of language can be expected in each form; if the writer doesn't conform to these expectations - for example if a poet uses very prosaic factual language - then say so, and think about why.

Once you have textual evidence and wider points about form/genre and meaning, you have the basis of an argument: ie. you have a) what the writer wants us to know/see/feel and b) how they achieve that. Glance between your two texts to identify similarities and differences both in content and technique. For instance, you might argue that the two writers are making a very similar point but their approaches are totally opposed; or you might argue that their views differ but they have remarkably similar techniques; or anywhere in between these. Bullet point these ideas as comparative paragraphs (ie both writers should appear in each paragraph). How many is up to you: I had 3 or 4 but I wrote long paragraphs and sometimes should probably have split up ideas further; equally you might only have 2, if that's one similarity and one difference. It depends on whether you're making broad or very specific observations. Once you've done a few, you'll work out what you can fit into the time.

Although there are no points here for specific context, historical or biographical, that you may know, you still want to support your argument with broader ideas that show you can orient yourself in a literary world. So go back and read the little intros that each text has to see the type of text you're reading and the date at which it was written. This will inform both your individual points - for example, this was written as a speech against slavery, so I know that its literary merits have a political purpose; or this was a serialised novel, so it was written to entertain/shock etc - and your comparative points - text A was written 100 years before text B, which explains why it uses religious language more strongly, perhaps. Aim to find at least one point like this, because thinking about the nature of the text is your really high level analysis. .

Once you've got all this nailed, you're ready to start writing the essay. This can feel daunting, but remember, if you've done the reading well, then you've done most of the work. I hated

planning essays, but with ELAT, I learnt to enjoy it, because it makes you feel safe, in a new format and a stressful situation, to know that you've found all the 'answers' before you've even started writing. Good luck, you've got this!

# ANALYSIS

The best piece of advice I could give you is not to analyse each passage in isolation. The question is asking you to compare and contrast the passages, which means making direct comparisons between the two., and not writing about each passage in their own respective paragraphs.

When you're writing your essay then, perhaps begin each main body paragraph by introducing a theme or idea prevalent in both passages, before exploring how exactly these themes or ideas or explored differently. Remember to use phrases like 'Whilst passage x presents y as z, passage a presents b as c….', 'On the other hand passage y,' or 'Similarly, passage x….' etc.

At A Level, or equivalent higher level study, you are probably used to connecting every analysis with historical, cultural, literary or political context specific to theme. The ELAT is not assessing your knowledge, so any analysis you do mentioning anything related to this will not contribute towards your mark. Yes, being aware of general key ideas relating to the theme is important but if you're thinking about including that obscure fact or figure to elevate your answer somehow, you probably don't need to.

Also, adding a bit of lively debate to your answer wouldn't go amiss. Make sure you show the examiner that you're aware of alternative interpretations you could gather from the text, because this is a key part of reading literature.

Finally, be careful to not repeat yourself. It can be easy to do with an unseen text of which you have limited understanding, but if you plan your answer clearly then you shouldn't have to. Proofreading also helps with recognising where you've done this, so you can correct it in time, so remember time management is key!

### Structuring your essay

When structuring your answer, try to think of an underlying point for each text that links to the theme in the question and really gets to the core of what the writer is trying to communicate about the topic. This one point may only come to you at the very end of the 30 minutes planning time, once you have thought of each individual point for a paragraph.

You might find it useful to make a table or a mind map outlining the points you think of and leaving a space or subtitle for this central point. Use whatever planning methods work for YOU - you might end up spending ages trying to work out a mindmap you've drawn if you're not used to working with them.

### Techniques to focus on

I was advised by my English teacher to show a broad range of skills by discussing a variety of techniques utilised by the writer. It may be good to look out for:

- Form - How does the type of writing impact its meaning, its audience, or the way it communicates ideas about the theme? Always read and pay attention to the note at the top of the text, which tells you about when and in what form the extract was written/ published. E.g.
    - Essay
    - Letter
    - Poem
    - Play
    - Novel

- Structure - What impact does the opening/ ending have? How does the way the writing progresses have an impact on the reader, and the meanings conveyed about the text?
- Language:
  - Imagery -
  - Alliteration/ sibilance/ consonance -
- Style - (I really struggled with this at first, but with practice it gets easier to recognise a writer's intentions and the tone of their writing.) Is it satirical/ comedic? May it seem serious at first, but then you notice a layer beneath that which reveals a completely different tone? Don't be afraid to always question what the writer is attempting to convey, or from what perspective/ views the narrator is coming from. It will push you up into the highest bands when you begin to demonstrate an awareness of nuances in texts.

Although (as previously mentioned) you don't get marks for context, it might be useful to have an awareness of the different periods of literature (this can literally be as quick and easy as a Wikipedia search (I know - awful!)) so that, when given a date of publication, you can instantly think of what style it may have been written in, or what common techniques to look out for.

For example, satire was a very common genre in the 17th century. It might be difficult to get the sarcasm of a text that's already quite unfamiliar due to the archaic language, until you see examples and realise that it's actually possible for someone in the 17th century to have a sense of humour.

In the same century, metaphysical poetry used a lot of conceits ('far-fetched or unusual similes or metaphors'). I would have saved myself a lot of embarrassment if I had known this before doing one of my practice papers (I failed to grasp the metaphorical aspect of a description, which threw me off for the whole essay and led me down a path of analysis that had absolutely nothing to do with the actual meaning of the text).

# TIMINGS

In total you have 90 minutes to complete your essay, so I would recommend spending around 30 minutes planning, including reading time, and to leave around an hour writing time, including 5-10 minutes at the end to proofread your answer and make any changes.

Your 30 minutes planning time is extremely important to flesh out the structure of your essay and put your ideas from annotating the passages into a cohesive plan. The better your planning, the stronger the essay will be, so if you think you could write an essay in less time, then by all means spend more time planning. Having said that, make sure you leave enough time – at least 40 minutes – for writing.

I would not spend longer than three minutes writing a small introductory paragraph. If you look at the top mark sample answers on the ELAT website, you'll see that they're rarely longer than a couple of sentences. The same rule applies to your conclusion – make it short and concise, and not in the same detail as your main body paragraph.

Of course, this leaves most of your time to work on your main body paragraphs but make sure you plan for each of these. Don't make the same mistake I did and include lots of new paragraphs that you did not plan for, leaving you to write a hasty conclusion.

Understanding how much you can write in an hour or less, and how long it takes for you to come up with a decent plan, can be determined when you do your practice ELAT tests before. The more you do, then hopefully the faster your planning time becomes.

# PRACTICING

The ELAT paper will take place during the first week of November. It is therefore likely to be either in the first week after your school half term or during that half term itself. So, you have the whole of the first half of your school term to get yourself prepared, and I would advise organising your practice over a 6-8 week timetable to take full advantage of this. You may feel that you want to start even earlier, in the summer holidays between year 12 and year 13: this is up to you, but I would suggest a greater focus on your personal statement, since this needs to be finished and sent earlier. If you do decide to begin earlier, then don't attempt full mock papers at this time, not least because there are a finite number and you can't afford to use them all too early. Instead, spend time bettering the raw skills of close reading. Let's call that phase one of preparation. Below is a description of how I tried to go about this which you might want to use aspects of. However, remember, this is your application so go with what feels right to you!

### Phase One: Close reading skills

- Before you attempt a full paper, practice identifying the key features of texts. You'll know about these from your GCSE, A Level or equivalent studies, but as a rule, you want a collection of linguistic points (alliteration, metaphor, simile, assonance), structure or form points (rhyme, repetition, rhythm) and some style points (genre, intended reader, tone).

- To do this, take a text you haven't seen before, photocopy it or copy and paste it into Word if you can - if not just have it in front of you and scribble notes on paper - and annotate. For poetry, you might take an anthology from a school or local library and pick a new poem at random each day. For prose, an anthology of short stories would work in the same way, or ask a friend or family member to pick a passage from any book they like that you haven't read. Try the same for drama. Failing even this, choose passages of your own books that you have read and enjoyed but which you perhaps read a while ago and read for pleasure rather than as a critic.

- In the exam, you will have 90 minutes total, 30 minutes of which you will probably spend reading or planning. But you'll have six texts to choose from. So, to begin with, spend 30 minutes on one text and don't worry about timing, but try to make these quick fire practices shorter every time, ideally down to 10 minutes or so.

### Phase Two: Choosing Texts and Planning

- Now you need to look at the ELAT practice papers that are available. You can find these here: ELAT (English Literature Admissions Test) | University of Oxford. Go through them and count how many contain all the texts (quite a few are, annoyingly, redacted due to copyright issues). If you can, go online and try to find the missing texts where possible. For poems, this is often possible on the Poetry Foundation website and for older novels, try Gutenberg ebooks. If you have access to a library at school or where you live, you could ask them for help: I did this and found them very helpful.If you possibly can get someone to collate papers for you, then it will be helpful: the practice will be realer if you've not seen any part of the paper before. Hopefully, after all that, you'll have about 8 papers with either the full 6 or at least 4 texts. These are the ones you will do in phase 3 so leave them aside.

- There will be a few official past papers with only 3 or even 2 texts on them, but you can still use these. These are your planning practices. Don't use these to practice the actual essay, but instead to simulate the first 30 minutes of the paper.

- Take one of these, read the question carefully, and do your annotations on each of the texts against the clock.

- In the last 10 minutes of the 30, review your annotations and try to plan the essay. The first few times you do this, use papers with only 2 options, so that there is no choice involved. Then move up to 3 or 4 so that you have to make a choice. In choosing, you could consider the following:
    - Are there some types of text you prefer writing about than others? For instance, I am least confident on drama, so unless it was verse Shakespeare, I would usually throw out any drama right away.
    - Have you read/studied any texts before? If you have read them for pleasure and enjoyed them, you may want to take that as an advantage and choose them; on the contrary, if you've studied one at school before, probably don't choose it as the point of this exercise is freshness of response.
    - Do you understand what actually happens? You need a couple of deeper points, sure, but you do need to demonstrate basic comprehension. And there are no prizes for picking the toughest one: it's what you write about it that counts.
    - Do you like it? You're trying to show spark, so write about something that fires you up.
    - Don't agonise! In the real thing, you will hopefully get some strong first impressions, so go with your gut, and get on with it. All the texts were chosen for the paper because they contain some good points. There is no right choice.
- Practice making this quick choice with a smaller range of texts. Then try to turn your annotations on your two chosen texts into a bullet pointed plan. You want comparison and contrast. Don't worry at this stage about how many points to have, because you'll need to try a timed paper to know what you can do, but spend 10 minutes arranging the textual evidence you've identified into argumentative points.
- Argument, argument, argument. Even if it seems obvious or boring, find a few things to say that you can sum up in a sentence. These sentences will then open your paragraphs.

**Phase Three: Timed papers**

- How many of these you do is totally up to you and will depend on your life and how busy you are. I did a full ELAT in 90 minutes once a week, at the weekend, for 8 weeks before. But that was because my biggest issues were with structure and timing so I needed to write the full essays to improve this. You won't have the same issues so you won't want the same pattern.
- Intersperse full papers with occasional quick plan tests you've made up yourself or got made for you, and work out your own preparation schedule containing a ratio of the types of practice which respond best to the skills you are most concerned about.
- Whatever you decide, do at least one paper with the full choice of 6 texts a few days before you take the ELAT. Even if you're a whizz at English exams, it isn't like one you've taken before and you need to work out your personal timing and familiarise yourself with the format of the paper.
- If you can get the support of an English teacher (ideally one who knows about Oxbridge, but any fair, experienced marker will do) then that will really help.General mark schemes and band descriptors can be found online, so if you print these off and take them to your teacher with a practice you've done then hopefully they'll take a look for you. My confidence really grew as I was able to act on what I had lacked at first and improve in each paper. Don't be disheartened if you initially score low down in the bands: it's meant to be a difficult exam that's unlike anything you've done before.

Here are three practice ELAT Papers for you to try. Remember that the time you'll have in the exam is 90 minutes: you should spend about 30 minutes reading and planning and 60 minutes writing. Many of the online papers have texts redacted due to copyright issues; these texts are either in the public domain and can be found on Gutenberg.org or the Poetry Foundation website, or they have been typed up from books that I own. I hope you find them useful, but please still use the official ones, as these make no claim to be exact replicas of the real ELATS, except in format. Good Luck!

## Mock paper 1

The following poems and extracts from longer texts all deal with the theme of **rain**. They are arranged chronologically by date of publication. Read all the material carefully then answer the question below.

*Select two of the passages (a) to (f) and compare and contrast them in any ways that seem interesting to you, paying particular attention to distinctive features of structure, language and style.*

*a) Act Three, Scene Two of* King Lear, *by William Shakespeare, written between 1603-1606. King Lear is the tragic hero who will be consumed by jealousy as his tragic fault.*

*[Another part of the heath. Storm still.]*

*[Enter KING LEAR and FOOL]*

**KING LEAR**
Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!

You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout

Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!

You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,

Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,

Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,

Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!

Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,

That make ingrateful man!

**FOOL**

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry

House is better than this rain-water out o' door.

Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing:

Here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

**KING LEAR**

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,
You owe me no subscription: then let fall
Your horrible pleasure: here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man:
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd
Your high engender'd battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this. O! O! 'tis foul!

**FOOL**

He that has a house to put's head in has a good
Head-piece.
The cod-piece that will house
Before the head has any,
The head and he shall louse;
So beggars marry many.
The man that makes his toe
What he his heart should make
Shall of a corn cry woe,
And turn his sleep to wake.
For there was never yet fair woman but she made
Mouths in a glass.

*b) from the novel* The Well-Beloved*, by Thomas Hardy, serialised in 1892, later published as a book in 1897* .

While overtaking and conversing with her he had not observed that the rising wind, which had proceeded from puffing to growling, and from growling to screeching, with the accustomed suddenness of its changes here, had at length brought what it promised by these vagaries—rain. The drops, which had at first hit their left cheeks like the pellets of a popgun, soon assumed the character of a raking fusillade from the bank adjoining, one shot of which was sufficiently smart to go through Jocelyn's sleeve. The tall girl turned, and seemed to be somewhat concerned at an onset which she had plainly not foreseen before her starting.

'We must take shelter,' said Jocelyn.

'But where?' said she.

To windward was the long, monotonous bank, too obtusely piled to afford a screen, over which they could hear the canine crunching of pebbles by the sea without; on their right stretched the inner bay or roadstead, the distant riding-lights of the ships now dim and glimmering; behind them a faint spark here and there in the lower sky showed where the island rose; before there was nothing definite, and could be nothing, till they reached a precarious wood bridge, a mile further on, Henry the Eighth's Castle being a little further still.

But just within the summit of the bank, whither it had apparently been hauled to be out of the way of the waves, was one of the local boats called lerrets, bottom upwards. As soon as they saw it the pair ran up the pebbly slope towards it by a simultaneous impulse. They then perceived that it had lain there a long time, and were comforted to find it capable of affording more protection than anybody would have expected from a distant view. It formed a shelter or store for the fishermen, the bottom of the lerret being tarred as a roof. By creeping under the bows, which overhung the bank on props to leeward, they made their way within, where, upon some thwarts, oars, and other fragmentary woodwork, lay a mass of dry netting—a whole sein. Upon this they scrambled and sat down, through inability to stand upright.

The rain fell upon the keel of the old lerret like corn thrown in handfuls by some colossal sower, and darkness set into its full shade.

They crouched so close to each other that he could feel her furs against him. Neither had spoken since they left the roadway till she said, with attempted unconcern: 'This is unfortunate.'

He admitted that it was, and found, after a few further remarks had passed, that she certainly had been weeping, there being a suppressed gasp of passionateness in her utterance now and then.

'It is more unfortunate for you, perhaps, than for me,' he said, 'and I am very sorry that it should be so.'

She replied nothing to this, and he added that it was rather a desolate place for a woman, alone and afoot. He hoped nothing serious had happened to drag her out at such an untoward time.

At first she seemed not at all disposed to show any candour on her own affairs, and he was left to conjecture as to her history and name, and how she could possibly have known him. But, as the rain gave not the least sign of cessation, he observed: 'I think we shall have to go back.'

'Never!' said she, and the firmness with which she closed her lips was audible in the word.

c) Rain, *by Edward Thomas, dated 1916. Thomas was a soldier in the First World War when he wrote this poem.*

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
Since I was born into this solitude.

Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain
Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be towards what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

*d)* The Great Figure*, a poem by William Carlos Williams*

Among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.

*e) An extract from the novel* A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, by Julian Barnes, published in 1989.*

For two days the wind blew from all directions simultaneously; and then it began to rain. Water sluiced down from a bilious sky to purge the wicked world. Big drops exploded on the deck like pigeons' eggs. The selected representatives of each species were moved from the Compound of the Chosen to their allotted ark: the scene resembled some obligatory mass wedding. Then they screwed down the hatches and we all started getting used to the dark, the confinement and the stench. Not that we cared much about this at first: we were too exhilarated by our survival. The rain fell and fell, occasionally shifting to hail and rattling on the timbers. Sometimes we could hear the crack of thunder from the outside,and often the lamentations of abandoned beasts. After a while, these cries grew less frequent: we knew that the waters had begun to rise.

Eventually came the day we had been longing for. At first we thought it might be some crazed assault by the last remaining pachyderms, trying to force their way into The Ark, or at least knock it over. But no: it was the boat shifting sideways as the water began to lift it from its cradle. That was the high point of the Voyage, if you ask me; that was when fraternity among the beasts and gratitude towards man flowed like the wine at Noah's table. Afterwards...but perhaps the animals had been naive to trust Noah and his God in the first place.

Even before the waters rose there had been grounds for unease. I know your species tends to look down on out world, considering it brutal, cannibalistic and deceitful (though you might acknowledge the argument that this makes us closer to you rather than more distant). But among us there had always been, from the beginning, a sense of equality. Oh, to be sure, we ate one another, and so on; the weather species knew all too well what to expect if they crossed the path of something that was both bigger and hungry. But we merely recognsied this as the way of things. The fact that one animal was capable of killing another did not make the first animal superior to the second; merely more dangerous. Perhaps this is a concept difficult for you to grasp, but there was a mutual respect amongst us. Eating another animal was not grounds for despising it; and being eaten did not instill in the victim - or the victim's family - any exaggerated admiration for the dining species.

Noah - or Noah's God - changed all that.

*f) An extract from the book* The Old Ways *by Robert McFarlane, a non-fiction account of the author's exploration of Britain on foot. Published 2012.*

Underfoot, the track - of fine chalk, pure enough to write with, pocked by butterscotch flints - was glossy with recent rain. Ahead of me, it ran brightly off over the ills, dripping from sight before looping back up again, softening with distance.

I was walking in a stormlight that made the linseed pulse a hot green, and turned the barely ripened barley fields to red and gold sand. Dark shoals of rocks over the woods, and billows of rain like candle-blacking dropped into water. The Downs are the only high ground in an otherwise flat and low landscape, and this means that, as in the desert or on an ocean, you can sometimes see whatever weather will reach you hours before it arrives.

For much of that morning I led a charmed life: monsoon-squalls sliding by to east and west. Then, just after noon, a big storm caught me. Yellow sun-flare, dulling to sepia. Rain drilling the earth. The path a river, gathering the water into a torrent that rinsed the chalks white again. A brisk summer hailstorm. Then rain again, so hard and fast that it appeared as cylinders rather than drops, as if I were seeing through reeded glass, and at last sun again and the air repristinated. I sheltered in a copse of ash, oak and high-trunked beeches, and ruefully considered Hippolyte Taine's pastoral claim that 'the first music of England' is to be heard in 'the fine patter of rain on the oak leaves'. That morning, there was nothing musical to the rain. It was military: weather war.

It was the first of many soakings for the day. During each shower the world bleared and wove. After each shower the sun struck back out and the earth steamed and the smells of the land rose up. Sun blazed rain-scarps trailed off to the south-east, away over the Channel to make landfall on the French coast. I tried to time my miles between storms, moving from cover to cover. Rain-filled hoof-marks and footprints flashed gold, coined by the sun. I felt lifted, glad to be out and walking.

**END OF PAPER 1**

## Mock paper 2

The following poems and extracts from longer texts all deal with the theme of **farewells**. They are arranged chronologically by date of publication. Read all the material carefully then answer the question below.

*Select two of the passages (a) to (f) and compare and contrast them in any ways that seem interesting to you, paying particular attention to distinctive features of structure, language and style.*

*a) The poem* Sweetest Love, I do not go *by John Donne. Published after the poet's death in 1633.*

Sweetest love, I do not go,
For weariness of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter love for me;
But since that I
Must die at last, 'tis best
To use myself in jest
Thus by feign'd deaths to die.

Yesternight the sun went hence,
And yet is here today;
He hath no desire nor sense,
Nor half so short a way:
Then fear not me,
But believe that I shall make
Speedier journeys, since I take
More wings and spurs than he.

O how feeble is man's power,
That if good fortune fall,
Cannot add another hour,
Nor a lost hour recall!
But come bad chance,
And we join to'it our strength,
And we teach it art and length,
Itself o'er us to'advance.

When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,
But sigh'st my soul away;
When thou weep'st, unkindly kind,

My life's blood doth decay.
It cannot be
That thou lov'st me, as thou say'st,
If in thine my life thou waste,
That art the best of me.

Let not thy divining heart
Forethink me any ill;
Destiny may take thy part,
And may thy fears fulfil;
But think that we
Are but turn'd aside to sleep;
They who one another keep
Alive, ne'er parted be.

*b) The poem* Ae Fond Kiss *by Robert Burns, first found in a letter sent by the poet in 1791. Written in Scotch dialect.*

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, and then forever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.
Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,
While the star of hope she leaves him?
Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me;
Dark despair around benights me.

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,
Naething could resist my Nancy;
But to see her was to love her;
Love but her, and love forever.
Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
Never met—or never parted—
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Fare thee weel, thou first and fairest!
Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest!
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,
Peace. enjoyment, love, and pleasure!
Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, alas, forever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!

*c) An extract from* Little Women *by Lousia May Alcott, published 1868.*

When the first bitterness was over, the family accepted the inevitable, and tried to bear it cheerfully, helping one another by the increased affection which comes to bind households tenderly together in times of trouble. They put away their grief, and each did his or her part toward making that last year a happy one.

The pleasantest room in the house was set apart for Beth, and in it was gathered everything that she most loved, flowers, pictures, her piano, the little worktable, and the beloved pussies. Father's best books found their way there, Mother's easy chair, Jo's desk, Amy's finest sketches, and every day Meg brought her babies on a loving pilgrimage, to make sunshine for Aunty Beth. John quietly set apart a little sum, that he might enjoy the pleasure of keeping the invalid supplied with the fruit she loved and longed for. Old Hannah never wearied of concocting dainty dishes to tempt a capricious appetite, dropping tears as she worked, and from across the sea came little gifts and cheerful letters, seeming to bring breaths of warmth and fragrance from lands that know no winter.

Here, cherished like a household saint in its shrine, sat Beth, tranquil and busy as ever, for nothing could change the sweet, unselfish nature, and even while preparing to leave life, she tried to make it happier for those who should remain behind. The feeble fingers were never idle, and one of her pleasures was to make little things for the school children daily passing to and fro, to drop a pair of mittens from her window for a pair of purple hands, a needle-book for some small mother of many dolls, penwipers for young penmen toiling through forests of pothooks, scrapbooks for picture-loving eyes, and all manner of pleasant devices, till the reluctant climbers of the ladder of learning found their way strewn with flowers, as it were, and came to regard the gentle giver as a sort of fairy godmother, who sat above there, and showered down gifts miraculously suited to their tastes and needs. If Beth had wanted any reward, she found it in the bright little faces always turned up to her window, with nods and smiles, and the droll little letters which came to her, full of blots and gratitude.

The first few months were very happy ones, and Beth often used to look round, and say "How beautiful this is!" as they all sat together in her sunny room, the babies kicking and crowing on the floor, mother and sisters working near, and father reading, in his pleasant voice, from the wise old books which seemed rich in good and comfortable words, as applicable now as when written centuries ago, a little chapel, where a paternal priest taught his flock the hard lessons all must learn, trying to show them that hope can comfort love, and faith make resignation possible. Simple sermons, that went straight to the souls of those who listened, for the father's heart was in the minister's religion, and the frequent falter in the voice gave a double eloquence to the words he spoke or read.

It was well for all that this peaceful time was given them as preparation for the sad hours to come, for by-and-by, Beth said the needle was 'so heavy', and put it down forever. Talking wearied her, faces troubled her, pain claimed her for its own, and her tranquil spirit was sorrowfully perturbed by the ills that vexed her feeble flesh. Ah me! Such heavy days, such long, long nights, such aching hearts and imploring prayers, when those who loved her best were forced to see the thin hands stretched out to them beseechingly, to hear the bitter cry, "Help me, help me!" and to feel that there was no help. A sad eclipse of the serene soul, a sharp

struggle of the young life with death, but both were mercifully brief, and then the natural rebellion over, the old peace returned more beautiful than ever. With the wreck of her frail body, Beth's soul grew strong, and though she said little, those about her felt that she was ready, saw that the first pilgrim called was likewise the fittest, and waited with her on the shore, trying to see the Shining Ones coming to receive her when she crossed the river.

*d) An extract from the novella* Death in Venice *by Thomas Mann, published in 1912. Gustav von Ashenbach is the protagonist, a middle-aged writer who holidays in Venice and becomes obsessively fascinated by a little boy called Tadzio whom he meets there.*

A few days later, as Gustav von Aschenbach was not feeling well, he left the beach hotel at a later hour in the morning than usual. He had to fight against certain attacks of vertigo which were only partially physical and were accompanied by a pronounced malaise, a feeling of bafflement and hopelessness—while he was not certain whether this had to do with conditions outside him or with his own nature. In the lobby he noticed a large pile of luggage ready for shipment; he asked the door-keeper who it was that was leaving, and heard in answer the Polish title which he had learned secretly. He accepted this without any alteration of his sunken features, with that curt elevation of the head by which one acknowledges something he does not need to know. Then he asked, "When?" The answer was, "After lunch." He nodded, and went to the beach.

It was not very inviting. Rippling patches of rain retreated across the wide flat water separating the beach from the first long sand-bank. An air of autumn, of things past their prime, seemed to lie over the pleasure spot which had once been so alive with colour and was now almost abandoned. The sand was no longer kept clean. A camera, seemingly without an owner, stood on its tripod by the edge of the sea; and a black cloth thrown over it was flapping noisily in the wind.

Tadzio, with the three or four companions still left, was moving about to the right in front of his family's cabin. And midway between the sea and the row of bathing houses, lying back in his chair with a robe over his knees, Aschenbach looked at him once more. The game, which was not being supervised since the women were probably occupied with preparations for the journey, seemed to have no rules, and it was degenerating. The stocky boy with the sleek black hair who was called Jaschu had been angered and blinded by sand flung in his face. He forced Tadzio into a wrestling match which quickly ended in the fall of the beauty, who was weaker. But as though in the hour of parting the servile feelings of the inferior had turned to merciless brutality and were trying to get vengeance for a long period of slavery, the victor did not let go of the boy underneath, but knelt on his back and pressed his face so persistently into the sand that Tadzio, already breathless from the struggle, was in danger of strangling. His attempts to shake off the weight were fitful; for moments they stopped entirely and were resumed again as mere twitchings. Enraged, Aschenbach was about to spring to the rescue, when the torturer finally released his victim. Tadzio, very pale, raised himself halfway and sat motionless for several minutes, resting on one arm, with rumpled hair and glowering eyes. Then he stood up completely, and moved slowly away. They called him, cheerfully at first, then anxiously and imploringly; he did not listen. The swarthy boy, who seemed to regret his excesses immediately afterwards, caught up with him and tried to placate him. A movement of the shoulder put him at his distance. Tadzio went down obliquely to the water. He was barefoot, and wore his striped linen suit with the red bow.

He lingered on the edge of the water with his head down, drawing figures in the wet sand with one toe; then he went into the shallows, which did not cover his knees in the deepest place, crossed them leisurely, and arrived at the sand-bank. He stood there a moment, his face turned to the open sea; soon after, he began stepping slowly to the left along the narrow stretch of exposed ground. Separated from the mainland by the expanse of water, separated from his companions by a proud moodiness, he moved along, a strongly isolated and unrelated figure with fluttering hair—placed out there in the sea, the wind, against the vague mists. He stopped once more to look around. And suddenly, as though at some recollection, some impulse, with one hand on his hip he turned the upper part of his body in a beautiful twist which began from the base—and he looked over his shoulder towards the shore. The watcher sat there, as he had sat once before when for the first time these twilight-grey eyes had turned at the doorway and met his own. His head, against the back of the chair, had slowly followed the movements of the boy walking yonder. Now, simultaneously with this glance it rose and sank on his breast, so that his eyes looked out from underneath, while his face took on the loose, inwardly relaxed expression of deep sleep. But it seemed to him as though the pale and lovely lure out there were smiling to him, nodding to him; as though, removing his hand from his hip, he were signalling to come out, were vaguely guiding towards egregious promises. And, as often before, he stood up to follow him.

Some minutes passed before any one hurried to the aid of the man who had collapsed into one corner of his chair. He was brought to his room. And on the same day a respectfully shocked world received the news of his death.

*e) The poem* Goodbye *by Alun Lewis, a soldier-poet of the second world war, written in 1942.*

So we must say Goodbye, my darling,

And go, as lovers go, for ever;

Tonight remains, to pack and fix on labels

And make an end of lying down together.

I put a final shilling in the gas,

And watch you slip your dress below your knees

And lie so still I hear your rustling comb

Modulate the autumn in the trees.

And all the countless things I shall remember

Lay mummy-cloths of silence round my head;

I fill the carafe with a drink of water;

You say ‘We paid a guinea for this bed,’

And then, ‘We’ll leave some gas, a little warmth
For the next resident, and these dry flowers,’
And turn your face away, afraid to speak
The big word, that Eternity is ours.

Your kisses close my eyes and yet you stare
As though god struck a child with nameless fears;
Perhaps the water glitters and discloses
Time’s chalice and its limpid useless tears.

Everything we renounce except our selves;
Selfishness is the last of all to go;
Our sighs are exhalations of the earth,
Our footprints leave a track across the snow.

We made the universe to be our home,
Our nostrils took the wind to be our breath,
Our hearts are massive towers of delight,
We stride across the seven seas of death.

Yet when all’s done you’ll keep the emerald
I placed upon your finger in the street;
And I will keep the patches that you sewed
On my old battledress tonight, my sweet.

*f) An extract from the autobiography* I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings *by Maya Angelou, about growing up in a black community in the American South in the 1930s, published 1984. Bailey is the author's brother and Momma is her grandmother.*

Our transportation was Momma's major concern for some weeks. She had arranged with a railroad company to provide her with a pass in exchange for groceries. The pass allowed a reduction in her fare only, and even that had to be approved so we were made to abide in a kind of limbo until white people we would never see, in offices we would never visit, signed and stamped and mailed the pass back to Momma. My fare had to be paid in 'ready cash'.That sudden drain on the nickel-plated cash register lopsided our financial stability. Momma decided that Bailey couldn't accompany us, since we had to use the pass during a set time, but that he would follow within a month or so when outstanding bills were paid. Although our mother now lived in San Francisco, Momma must have felt it wiser to go first to Los Angeles where our father was. She dictated letters to me, advising them both that we were on our way.

And we were on our way, but unable to say when. Our clothes were washed, ironed and packed, so for an immobile time we wore those things not good enough to glow under the Californian sun. Neighbours, who understood the complications of travel, said goodbye a million times.

"Well, if I don't see you before your ticket comes through, Sister Henderson, have a good trip and hurry safe home." A widowed friend of Momma's had agreed to look after (cook, wash, clean and provide company for) Uncle Willie, and after thousands of arrested departures, at last we left Stamps.

My sorrow at leaving was confined to a gloom at separating from Bailey for a month (we had never been parted), the imagined loneliness of Uncle Willie (he put on a good face, though at thirty-five he'd never been separated from his mother) and the loss of Louise, my first friend. I wouldn't miss Miss Flowers, for she had given me her secret word which called forth a djinn who was to serve me all my life: books.

The intensity with which young people live demands that they 'blank out' as often as possible. I didn't actually think about facing Mother until the last day of our journey. I was 'going to California'. To oranges and sunshine and movie stars and earthquakes and (finally, I realised) to Mother. My old guilt came back to me like a much-missed friend. I wondered if Mr Freeman's name would be mentioned, or if I would be expected to say something about the situation myself. I certainly couldn't ask Momma, and Bailey was a zillion miles away.

**END OF PAPER 2**

## Mock paper 3

The following poems and extracts from longer texts all deal with the theme of **stars**. They are arranged chronologically by date of publication. Read all the material carefully then answer the question below.

*Select two of the passages (a) to (f) and compare and contrast them in any ways that seem interesting to you, paying particular attention to distinctive features of structure, language and style.*

*a) The poem* Sonnet 25 *by William Shakespeare, first published in 1609.*

Let those who are in favour with their stars
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,
Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most.
Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd:
Then happy I, that love and am beloved
Where I may not remove nor be removed.

*b)The poem* The Light of Stars *from the series* Voices of the Night *by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, published in 1839.*

The night is come, but not too soon;
  And sinking silently,
All silently, the little moon
  Drops down behind the sky.

There is no light in earth or heaven
  But the cold light of stars;
And the first watch of night is given
  To the red planet Mars.

Is it the tender star of love?
  The star of love and dreams?
O no! from that blue tent above,
  A hero's armor gleams.

And earnest thoughts within me rise,
  When I behold afar,
Suspended in the evening skies,
  The shield of that red star.

O star of strength! I see thee stand
  And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailèd hand,
  And I am strong again.

Within my breast there is no light
  But the cold light of stars;
I give the first watch of the night
  To the red planet Mars.

The star of the unconquered will,
  He rises in my breast,
Serene, and resolute, and still,
  And calm, and self-possessed.

And thou, too, whosoe'er thou art,
  That readest this brief psalm,
As one by one thy hopes depart,
  Be resolute and calm.

O fear not in a world like this,
  And thou shalt know erelong,
Know how sublime a thing it is
  To suffer and be strong.

*c) The poem* The Starlight Night *by Gerard Manley Hopkins, written in 1877.*

Look at the stars! look, look up at the skies!
  O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
  The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!
Down in dim woods the diamond delves! the elves'-eyes!
The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!
  Wind-beat whitebeam! airy abeles set on a flare!
  Flake-doves sent floating forth at a farmyard scare!
Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize.

Buy then! bid then! — What? — Prayer, patience, alms, vows.
Look, look: a May-mess, like on orchard boughs!
  Look! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows!
These are indeed the barn; withindoors house
The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
  Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows.

*d) An extract from the novel* Ethan Frome *by Edith Wharton, published in 1911 but set in the 19th century. Zenobia is Ethan's wife and Mattie a distant relative who shares their home, having nowhere else to go.*

Mattie Silver had lived under his roof for a year, and from early morning till they met at supper he had frequent chances of seeing her; but no moments in her company were comparable to those when, her arm in his, and her light step flying to keep time with his long stride, they walked back through the night to the farm. He had taken to the girl from the first day, when he had driven over to the Flats to meet her, and she had smiled and waved to him from the train, crying out, "You must be Ethan!" as she jumped down with her bundles, while he reflected, looking over her slight person: "She don't look much on housework, but she ain't a fretter, anyhow." But it was not only that the coming to his house of a bit of hopeful young life was like the lighting of a fire on a cold hearth. The girl was more than the bright serviceable creature he had thought her. She had an eye to see and an ear to hear: he could show her things and tell her things, and taste the bliss of feeling that all he imparted left long reverberations and echoes he could wake at will.

It was during their night walks back to the farm that he felt most intensely the sweetness of this communion. He had always been more sensitive than the people about him to the appeal of natural beauty. His unfinished studies had given form to this sensibility and even in his unhappiest moments field and sky spoke to him with a deep and powerful persuasion. But hitherto the emotion had remained in him as a silent ache, veiling with sadness the beauty that evoked it. He did not even know whether any one else in the world felt as he did, or whether he was the sole victim of this mournful privilege. Then he learned that one other spirit had trembled with the same touch of wonder: that at his side, living under his roof and eating his bread, was a creature to whom he could say: "That's Orion down yonder; the big fellow to the right is Aldebaran, and the bunch of little ones—like bees swarming—they're the Pleiades..." or whom he could hold entranced before a ledge of granite thrusting up through the fern while he unrolled the huge panorama of the ice age, and the long dim stretches of succeeding time. The fact that admiration for his learning mingled with Mattie's wonder at what he taught was not the least part of his pleasure. And there were other sensations, less definable but more exquisite, which drew them together with a shock of silent joy: the cold red of sunset behind winter hills, the flight of cloud-flocks over slopes of golden stubble, or the intensely blue shadows of hemlocks on sunlit snow. When she said to him once: "It looks just as if it was painted!" it seemed to Ethan that the art of definition could go no farther, and that words had at last been found to utter his secret soul....

As he stood in the darkness outside the church these memories came back with the poignancy of vanished things. Watching Mattie whirl down the floor from hand to hand he wondered how he could ever have thought that his dull talk interested her. To him, who was never gay but in her presence, her gaiety seemed plain proof of indifference. The face she lifted to her dancers was the same which, when she saw him, always looked like a window that has caught the sunset. He even noticed two or three gestures which, in his fatuity, he had thought she kept for him: a way of throwing her head back when she was amused, as if to taste her laugh before she let it out, and a trick of sinking her lids slowly when anything charmed or moved her.

The sight made him unhappy, and his unhappiness roused his latent fears.

*e) An extract from the novel* Night and Day *by Virginia Woolf, published 1919. Its heroine, Katharine Hilbery, is fascinated by astronomy.*

They both looked out of the window, first up at the hard silver moon, stationary among a hurry of little grey-blue clouds, and then down upon the roofs of London, with all their upright chimneys, and then below them at the empty moonlit pavement of the street, up which the joint of each paving-stone was clearly marked out. Mary then saw Katharine raise her eyes again to the moon, with a contemplative look in them, as though she were setting that moon against the moon of other nights, held in memory. Someone in the room behind them made a joke about star-gazing, which destroyed their pleasure in it, and they looked back into the room again.

[...]

"You know the names of the stars, I suppose," Denham remarked, and from the tone of his voice one might have thought that he grudged Katharine the knowledge he attributed to her. She kept her voice steady with some difficulty.
"I know how to find the Pole Star if I'm lost."

"I don't suppose that happens often to you."

"No, nothing interesting ever happens to me," she said.

"I think you make a system of saying disagreeable things, Miss Hilbery," he broke out, again going further than he meant to. "I suppose it's one of the characteristics of your class. They never talk seriously to their inferiors."

"In what sense are you my inferior?" she asked, looking at him gravely, as though honestly searching for his meaning. That look gave him great pleasure. For the first time he felt himself on perfectly equal terms with a woman whom he wished to think well of him, although he could not have explained why her opinion of him mattered one way or the other. Perhaps, after all, he only wanted to have something of her to take home to think about.

*f) From the non-fiction narrative* A Short History of the World *by H G Wells, published in 1922. The work aims to present what was then an up to date account of all that science and history knew about Earth's past.*

It now seems probable that the earth has had an independent existence as a spinning planet flying round and round the sun for a longer period than 2,000,000,000 years. It may have been much longer than that. This is a length of time that absolutely overpowers the imagination.

Before that vast period of separate existence, the sun and earth and the other planets that circulate round the sun may have been a great swirl of diffused matter in space. The telescope reveals to us in various parts of the heavens luminous spiral clouds of matter, the spiral nebulæ, which appear to be in rotation about a centre. It is supposed by many astronomers that the sun and its planets were once such a spiral, and that their matter has undergone concentration into its present form. Through majestic æons that concentration went on until in that vast remoteness of the past for which we have given figures, the world and its moon

were distinguishable. They were spinning then much faster than they are spinning now; they were at a lesser distance from the sun; they travelled round it very much faster, and they were probably incandescent or molten at the surface. The sun itself was a much greater blaze in the heavens.

If we could go back through that infinitude of time and see the earth in this earlier stage of its history, we should behold a scene more like the interior of a blast furnace or the surface of a lava flow before it cools and cakes over than any other contemporary scene. No water would be visible because all the water there was would still be superheated steam in a stormy atmosphere of sulphurous and metallic vapours. Beneath this would swirl and boil an ocean of molten rock substance. Across a sky of fiery clouds the glare of the hurrying sun and moon would sweep swiftly like hot breaths of flame.

Slowly by degrees as one million of years followed another,
this fiery scene would lose its eruptive incandescence. The vapours in the sky would rain down and become less dense overhead; great slaggy cakes of solidifying rock would appear upon the surface of the molten sea, and sink under it, to be replaced by other floating masses. The sun and moon growing now each more distant and each smaller, would rush with diminishing swiftness across the heavens. The moon now, because of its smaller size, would be already cooled far below incandescence, and would be alternately obstructing and reflecting the sunlight in a series of eclipses and full moons.

And so with a tremendous slowness through the vastness of time, the earth would grow more and more like the earth on which we live, until at last an age would come when, in the cooling air, steam would begin to condense into clouds, and the first rain would fall hissing upon the first rocks below.

**END OF PAPER 3**