

0860/403

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2011

FRIDAY, 6 MAY
1.00 PM – 1.50 PM

ENGLISH
STANDARD GRADE
General Level
Reading
Text

Read carefully the passage overleaf. It will help if you read it twice. When you have done so, answer the questions. Use the spaces provided in the Question/Answer booklet.



In this passage the writer describes a childhood visit to Glasgow at Christmas.

BRIGHT LIGHTS BIG CITY



1 **G**lasgow didn't have Christmas, it *was* Christmas. Even I knew that. A small-town seaside who would never swim, a child thrilled by beauty who somehow managed to break every glass ornament she ever touched, I knew the difference between magic and cold reality. Our town had miles of seaweed and pink rock with writing through it, cows and rolling greenery. We had industrial-strength downpours of rain. Glasgow people came to us in the summer holidays, desperate for sunburn, seagulls and seafood. But sea breezes and face-filing sand counted for nothing in winter. Nothing desirable, at least. At the opposite end of the year, as the dark descended, people wanted the city; for dazzle, the warmth of crowds and snowy shop displays. The place for cheer, therefore, was at the other end of the train line. Glasgow. My sister worked there in a stockbroker's office, typing important letters she did not understand, and claimed the city was what counted. "Our town is a dump," she'd say, rolling her eyes. "We've only a daft wee tree at the War Memorial. Glasgow's got hundreds. Lights and everything, George Square, you canny imagine it. Glasgow's the works!"

2 I got to see what those works were for the first time in December, 1961. I was five, and for the occasion dressed in a red Peter Pan collar coat and white nylon gloves.

3 "You've got to look nice for Santa," my mother said, scouring the side of my mouth with a spit-doused hankie till it hurt. "He lives up the stairs in the store," she explained, checking my face for further signs of imperfection, laziness and disease. The journey, it seemed, was putting us on show. "You keep they gloves on and mind they're new. One mark and you're for it, lady."

4 Whatever "it" was, I knew to steer clear.

5 The train was cold and the seats kitted out in dark, shiny tartan. An overhead rack hung like a hammock on a wooden frame, waiting for luggage. "Touch nothing," my mother said. "The windows are filthy." There was no arguing. Our view was strips of grass and passing branches, visible in glimpses through grime. Central Station, however, supplied the journey's missing sense of space. It was big enough for trains to roll right inside and from my vantage point, some three feet from the ground, high as cliffs. The noise of our footsteps over the platform shook waves into puddles as we passed. A bouquet of pigeons with rose-pink chests opened like roses. That was the size of the place: there were pigeons indoors, a clock the size of our bathroom. I tripped over my own feet, staring.

- 6 Outside, Glasgow presented itself: a black city. The buildings were coated with velvet-deep soot. There were charcoal-coloured statues at office doors or holding up second and third storeys of buildings. My mother hauled me by the hand down a long corridor of ash-grey walls and matching sky, my face brushing against the tweedy coats of strangers, to—my mother’s words—the fanciest shop in the world. There was a Christmas tree inside the door, a sour reek of adult perfume. The grotto, three floors up, was a room full of glittery cotton wool and animal cut-outs, with a red-suited man in a squinty beard, the elastic of which stretched too far beneath his ears. I would not sit on his knee and my mother was embarrassed. When I resisted two shoves, she lifted me by the arms and sat me there, whether he or I liked it or not. Santa looked tired, and I felt uncomfortable. My failure to respond when asked what I wanted for Christmas did not throw him. It must have happened several times that day. He gave me my gift and released me back to the wild. The gift itself was a pink manicure set with sequins on the front. It had scissors and little metal sticks that looked like miniature butcher’s tools. Whatever they were for, it was lovely. It took a moment to work out this was mine to keep. I did not need to hand it back for another little girl. The little pink cutlery set was mine.
- 7 We shared a vanilla ice cream in the store’s café then stood on the stairs to see their display of lights and bells from above. “We’re like angels,” my mother said, her mouth pale now she’d eaten her lipstick off on a scone.
- 8 The food apart, nothing was bought. Odd though it seems now, in an age where people take day trips to shopping centres for pleasure, we had not come for the shopping. We had come for the promised lights, which we could not, according to my sister, imagine for ourselves. She was right. I remember still the eye-watering colour strung between high buildings, the never-ending sky with no stars. But the bit that took my breath away was entirely natural. It was starlings: thousands upon thousands of starlings in George Square, a chorus of birds clinging or swooping between telegraph wires, the reckless, nerve-shredding noise of screaming.
- 9 My mother had to pull me away to get the train. All the way back, I knew my sister was right. I would not have imagined any of it. But what was magic, what stayed with me and always would, was not the lights or the trees, not the manicure set from a man who was not Santa at all.
- 10 It was the birds. Little creatures making what life they could in the city square, singing for dear life and thriving. I’d never have imagined the courage, the grandeur of those birds. I got told off on the way home for making my gloves black, of course. I’d not get to go again. But it was worth it. In one visit and forever, the noise of a real chorus that has never lost its volume, its truth.
- 11 The starlings have long gone from George Square. No matter. First thing on Christmas morning, we go out feeding birds. It seems the right thing to do.

Adapted from a newspaper article by Janice Galloway

[END OF PASSAGE]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

General Level Reading—Text is adapted from “Bright lights, big city” by Janice Galloway (as adapted from *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 21 December 2008). Permission is being sought from Janice Galloway (AP Watt Agency).

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FRIDAY, 6 MAY
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ENGLISH
STANDARD GRADE
General Level
Reading
Questions

Fill in these boxes and read what is printed below.

Full name of centre

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Town

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Forename(s)

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Surname

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Date of birth

Day Month Year

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Scottish candidate number

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Number of seat

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**NB Before leaving the examination room you must give this booklet to the Invigilator.
If you do not, you may lose all the marks for this paper.**



QUESTIONS

Write your answers in the spaces provided.

Look at Paragraph 1.

1. "Glasgow didn't have Christmas, it *was* Christmas." (Paragraph 1)

What do you think the writer means by this?

2 ■ 0

2. Explain **one** of the two surprising things the writer tells us about herself.

2 1 0

3. "... sunburn, seagulls and seafood." (Paragraph 1)

Identify the technique used here.

2 ■ 0

4. Glasgow was more popular than the seaside in the winter. Give **three** things Glasgow could offer in winter that the writer's town could not.

(i) _____

(ii) _____

(iii) _____

2 1 0

5. Write down **one** thing the writer's sister **did** and **one** thing she **said** which showed her view of her town.

2 1 0

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Look at Paragraphs 2 to 4.

6. Give **two** details which show that preparing to travel to Glasgow was not pleasant for the writer.

2 1 0

7. “Whatever “it” was, I knew to steer clear.” (Paragraph 4)
In what way does the writer make this statement stand out?

2 ■ 0

Look at Paragraph 5.

8. **In your own words**, explain what spoiled the view out of the train window on the way to Glasgow.

2 1 0

9. “Central Station, however, supplied the journey’s missing sense of space.” (Paragraph 5)
Give **two** ways in which the writer shows the “space” of Central Station.

2 1 0

10. “A bouquet of pigeons with rose-pink chests opened like roses.” (Paragraph 5)

(a) Identify **two** techniques used here.

2 1 0

(b) Explain what the pigeons are doing.

2 ■ 0

[Turn over

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Look at Paragraph 6.

11. “. . . a black city.” (Paragraph 6)

How does the writer continue this idea in Paragraph 6?

2 1 0

12. Give **one** piece of evidence which shows that the streets were crowded.

2 ■ 0

13. Explain the use of the dashes in the expression “–my mother’s words–”. (Paragraph 6)

2 1 0

14. **In your own words**, explain why the Santa costume was not convincing.

2 1 0

15. What did the writer’s mother do to make her sit on “Santa’s” knee?

2 1 0

16. Write down **two** expressions which show the writer’s confusion about what the gift was.

2 1 0

17. **In your own words**, explain fully how the writer felt about receiving the gift.

2 1 0

Look at Paragraphs 7 and 8.

18. In what way were the writer and her mother “like angels”?

2 ■ 0

19. What was “odd” about the shopping trip?

2 ■ 0

20. Explain fully why the starlings made such an impression on the writer when she first saw them.

2 1 0

Read Paragraph 9 to the end of the passage.

21. Give **two** pieces of evidence from Paragraph 9 which show the writer really enjoyed this outing.

2 1 0

22. “But it was worth it.” (Paragraph 10)
Why was the writer in trouble on the way home and why was it “worth it”?

2 1 0

[Turn over

23. The visit made a lasting impression on the writer. In what way does she show this in Paragraph 11?

2 1 0

Think about the passage as a whole.

24. Do you think the writer gives a realistic description of this childhood experience? Give **one** piece of evidence from the passage to support your answer.

Yes	
No	

2 ■ 0

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

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