

GCSE

English language

Reaching for grade 8/9

Activities booklet

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Reaching for grade 8/9

This meeting uses students' responses to the November 2017 GCSE English Language papers to exemplify responses that will meet the standard required in order to achieve the higher grades at GCSE.

What do 'Grades 8/9' look like?

GCSE grades are not strictly aligned to marks and levels, but getting to grades 7, 8 and 9 will require students to exhibit skills in reading and writing that consistently achieves level 4 in the mark scheme.

The key words for level 4 in reading are 'perceptive' and 'detailed'. What do we mean by this? A perceptive response would be developed, insightful, exploratory, conceptual, abstract, contextualised, profound and penetrating. On a practical level, it would offer a level of detail that moves beyond clear through its ability to, for example, offer a developed response which may explore different facets of the ideas/words/phrases used by a writer. For the longer questions, there would be evidence of higher order thinking when it comes to evaluation and comparison. For question 4 on paper 1, for example, a student's response will move beyond the formulaic and offer alternative viewpoints which consider aspects of the text that might be surprisingly nuanced and subtle. For question 4 on paper 2, they will often synthesise the two viewpoints and make insightful cross-references that can be concise and penetrating rather than adhering to particular mnemonics.

Paper 1

Activity one

Read the extract from source A which has been identified for language analysis on question 2.

Paper 1, November 2017 Insert

It's her first time in the Pyrenees, although she feels very much at home. She's been told that in the winter the jagged peaks of the mountains are covered with snow. In the spring, delicate flowers of pink and mauve and white peep out from their hiding places in the great expanses of rock. In early summer, the pastures are green and speckled with yellow buttercups. But now, the sun has flattened the land into submission, turning the greens to brown. It is a beautiful place, she thinks, yet somehow an inhospitable one. It's a place of secrets, one that has seen too much and concealed too much to be at peace with itself.

Discussion

- How does the writer use language here to describe the mountain area?
- Choose two or three quotations from the extract that would be useful for language analysis

Activity two

Discussion

'Jagged peaks' why has the writer used the word 'jagged'?

1. What does the word 'jagged' mean?
2. Think in images: what does the image of 'jagged peaks' remind you of?
3. What other associations of 'jagged' can you think of?
4. What does this phrase mean in the context of the extract?
5. Does the image of 'jagged peaks' connect/contrast with other ideas in the text?

Activity three: Sustaining an idea

Example response A

The writer uses colour to conjure connotations of happiness. The accumulation of the adjectives 'delicate', 'beautiful', and 'pink, highlights the beauty of nature and emphasises how insignificant humans are in comparison with the magnitude of nature. In addition to this, the use of colour also juxtaposes with the jovial atmosphere that is initially established. We learn of the land turning 'greens to brown' and being 'inhospitable'. The adjective 'brown' suggests decay and implies that nature is a paradox; it has the power to destroy and the power to recreate. This idea is accentuated through the adjective 'inhospitable' and the verb 'submission'. These words display nature as a predator who is looking for his victim. The length of the sentences reflect the longevity of the mountain and how it is able to withstand time and humans.

The writer creates an ominous mood through the words 'secrets' and 'concealed'. They suggest that the mountain is able to hide as well as reveal things again emphasising its magnitude and stature. This contradicts with the image of bright colours and imagery conjured.

Level 4

Commentary:

In this extract, the student has identified the inherent contradictions in the description of the mountain. It is both life-giving and destructive; it is beautiful and terrible. These ideas drive the analysis and help the student to offer a cohesive and conceptualised response to language.

Paper 2

Paper 2, November 2017 Insert

‘Good afternoon to you, Mr Phinn,’ said Sister Brendan enthusiastically. ‘I got your letter. We are all ready and waiting and raring to go.’ She was a slight, thin-cheeked woman with tiny, dark, darting eyes and a sharp little beak of a nose. Sister Brendan looked like a small hungry blackbird out for the early worm.

‘Good afternoon, Sister,’ I replied, shaking a small cold hand.

‘And did you have a pleasant journey, Mr Phinn?’ she asked, her little black glittering eyes looking up into mine.

‘Yes, indeed, Sister, a very pleasant journey.’

The Head teacher took me on a tour of the school, fluttering along the corridors, pointing and chattering and chuckling away as we went from room to room. Children’s painting and poems, posters, pictures and book jackets covered every available space. Shelves held attractive books, tables were covered in shells, models, photographs and little artefacts. Each child we passed said ‘Hello,’ brightly and in all the classrooms little busy bodies were reading, writing, discussing, solving problems and working at the computers.

‘It’s a hive of activity,’ I remarked.

‘Does that make me the Queen Bee?’ asked Sister Brendan with a mischievous glint in her shining eyes.

Activity four

Example response C

Finally the writer uses an extended metaphor of a blackbird to describe Sister Brendan: ‘sharp little beak’, ‘small cold hand’, ‘little black glittering eyes’. These phrases clearly portray Sister Brendan as someone who is mysterious and perhaps deceiving. As we see that she is ‘cold’ and this could symbolise that maybe her true intentions are not what they seem to be. Also the constant reminder of her ‘black’ eyes gives the sense that Sister Brendan is watching Phinn’s every move to judge and see if he is a threat and if he might see or realise something that was not meant to be. The juxtaposition of ‘black’ with ‘glittering’ captures this duality in the woman, with the adjective ‘glittering’ conveying an image of something precious but also alive with light as if she is completely aware of what is going on. This extended metaphor also portrays how Sister Brendan is on the hunt and is hungry and could suggest that she might be teaching the children things that would lead to them being brainwashed.

Level 4

Commentary

In this example, the student has sustained the idea of Sister Brendan as a mysterious character who might not be all that she appears. Each phrase is explored more effectively through the ‘zooming’ method.

Paper 1 Question 3: Structure

Activity five

Read the whole extract from the Paper 2 insert again.

1. How does the extract begin? What ideas are presented in the opening two paragraphs which are important to how the extract develops?
2. What themes or motifs are recurrent throughout the extract?
3. How does the use of present tense contribute to the structural impact of the text?
4. Are there any pivotal moments/sentences?
5. How does the extract end? Does the ending echo or contradict anything that has gone before?

Commentary

The opening descriptions of nature present a sense of duality – its beauty and its dangers as well as its secrets – a duality that is maintained throughout as Alice battles with the weather, the monotonous nature of the work and her isolation even though she is clearly excited by the discovery she has made.

There is motif of secrecy and discovery that is maintained throughout: Alice keeps her find to herself until she can validate it; the landscape conceals and reveals, as if Alice is the chosen one.

The use of the present tense – although strictly a language feature – contributes to the gradual unfolding of events: as if the reader is on a journey of discovery alongside Alice herself.

A pivotal moment is the reference in the third paragraph “In the days and weeks to come, Alice will look back to this moment. She will remember the quality of the light, the dust in her mouth, and wonder at how different things might have been had she made the choice to go and not stay” foregrounds the importance of this moment – the use of future tense jars against the predominant present tense – and foreshadows something even more dramatic later on.

Another pivotal moment is the sentence ‘if she had played by the rules’. This adds another dimension to Alice’s character and aligns her once again with the natural environment which also has not played by the rules – yielding its secrets even though in the second paragraph is described as being all too secretive.

The ending to the extract reflects the opening; there is a circularity to the narrative here. Nature remains constant, Alice is still working and thirsty: however, the reader’s understanding of events has shifted along with Alice’s own motivations. But a ‘chorus’ has become a ‘whine’; discord has replaced harmony (‘the scrape of metal on rock’ for example) so there is a clear shift in tone.

Activity six: The big idea

- At the beginning of the source the focus of the extract is mainly the environment around Alice, creating a mental image of how beautiful the Pyrenees are. The effect on the reader would be getting the image of the heat and different colours of the mountains but it also gets them to question the source itself as towards the end of the first section it's hinted that the mountains have an interesting secret which makes the reader carry on as they want to know the secret. (From a level 4 response.)
- In this extract we see that at the start we get introduced to Alice and find out what is going on. In the middle, we discover that Alice is doing voluntary work. Then at the end we see that Alice is hiding something from everyone else. (From a level 3 response.)
- The writer uses a circular structure by permeating the motif of weather and environment throughout the whole extract. Initially (From a level 4 response.)

Further examples

- Presented throughout the extract is the theme of secrecy which the writer introduces early in the section. This connects throughout to Alice's own secret 'discovery' which the switch to the future tense in the penultimate paragraph foregrounds implying that it will have important future consequences.
- The circular structure to the extract – beginning and ending with the description of the environment – reinforces the monotony of the scene. However, the fact that the sound has changed – from an 'unrelenting chorus' to a 'scrape of metal' and a 'buzz of light aircraft' also implies that the atmosphere has turned to something more threatening.

Activity seven

Read these three responses to question 3.

- Can you rank order them?
- Identify moments of perception?

Structure example response D

At the start of the text the focus is upon the mountain, setting this area up as the main location of the story. By describing the areas as beautiful but mysterious the writer encourages the reader to consider what secrets the mountain may hold, and this comes into play when, later in the text, Alice makes her discovery. The end of the second paragraph is like a cliff-hanger: it will encourage the reader to continue with the story to find out what the mountain may conceal.

Next the focus moves to Alice's colleagues. We discover that she is not alone on the mountain, and her reasoning for being there. By informing the reader that Alice is taking part in an archaeological dig, the writer sets the scene for the main focus of the extract: Alice's discovery.

Towards the end of the extract the focus shifts to Alice's discovery. The writer spends the most time describing this, indicating that it may be a very important event within the novel. As the feeling of suspense is built up around the object, the reader will begin to feel the same anticipation and determination to discover what it may be as Alice herself does. The writer draws this feeling out, which is a very effective way of encouraging the readers to continue and gain the answers they crave.

Commentary

- Methodical coverage – works through the extract; is consistently precise.
- The idea of the secret is a thread which the student maintains throughout. Identifies the importance of the discovery.
- The links in the first paragraph between the later parts of the extract (Alice makes her discovery).
- Final paragraph – the comment on ‘the writer spends most of the time describing’ the discovery and therefore indicates its importance is clear but is not developed and ‘indicating that it may be a very important event’ is hardly perceptive

6 marks

Structure example response E

The writer uses a circular structure by permeating the motif of weather and environment throughout the whole extract. Initially, the writer focuses on creating an overwhelming atmosphere through the ‘heat haze’ in the introductory paragraphs. This helps to establish the setting and characterisation of Alice. We the readers later learn that Alice feels encumbered by her ‘monotonous’ work. Similarly, to how the sun is unrelentingly beating upon her, so does the strain of her work which leads to fatigue and ‘aching’ calves.

As the extract progresses, the focus of the writer shifts as she describes the environment and daily hardships Alice has to endure. There are overtones of colour throughout the extract to highlight how Alice has the power to determine what she will gain from the experience. This is accentuated further through the adverb ‘hopefully’. This could perhaps be described as the pivotal point in the extract as we the reader expect Alice to accomplish great things.

The extract closes by reinforcing an idea that was expressed at the beginning. The repetition of drinking water to suppress her dehydration from the high temperatures is maintained to highlight the severity of the weather and Alice’s work. Furthermore, the use of subordinate clauses reflect the duration of Alice’s work. This helps to slow the pace of the extract and exemplify the brutal conditions she is working in.

Commentary

- Identifies a central motif. However, unlike the previous script (A), the weather is not as important as the notion of secrecy and discovery and therefore the focus is not as precise.
- Textual details such as ‘heat haze’ in the first paragraph are not really linked effectively to the comments (how does a heat haze establish Alice’s characterisation for example).
- Second paragraph on colour is less helpful but the identification of the pivotal moment is useful although it’s not fully explained.
- The comment on ‘the repetition of drinking water’ in the final paragraph links back to the student’s earlier point about ‘circular structure’. Because of this, this feels clear but lacks a perceptive moment.

6 marks

Structure example response F

At the beginning the writer introduces us to a girl called Alice who we later get to know is in the Pyrenees and has fully settled in there as she feels like she's home.

The attention shifts from Alice and onto the mountain. It gives the mountain an aura of importance as we learn about it. The writer focuses on the mountains to show the reader that even though the mountains are beautiful, are rather magical (it adapts to change in the seasons), and is somewhere welcoming, it's not as magical as it seems as we get to know that the mountain has seen secrets and have covered them up, so maybe no-one knows apart from the mountain.

The focus then changes to Alice and her colleagues – but only briefly. This shows that Alice's colleagues aren't really important. The writer also describes the whole team as demoralised which doesn't fit with the exterior atmosphere of the mountain on the outside, but it would match with the mountain on the interior as '[it has] concealed too much to be at peace with itself'.

Towards the end of the source Alice keeps her own secret about what she has discovered for selfish purposes and wants her discovery to be only hers. On line 34-37 the structural feature of time tenses has altered and the phrase 'If she had played by the rules'. This makes the reader think back to the beginning of the source when we found out about the mountain concealing secrets. On the last line all attention has been taken off Alice and it's like the source has come full circle and Alice has become the mountains newest concealed secret.

Commentary

- First paragraph is level 2 'some comment'.
- Second paragraph moves into level 3 by focusing on the effects of the shift in focus to the mountain.
- It is really in the final paragraph that the student moves into level 4 with a perceptive comment on the shift in tenses and the source coming full circle.

7 marks

Example response G – Level 4

Mosse begins by introducing the protagonist of the novel, Alice, with a simple sentence. The use of this simple sentence with Alice as the subject means that the focus is solely on her, ensuring that the reader immediately identifies her as the main character. However, besides introducing Alice, this sentence tells us very little about anything. We don't know where Alice is, what she is doing or the time. This deliberate lack of information means the reader is forced to read on to find out more about the situation.

In paragraph 7 there is a shift in tense and the narrator tells us that 'in the days and weeks to come, Alice will look back to this moment ... and wonder how different things might have been ... if she had played by the rules'. Mosse's use of an omniscient third person narrator means that the reader knows more than Alice does. The reader knows that Alice's decision to stay is a mistake and having to read on already knowing this makes them frustrated and worried for Alice.

Finally this extract has a cyclical structure as the final paragraph focuses on the same things that the beginning paragraph focuses on: Alice drinking from her water bottle, the heat and the sound of insects. Mosse has structured this *piece of writing in this way deliberately to place emphasis on the fact that Alice is still doing exactly what she was at the beginning*. We know now, from the previous paragraph, this is a mistake and Alice should stop what she is doing and go find her colleagues. Consequently, this ending makes the reader concerned for Alice.

Commentary

The first paragraph illustrates how a student can make meaningful structural comments on the position of a sentence. The reference to the fact that the focus is 'solely' on Alice is a clear comment on the effect of the structural feature. Nothing else in this paragraph adds to this sense of clarity, but the second paragraph shows a perceptive understanding of the function of the omniscient narrator, and the comment on how this reveals Alice's decision to be a 'mistake' is also perceptive – the student understands that Alice will look back and regret her actions and that she is going to be affected by the discovery. The final paragraph offers judicious textual detail – bottle, heat insects – and there is perceptive understanding in the reference to how the ending reflects the opening: it is a clever comment on the passage's cyclical structure and the textual detail ('we know now' that it's a mistake for Alice to be doing the same things and not to go and find her colleagues) supports this point precisely. This response is entirely focused on structure and the structural references are used with precision without resorting to elaborate technical terms.

Activity eight – Question 4

Some ideas to support a response to the question.

Why does Alice continue digging?

- Determined, indefatigable (despite the physical effects of the hard work); unwavering in her desire to prove herself.
- Unperturbed by environmental factors ('drains the last drop of water ... tosses it into her rucksack', 'carries on working' – active verbs suggest this determination. Something casual about 'tossing' the bottle into her rucksack to imply efficiency and commitment.
- Ambitious – wants to be the one who makes the discovery.
- They mark Alice out – very early on in the novel – as a key protagonist, someone who will be used by the writer to initiate and enable change.

How does the writer create mystery?

How does the writer suggest the discovery might be life-changing?

- The time-shift 'earlier...' indicate that the fiction-trigger has already happened; the reader is already behind the character in their awareness of key events. The writer unveils this object to introduce its importance.
- The object takes on almost mythical proportions – 'placed there by a giant hand'; one is reminded of Indiana Jones or a Kubrick's monolith in 2001. It is 'glinting' which not only shows how it catches the light and its presence it therefore foregrounded in the narrative, but 'glinting' also suggests something precious.
- The change of tense to reveal future emotions deepen the importance of this moment. Sensory impact – light, dust – imply the vitality of the setting and its possible links to the discovery.
- The subtle change in the sounds (links back to the beginning) – scrape, whine, buzz – the onomatopoeia foregrounds aural qualities of the space and these sounds have become slightly more grating, perhaps even unsettling. As if nature itself is alive to the possibilities of the discovery, or even that Alice's digging has the potential to disrupt the order of things.

Activity nine

Look at these three extracts. Can you rank order them and explain your decision?

Extract 1

The writer creates a further sense of mystery by integrating a paragraph in the future tense to reflect Alice's decision to dig by herself. The writer says she will look back at this moment 'and wonder at how different things might have been had she made the choice to go and not stay. If she had played by the rules.' The short sentence at the end is pivotal and adds a dramatic twist and implies that her actions will have great consequences, as if these 'rules' were predetermined by fate. The writer gives very little detail as to whether future events are good or bad which also creates a sense of foreboding surrounding the discovery. The writer's use of accusatory language towards Alice, 'if she had played by the rules', also emphasises that the choice was hers to make and she must live with the consequences.

Extract 2

When the text says 'Alice will look back at this moment' it describes her digging to be memorable and the work worthwhile. It shows her discovery is already life-changing as she looks back on the moment and remembers everything about the day.

Extract 3

The writer structures the text in a way to build up tension and excitement for the reader to feel like Alice's decision to keep digging is mysterious and could be life-changing. The opening line to paragraph eight 'in the days and weeks to come, Alice will look back at this moment' implies the narrator knows something the reader doesn't, suggesting that Alice's find will be forever remembered.

Commentary

In extract 3, the student refers to structural methods and links this to the statement in the question. The comment that the narrator is holding back information from the reader and that the find will be memorable shows a clear understanding of the impact of this sentence on a narrative level.

Extract 2 comes from a level 2 response. It makes some attempt to respond to the statement but does very little with methods. There is very little awareness of a writer at work.

Extract 1 meets level 4 criteria. It provides a detailed evaluation of the statement by evaluating the methods used by the writer, in this case it is the references to structure and language which hint at the consequences of Alice's actions. There is judicious textual detail, especially in the reference to the accusatory tone in 'if she had played by the rules' to emphasise the sense of a writer at work. The reference to 'a sense of foreboding' is also effective, reinforcing the comment that this is a pivotal moment in the text and the reference to 'fate' is a convincing personal response to the text.

Activity ten

Read this part of a response to question 4.

- Where could this be described as 'perceptive'?
- What advice would you give to this student to help them improve this response?

Response

At this juncture in the extract, we the readers are conditioned to believe that Alice has discovered a revolutionary object. The adverb 'hopefully' indicates that a new discovery is within her grasp. However, the connectives 'but' and 'although' create a mood of doubt implying that the object may not be special. This idea is perhaps overshadowed by the phrase 'placed ... by a giant hand'. The verb 'placed' suggests that it was fate that brought her towards the object. In addition to this the words 'giant hand' connotes the idea that a higher force (such as God) destined Alice to stumble across the object.

Commentary

Perceptive in the way it comments on the object as 'revolutionary' and the links to fate, God and destiny. Earlier quotations might be extended and the comments on connectives are not explained clearly because of this.

Question 4: Example response

I agree with the reader; her choices to continue digging are obscure, and her determination suggests that what she is discovering may be astonishing. The writer hints to us that her reasons may be slightly selfish, and self-oriented. When she considers telling everyone she might have found something she 'because it will no longer be her discovery'. This adds a sense of selfishness, suggesting she wants this for herself. The use of the personal pronoun 'her' gives Alice all the attention; we can assume this is one of the reasons she carries on alone.

The writer avoids describing directly exactly what she has found. This adds a sense of mystery, and gives the reader curiosity to what the object may be. The writer uses figurative language, he says the objects has been placed there by a 'giant hand'. The writer could be referencing God as the 'giant hand'; consequently, it is Alice's fate to discover the object as she has been directed by the 'giant hand' of God. This makes the reader question the reasons for the placement of the object, adding mystery and excitement of the unknown.

Alice shows a lot of grit and determination. She fights the temptations of giving up. What is the momentum behind her determination? The rest of the colleagues are demoralised and have given up. Possibly she is trying to prove to herself that she has determination and strength; also she may want to prove her colleagues wrong. The writer purposely keeps her reasons obscure to develop the sense of mystery, and to let the reader question her determination. It allows the reader to put themselves in her situation and consider the reasons to carry on. Ultimately creating a sense of mystery.

Despite the water running out and the sun getting higher, she still powers through. As the reader says, her discovery may be life-changing. From a less selfish perspective she may be so determined so that she can help the archaeologists who work at the camp. Considering she is a volunteer, she could want to ensure that she has truly impacted the camp during her time as a volunteer.

Level 4

Commentary

The student opens with a clear evaluation of Alice's reasons for digging, making some subtle inferences about her determination and referring to the writer's methods (the pronoun 'her'). The second paragraph links the discovery to fate and 'the unknown' which sees beyond the literal interpretation and links it to God. This is perceptive in its analysis and evaluation of methods. The evaluation of Alice's reasons for digging and the mystery of the object are continued in the next two paragraphs which draw attention to her 'grit and determination' as well as offering different interpretations 'possibly she is trying to prove to herself ... also she may want ...'). There is no doubt that the students use of language enables them to fine tune their analysis ('self-oriented', 'obscure', 'demoralised' etc.) and the ability to express ideas with precision is a feature of this response.

Paper 2 Question 2

Activity One

Reading the sources think about:

- place
- people
- recurring ideas, images/motifs
- structural features
- tone/mood.

Activity two

Read the response and discuss how it achieves level 4.

- Where is it perceptive?
- How does it deal with differences?
- How are inferences developed?

Example response A

In source A the children at the school seem delighted and beaming to be attending the school. The school has a greatly positive impact on the children and this is evident in their attitudes. The inspector witnesses the children being 'bright eyed and keen' which shows that the children's behaviour is astonishingly perfect and their conduct shows that they can behave well and enjoy themselves too.

In source B the children are presented as relentless and uncontrollable. It is evident that they do not enjoy being at school and the teachers do not enjoy looking after them. Contrary to source A where Sister Brendan's children were a 'source of real delight', the children in source B are described as a 'moral hell'. This shows that not only is their behaviour extremely poor, they do not enjoy school unlike the children in source A.

The activities in which the children take part also reflects their behaviour and conduct. In source A, the marvellous behaviour of the children is conveyed by reading with 'clarity and expression'. They show pride in their ability to read so well and this is portrayed with 'enthusiasm'. The children evidently enjoy learning and showing off their abilities. This also improves the children's general self-esteem, giving them 'confidence'.

In source B, the only education being described is interrupted by stones being 'thrown through the window'. The already difficult task of teaching these children is made even worse by their rebellious activities. Furthermore, other children taking part in 'vicious boxing', conduct which contrasts greatly with the pleasant children in source A.

Level 4 full marks

Commentary

The above response begins with clear inferences in observing that the ‘children’s behaviour is astonishingly perfect’ and the comments on their conduct which reference behaviour and enjoyment are level 3 inferences.

The second paragraph offers a perceptive inference by referring to the children as ‘relentless and uncontrollable’ and this difference is further detailed in this paragraph by drawing out the different attitudes to schools exhibited by the pupils. These perceptive inferences and differences are continued throughout the next two paragraphs with the student’s tight focus on behaviour and attitudes to learning reinforced by judicious textual detail which is precise in its selection. The phrase ‘the already difficult task of teaching is made even worse by their rebellious activities’ shows an ability to read with precision and incisiveness that is characteristic of students at this level.

Developing more integrated responses

1. Identify a difference.
2. Select appropriate detail from one text and infer some meaning.
3. Go to second text.
4. Select another textual detail and infer some meaning about how this is different.

Where does this paragraph from the level 4 response fit the above structure?

The activities in which the children take part also reflect their behaviour and conduct. In source A, the marvellous behaviour of the children is conveyed by reading with ‘clarity and expression’. They show pride in their ability to read so well and this is portrayed with ‘enthusiasm’. The children evidently enjoy learning and showing off their abilities. This also improves the children’s general self-esteem, giving them ‘confidence’.

In source B, the only education being described is interrupted by stones being ‘thrown through the window’. The already difficult task of teaching these children is made even worse by their rebellious activities. Furthermore, other children taking part in ‘vicious boxing’ conduct which contrasts greatly with the pleasant children in source A.

Paper 2 Question 4

Activity three

Consider the different viewpoints in both texts in the light of the previous two slides. There are some statements on slide 64 that they can place in the Venn diagram. Below are some further ideas

Here are some possible ideas:

- The similarities in settings and the fact that the texts begin with a dismal view of the surrounding area is a clear structural feature; however, in source B there is a determinist viewpoint which suggests that people are a product of, and therefore will behave in a way which reflects, their surroundings.
- Phinn is a visiting observer and therefore his viewpoint is not coloured by his experiences in the school (unlike the teacher in source B who is an active participant). He describes the school in positive terms, referring to the fabric of the building, the achievements of the children and the human interactions.
- The different behaviour of the teachers and pupils: the engaged students in source A, the frustrations felt by the school master in source B at the intransigence of the children in his care.
- Phinn's voice is often ambiguous: why does he draw attention to Sister Brendan's physical features and describe them in such loaded terms? Why does he give Sister Brendan so much of a voice? The phrase used to describe her reactions – 'like some mechanical toy' – is at odds with the zoomorphism used earlier which imbues her with life and vigour. Instead, this phrase reduces her to an automaton.
- In source B, the writer is frustrated at the lack of progress he is making with the children's education. He is physically at risk and this is reflected in his weary tone and the negativity of his language. Although it is negative, there is no doubt as to his desire to win through, although he feels that his efforts are futile.
- The writer of source B emphasises a theme of conflict throughout. This is reflected in the behaviour and attitudes of the children but also in the sense of class and social conflict that comes with his position as school teacher.
- In source B, the writer catalogues a series of events which range from the argumentative, the belligerent and to those which are outright physical threats which presents the reader with the relentlessness of his day and ultimately to sympathise with his patience! But again, more able students might be able to see between the lines and think about how this teacher is imposing his own 'world-view' on the children, to impose order where there is chaos, to reduce the children to a problem to be solved etc...
- Where are the moments of cross-over?

Activity four

Coat hanger statements.

Extract A

The writer's attitudes on source A tells us that the school was in a 'disadvantaged centre of Crompton'. The writer saw it as a 'dark and broody northern industrial town'. The language the writer uses to describe the area makes us envision a very haunted and terrifying place. Key adjectives like 'dark' and 'brooding' imply the area wasn't too pleasant. We get similar imagery in source B where the writer's viewpoint of the school's area was also unpleasant. The writer says that it was a 'dismal scene' suggesting it too is disadvantaged.

Extract B

At the beginning of both texts, the writers use metaphors to express their feelings about the places they describe. In Gervase Phinn's extract, he praises the school using metaphorical language to convey how the building was beautiful, 'calm' and an 'oasis' emphasising how the school itself is a contrast to the 'grim and forbidding wasteland of derelict buildings' in which it is situated. His reference to the 'oasis' suggests that the school is a place of calm and even relief in the desert of the 'dark and brooding' town that surrounds it. This is in contrast to the teacher's initial reaction to the school in source B who describes the road up to the school as a 'moral hell' emphasising the horror he felt at the sight of the school. His description of the 'dismal scene' with 'nothing but squalid dirt and idleness' implies his sheer disgust at what he sees and reinforces the metaphor of it being 'hell' as it is a place where there appears to be no hope, unlike the 'oasis' of hope in source A.

Commentary

The opening sentence to extract B offers a 'big idea' for the paragraph – here the student is stating their intention to focus on a particular element of the text which will help them organise their thoughts and analysis. They move effortlessly from this 'coat-hanger' statement to exploring one of the sources, picking up on the 'big idea' by examining the effect of the word 'oasis'. The judicious selection of quotation which is seamlessly integrated into their response clarifies the point they are making about the way the writer utilises setting to emphasise their perspective about the school. The student then moves to source B and again picks up on the metaphor idea and the final sentence which comments on the lack of hope synthesises the ideas in the two texts with a deal of perceptiveness.

Example Level 4 response

At the beginning of both texts, the writers use metaphors to express their feelings about the places they describe. In Gervase Phinn's extract, he praises the school using metaphorical language to convey how the building was beautiful, 'calm' and an 'oasis' emphasising how the school itself is a contrast to the 'grim and forbidding wasteland of derelict buildings' in which it is situated. His reference to the 'oasis' suggests that the school is a place of calm and even relief in the desert of the 'dark and brooding' town that surrounds it. This is in contrast to the teacher's initial reaction to the school in source B who describes the road up to the school as a 'moral hell' emphasising the horror he felt at the sight of the school. His description of the 'dismal scene' with 'nothing but squalid dirt and idleness' implies his sheer disgust at what he sees and reinforces the metaphor of it being 'hell' as it is a place where there appears to be no hope, unlike the 'oasis' of hope in source A.

In source B, the teacher uses hyperbole to describe the attitudes of the children to the school and authority. The fact that the teacher has a 'coat' emphasises the difference between him and the children and so they feel that that they 'consider themselves at war'; this hyperbole shows that there is an aura of hatred towards him and what he stands for. This is in contrast to Phinn's visit to his school as he was greeted 'enthusiastically' by the head teacher even before he 'had a chance to straighten [his] tie' which suggests a more positive experience. In addition, Phinn uses lots of positive language – the head's 'shining eyes', the 'attractive books' and 'the enthusiasm and confidence' of the children which reveals a place of harmony and pleasure which is a very different picture of the school than the 'distressing' scenes shown by the teacher in source B.

Perhaps this difference is caused by the time difference of the two accounts but it seems to me that the people educated in these establishments come from similar, disadvantaged backgrounds. However, whilst the children in source A want to learn, the teacher in source B is faced with despair at every level. Phinn emphasises Sister Brendan's passion for her children's reading and its importance to the children; when they come to read to him they 'clasp their readers, bright-eyed and keen'. By using the verb 'clasp', Phinn suggests that the children feel education is precious to them. On the other hand, the teacher in source B is despairing. He states quite bluntly in one short sentence 'No school can be possibly worse than this'. Although he has some sense of duty 'we must work harder' he also seems to have given up already with the short phrase 'it is a forlorn hope'. Unlike Sister Brendan, the teacher in source B has other priorities and thinks that reading, writing and arithmetic are less important to the children than being clean which suggests that he is fighting a losing battle.

Commentary

Following on from the commentary on the first paragraph (see slide above), the second paragraph continues to drive the answer through an analysis of methods – this time the use of hyperbole 'at war'. Again, the student's grasp of language (an aura of hatred) does them no harm in fine-tuning their ideas whilst the integrated comparisons ('this is in contrast to') are evidence of a holistic interpretation. The reference to the historical context is not a required feature of a level 4 response, but here the student uses this to draw a connection between the social context, which is perceptive. Throughout, methods, ideas and perspectives are compared and evaluated with a high level of confidence.

Additional full mark response for paper 2 question 4

There is an overall sense that the attitudes of the two writers reflect the attitudes of society at the time. The 20th century piece has the visitor there to observe and draw his conclusions from what he has seen, which I feel somewhat with the 19th century piece which conveys more of a sense of needing to interfere, to fix, to change.

The tone of source one is rather light. It starts with the idea that the visitor is trying to straighten his tie, like an errant schoolboy and he was greeted with a hyperbolic smile. Although the environment is described in dark and dismal tones this merely acts as a juxtaposition to the 'oasis of the school'. Descriptive words like 'pleasant' are for effect. The adverbs 'brightly', 'enthusiastically' and 'lively' are used to enhance the overall sense of positivity and brightness in his visit.

His final statement is rather a bold one for an experienced school inspector: 'I've never met such lively enquiring minds, nor so many budding little philosophers in ones so young'. High praise indeed and one that leaves the reader in no doubt of the positivity of the visit.

There is no juxtaposition between the environment and the school in source two. It is as if the writer wants us to realise that his journey there, through the 'lanes [of a] moral hell' is only the beginning. It recalls the images of Dante's *Inferno*: it just gets worse. Adjectives like 'squalid', 'discordant' and 'idleness' set the tone of the piece and he alludes to the unspoken class war going on when he talks of the 'eve of a great outbreak of some kind or another' and how his coat alone makes him an enemy with whom the locals consider 'themselves at war'. Indeed, there is tension here from these descriptions which contrasts with the way he describes his own behaviour. He claims he 'spoke to them kindly' and punished a 'boy slightly' but these appear to have been met with acts of aggression.

It is perhaps with distance and hindsight we can interpret his attitude as patronising and alien to his environment: but he clearly doesn't. The list at the end is perhaps most telling in its priorities. Basic needs are not being met but after those it is 'prayers' and 'privileges' he lists above any level of skill that may help them rise from poverty. The use of the word 'privilege' in the context of those children would appear outrageous to a modern reader. It is as if the attitudes are a reflection of their prior expectations. The modern writer having his initial impression confounded by those 'budding philosophers' and the 19th century one having his negative attitude compounded with his 'forlorn hope'.

The word 'philosophy' is a connecting point here too. The historic philosophy of trying to help the poor through good and charitable work such as teaching is conveyed in the 19th century text. The teacher has portrayed himself saint-like in his patience and wish to bring 'prayers' and 'religious instruction' as part of his 'duties'. Yet in the modern piece, it is these happy, 'lively', 'enquiring' minds of the children who are expressing their own philosophies. A significant change in attitude and position of teacher/pupil.

Commentary

Here is another example of a full mark response. This is a delightful and extremely sophisticated essay. Notice how this student draws on their wider knowledge and understanding to incorporate subtle and sophisticated details such as literary allusion and historical context to underpin the ideas about perspectives. Methods such as tone and structure are used judiciously to drive the analysis of ideas and an understanding of the mode (source A's observational style versus the involved perspective of source B) also contributes to the depth of the response. The observations on 'class war' are superb and these are aligned perfectly with the comments about privilege and alienation!

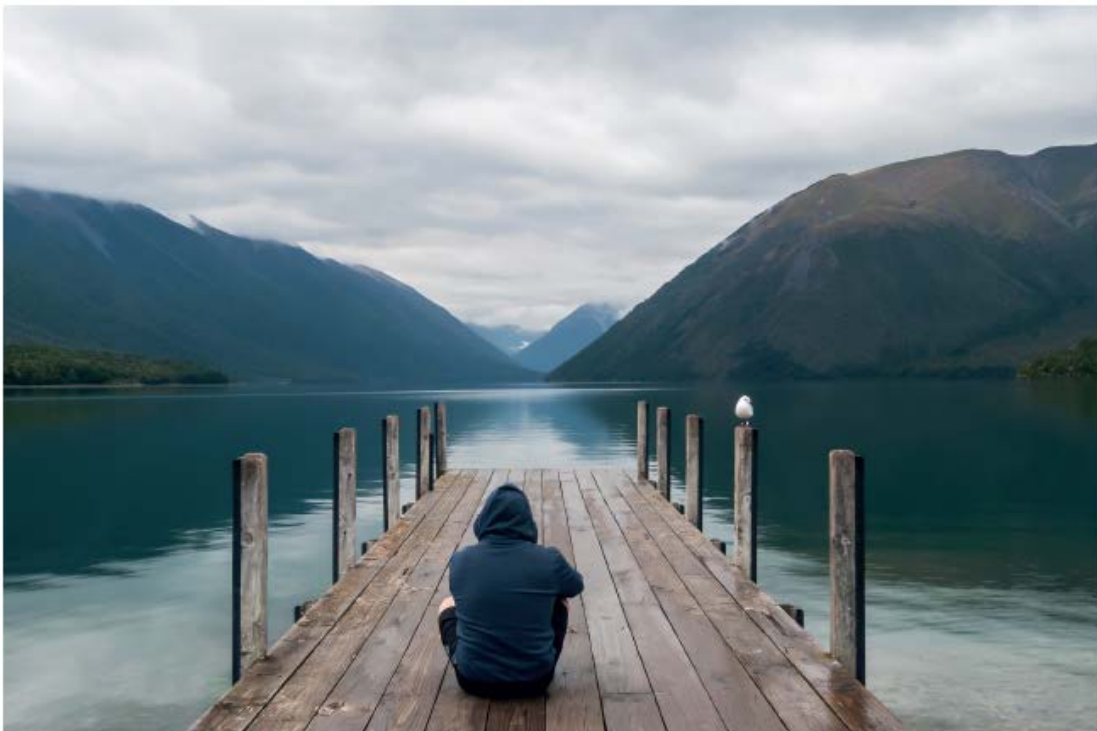
Paper 1, Section B: Writing

0 5

An online competition for story writing is being held, and you have decided to enter.

Either

Write a story, set in a mountainous area, as suggested by this picture:



or

Write a story with the title 'Discovery'.

(24 marks for content and organisation
16 marks for technical accuracy)
[40 marks]

Typical features of level 3 writing:

- logical structure
- paragraphs are connected in a logical way ie using temporal or sequential links
- easy to follow
- mostly accurate spelling and punctuation
- evidence of a wider vocabulary
- engages interest
- consistent viewpoint
- varied sentences structures and forms to create credible effects
- devices are used for effect and are credible in context
- draws reader's attention to details
- begins to write a lot about a little
- effectively structured with some conscious shifts in focus/tone.

Typical features of level 4 writing:

- possesses structural impact
- coherent and cohesive
- employs rhetorical devices with fluency but also judiciously
- may employ time shifts or perspectival shifts with confidence
- consciously crafted at word, sentence and whole text level
- fluently expressed
- varied sentence forms and structures – unforced and fluent.
- risk-taking
- exploratory
- consistently engaging
- abstract
- can move between the micro and the macro.

Activity One

Compare these two extracts from paper 1 question 5 responses.

Extract A

As the man sat on the damp wood he began to glare at the expansions of the mountains forming a zig-zag, a delicate white bird caught his eye, it was resting on the wooden post, calmly stretching his satin soft wings and letting the soft Scotland breeze dance with his wonderful white feathers. It were as if he was an angel. The jagged peaks of the mountains are towering so high that they kissed the cascade of clouds as they devoured the blue in the sky. The fresh air whistled as it spoke of the picturesque landscape that had been carved by God himself. As the man was watching the clouds race each other like birds it felt like the world was going back in time.

Extract B

I am completely alone up here, I realise, as the overwhelming sound of nothing envelops me. When I gaze down into the water of the lake, my own reflection stares back at me, only slightly contorted by the light ripples: the day is calm, the air is still, and the weather although chill is surprisingly welcoming. The high peaks of the mountains loom ahead, barely meeting in the middle and creating a gateway for the valley beyond. I can see the trail of the lake as it heads up hill, only slightly obscured by the light mist that curls around the slopes of the mountains in the distance. When summer breaks through the veil of spring the slopes will be mottled yellow, pink and healthy green as the warmth encourages life back into the landscape. For now, everything is cast through a stale grey filter.

Discussion

Which of the below statements match with the two extracts?

1. Multiple adjectives to build noun phrases.
2. Feels like a list of observations.
3. Would have benefitted from more effective use of discourse markers.
4. Additional clauses help build descriptive detail.
5. Sentence openings lack variety.
6. Evidence of conscious crafting.
7. Extensive vocabulary.
8. Temporal connectives aid cohesion.
9. Varied sentence lengths and openings create a more engaging rhythm.
10. More effective use of punctuation.

Commentary

Both these extracts are taken from level 4 pieces of writing. Both students employ adjectives effectively, although their use in extract A feels a little contrived in places (the first sentence tends towards this with ‘satin soft wings ... wonderful white feathers’ perhaps). In extract A the mountains form a ‘zig-zag’ which is a concrete visual image whilst in extract B they ‘create a gateway’ which uses the same idea (they ‘barely meet in the middle’). However, it should be noted that extract A also offers some figurative detail – the mountains ‘kissed the cascade of clouds’ and ‘devoured the blue in the sky’. One way of differentiating the two extracts is B’s use of more varied sentences which offer a greater sense of rhythm. Another is the way in which extract B links the different images together using temporal connectives (‘when I...’, ‘for now’) and there is less of the impression that the writer is dealing with a catalogue of images.

Activity two

Read the whole of example script 1.

- There are **five** paragraphs and each paragraph has a particular focus.
- Decide on one word or short phrase that encapsulates the focus of each paragraph.

Example script 1

The day is cold and overcast, and the dark grey sky looms endlessly above me. As I take my first step onto the rickety old pier the wood creaks and groans, like an elderly woman rising from her chair, joints popping and complaining. Once I am seated, the cold air settles around me. The atmosphere alongside the lake is clammy, and condensation beads upon the dried-out wooden planks of the walkway.

I am completely alone up here, I realise as the overwhelming sound of nothing envelops me. When I gaze down into the water of the lake my own reflection stares back at me, only slightly contorted by the light ripples: the day is calm, the air is still, and the weather although chill is surprisingly welcoming. The high peaks of the mountains loom ahead, barely meeting in the middle and creating a gateway for the valley beyond. I can see the trail of the lake as it heads up hill, only slightly obscured by the light mist that curls around the slopes of the mountains in the distance. When summer breaks through the veil of spring the slopes will be mottled yellow, pink and healthy green as the warmth encourages life back into the landscape. For now, everything is cast through a stale grey filter.

Suddenly, the peaceful silence is interrupted. The sound is small, but stark against the tranquility that my ears had grown accustomed to. There again, the noise surrounds me, bouncing off of the edges of the mountains and disorienting my senses. Again. Behind me this time. I whip around in search of the source, the sound growing louder to reveal a strange murmuring. My heart pounds in my chest as I try to level my breathing.

The sound is everywhere, growing louder and more frequent, and I try my best to convince myself it’s nothing but I’m all alone, what if – a deafening screech echoes around the lake. My heart stops in my chest.

Earlier, I had eyed my pocket knife from its perch on my garage shelf. Why didn’t I pick it up? I ask myself as the horrifying sound reverberates around the ravine. Just as I am preparing myself for defence ... a single gull lands to perch on the post in front of me. It looks me in the eye, tilts its head as if considering me, and lets out a screeching call. Relief floods me, adrenaline coursing through my veins and warming me against the chill air. I laugh, standing to leave, and give the gull a courteous wave. Smiling and shaking my head at my own mistake, I head home.

Commentary

Reading this piece alongside the subsequent plans highlights the importance to students of planning and taking the time to prepare. There is a clear distinction between paragraphs and the narrative develops, albeit in conventional form, towards a clear and definite conclusion. The narrative structure follows a fairly familiar 'calm-chaos-calm' structure which is exploited for maximum impact.

Full version of Extract A from activity two

As the man sat on the damp wood he began to glare at the expansions of the mountains forming a zig-zag, a delicate white bird caught his eye, it was resting on the wooden post, calmly stretching his satin soft wings and letting the soft Scotland breeze dance with his wonderful white feathers. It were as if he was an angel. The jagged peaks of the mountains are towering so high that they kissed the cascade of clouds as they devoured the blue in the sky. The fresh air whistled as it spoke of the picturesque landscape that had been carved by God himself. As the man was watching the clouds race each other like birds it felt like the world was going back in time.

As the tranquil waters sat still, the man could see a droplet of water diving through the soft air and into the lake, quietly disturbing the calmness of the scene, the microscopic waves as they expand along the lake.

The layers of damp grass bled into the mountains whilst the little white bird lifted his wings and took flight. When this happened, the man began to realise the true meaning of life, the meaning that no technology could ever give. He grasped the moment of peace and tranquillity and kept it in his heart and mind and didn't plan on letting it go.

The smell of damp grass wafted around the man's nose. He could smell the purity of this place and it felt like he discovered it. The peaceful chorus of the little birds filled the whole of the mountains it was echoing around the place. The beautiful mountains looked though as if they were painted by God because their beauty is unmatched, it showed so much divinity and peace and the man had quickly fell in love with the place.

The bird continued to fly and the unfurling of its wings seemed to reflect in its natural simplicity the sudden relief of all the man's stress and anxieties. It was as if all his troubles had taken flight with the beauty of the bird, a reminder of his own youth. How precious was freedom, he thought. The magnificence of the landscape, its purity, had the capability of cleansing souls.

The place was concealed from the world, it was waiting to be discovered by mankind and now the magic of it is found. Speckles of green could be observed from the mini-islands that were scattered along the vast landscape. The mute mountains spoke volumes of the beauty of the place. It was magical.

Paper 2 Question 5

Example script 3

Dear students, teachers, and parents. We did it, we made it through college! However, it's not over just yet and I am here to give one final speech which I hope you will carry with you long after you last walk out of these familiar school gates... It is on the way in which our educations, enjoyable as they have been, could be improved.

First and foremost is the unbelievable rise in recorded cases of bullying and depression in colleges nationwide. A recent study by Ofsted found there to be a 39% increase in teenager suicides in the capital alone. This must end. We must be the ones to resolve this heartbreaking and truly despicable state of affairs. As Nelson Mandela famously said "no person is born hating another man, we are taught to hate, and if we can learn to hate, we can learn to be kind - for kindness comes far easier to the human heart". Although the answer to this pandemic problem may not be simple, there are certainly places one can begin, for example offering safe and understanding environments in which students can share their feelings and thoughts.

Secondly is the incredible importance of stimulation independent of academia. When did our school experience become nothing more than a blur of black pen on white paper and the occasional uninteresting school trip? The best schools are those that offer more than just an exam result. I believe passionately in the desperate need to broaden education's horizons, for if we are not given the opportunity to experiment in school then perhaps we will never leave our comfort zones. It would be an abominable, saddening, and quite frankly unforgiveable thing to deprive students of the abundant wonders of cooking, to art history; to steal from them the simple pleasures of art, photography carpentry and sculpture.

It is often argued that the attainment of qualifications is far more pertinent to the education system, as it is vital to the employment of students in their futures. But what do you do once you've landed your job and your only form of knowledge and experience is an exam paper and the familiar scrawl of black ink? When did we reduce the children of this generation to nothing more than a grade on a paper? This entire philosophy of education is totally ludicrous. Knowledge isn't only gained by the memorising of a textbook: we are people, not letters and percentages. Our development, both social and cultural, is paramount to the improvements we will create in the world around us. After all it is art that we as a society leave behind. The works of Socrates and Aristotle are still studied worldwide, people travel 1000s of miles to admire the Mona Lisa. Does anyone bother to venerate the Roman educations grade average ... of course not!

If you can leave today with the knowledge that not only have you completed an exam, but that you are equally kind and knowledgeable, intelligent and intellectual, then you have every right to be proud of yourself. And this is what I believe makes a school good.

Commentary

The student sets out their argument from the opening paragraph: that education could be improved, and then produces a consistent and coherent piece of writing that supports this idea throughout. Each paragraph has a clear topic: bullying in school, external stimulation, and finally to a reflection on how society has prioritised certain aspects of education over others before turning to a consideration of cultural and historical legacies! The vocabulary becomes increasingly sophisticated ('venerate', 'ludicrous') whilst the phrasing is subtle and engaging – ('blur of black pen on white paper'; 'familiar scrawl of black ink'). Sentence structures are varied with lists, rhetorical questions and short sentences being employed effectively. The final paragraph in particular is quite sophisticated in its argument, and its references to Western thought and culture are effectively employed to underpin its argument.

Example Script 4

Education. What is it? Six painful hours of mandatory work for thirteen mandatory years of wretched school life, for a few hours of stressful exams which test how much you've been listening and how much you understand.

Education is reading from a textbook and memorising each and every word because who knows what questions could come up in the test?

Education is listening to a teacher when they tell you 'Write this down, it may come up in the test' because you don't want to fail.

Education is learning the cruel mark scheme off by heart in order for you to know how to answer the question the way the examiner wants it answered and to dodge any sneaky tricks they add in to try and trip you up to fail you.

Education is whatever the government wants it to be.

However, to us, it can become much more. People will tell you that you must hand in your homework at a certain time because it prepares you for deadlines that you will meet at work, correct? And they will bang on about how important it is to use high level words so you sound sophisticated in your work, correct? And they will also tell you that you must score highly in your test because there's nothing else left for you to do if you don't, correct?

Incorrect. Some people struggle with being organised and actually need help becoming more organised. Some people don't have an enormous advanced dictionary in their minds, maybe due to lack of skill or maybe due to learning difficulties. Some people don't perform at their best under pressure, maybe due to nerves or even anxiety. My point is that not everyone has the same skills and abilities and strengths, so why treat them as if they do? Not everyone learns the same way, eats the same way, moves the same way or thinks the same way, so don't treat them as if they do.

Everyone is different and unique and I believe that education is key to highlighting those differences and evolving them to become something even greater. Education should be about encouraging people to explore the world and themselves, to gain experience, to try new things, to find what works best for them. Not forcing them to do everything the same, stripping them of everything but their name for non-identification in a test. I refuse to be a marionette and let someone else pull my strings. I challenge education to let go and do something different for a change, to let itself evolve like the world around it, before it becomes extinct.

A good education should be dispensed to all. Education with an open mind and diverse ways of thinking. No one is the same so treat them as they deserve to be treated. Don't let us become the victims of education, let us become proud children of it.

Commentary

- Rhetorical devices used not merely to decorate, but to emphasise the writer's perspective on the topic.
- Use of repetition in the first few paragraphs announces a personal style that serves to reinforce the message about education as a mere cataloguing of experiences.
- Vocabulary ('mandatory', 'wretched') in the opening paragraphs is already extensive and impressive and continues to be assured throughout.
- There is a clear voice – not ranting, not haranguing – but subtly interweaving some quite perceptive insights into modern education with the sense of personal experience.
- The fifth paragraph is effective in moving to the wider social context – 'Education is whatever the government wants it to be' – which reinforces the writer's message that students are treated as automatons with no agency in the structures of education (reinforced later by the reference to the 'marionette').
- The shift in tone in the sixth paragraph is effective in signposting the introduction of the writer's own opinions about what education could be.
- Judicious combination of sentence structures and forms.

Appendix

Writing Activities for Paper 1

In the following section, we have included a sequence used in the classroom to encourage students to write in more detail and with more focus on structure.

Task: Write about a time when you felt anxious or fearful.

Think of four parts to your story:

1. Beginning – **who/where/what/when/why?** Try and answer these questions in your opening paragraph(s).
2. Problem – **what** is the problem? Create a conflict between ...
3. Pivotal moment – Show your reader **how** this **conflict** unfolds.
4. Conclusion – **how** does it all end up? Link back to the beginning.

Beginning:

Set the mood for the story here. Begin in medias res – ‘And then I realised I was alone ...’

- Spend some time setting up the situation – a couple of paragraphs. Imagine your reader is watching a film: scan the setting for them. Pick out little details and use a metaphor, personification or a simile (“the sinewy arms of the trees”).
- You don’t have to use pathetic fallacy. Make the setting contrast with the mood. Try – “The trees were filled with birdsong and in the distance I could hear children’s voices raised in excitement. All this seemed merely to highlight my own gloomy thoughts...”
- Use some good **prepositional phrases** to help with describing the physical space to your reader: “From behind the wall, I could hear little snuffling sounds, as if the stones themselves were warning me to turn back...”
- Remember Chekhov’s gun? Draw attention to something that will have importance later on. “Up ahead, a car stopped for a moment, its brake lights flickered in the gloom. I thought I heard a door slam, but then the car continued on.”
- Try and avoid dialogue here if you can. Focus on atmosphere and ideas.

Try and help your reader answer the questions for your reader:

- **Who** is the main protagonist? **where** are they? **why** are they there?
- **What** are they feeling? **when** are the events occurring?

Problem: what is the problem that your character needs to overcome?

- Create some kind of **conflict**: introduce something that threatens to disturb your protagonist (or that adds to their already anxious emotions).
- Think back to your ‘Chekhov’s gun’ – the sound of a door slamming? Someone had got out of the car! - “Up ahead, I saw a shadowy figure...”
- Use a short sentence for effect. Or even a one sentence paragraph.
- Slow down time at this point by shifting your story’s perspective to something else in the scene (“Slivers of grey cloud scuttled across the crescent moon, like scrawled lines over a torn piece of paper. A dog barked somewhere...”). This helps create suspense – but don’t spend too long on this shift – you don’t want your reader to lose the thread of your narrative.

Pivotal moment – Show your reader how this conflict unfolds and build to a dramatic, tense moment.

- Include a few more shorter sentences and active verbs to quicken the pace. “I scrambled for my phone. It was gone. Panic swallowed me.”
- In this part, make a conscious effort to think about word order: leave an important word or phrase to the end of a complex sentence, for example: “I felt the man stare at me as I passed by” becomes: “As I passed by, I felt the man’s cold, calculating stare”.
- End this section with a one or two-word sentence that holds your reader’s attention. “He ghosted towards me, his left hand held something small that glistened in the pale light of the moon. Like steel.”

Conclusion – how does it all end up? Try and wrap up your story. No cliffhangers or ellipsis or dreams.

- Make a reference back to your opening paragraph or other parts of your story. Maybe the birds are no longer singing. Maybe the moon is now hidden by the clouds.
- Use some repetition here: “Why did I take this path? Why did I come here alone?”
- Try some **repetition**: “I wanted to run. Run away from here as fast as I could...”
- NB – You might change the tone – move from serious to not so serious...)
“As he approached, the light of a passing car flooded the streets; I saw the object in his hands and breathed a sigh.
“Is this your phone? I think you dropped it in the park.”
- My heart still beating, I held out my hand, still anxious, still fearful. The man’s hand shook too as he handed me the phone, its metallic case bathed in the light from the streetlamp.

Notes

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