

AQA Sample Paper: GCSE English Language

Paper 1: Explorations in creative reading and writing

Time allowed: 1 hour 45 minutes

- The marks for questions are shown in brackets.
- The maximum mark of this paper is 80.
- There are 40 marks for Section A and 40 marks for Section B.
- You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers.
- You will be assessed on the quality of your reading in Section A.
- You will be assessed on the quality of your writing in Section B.

You are advised to spend about 15 minutes reading through the **Source** and **all five questions** you have to answer. You should make sure you leave sufficient time to check your answers.

Source A

This extract is from the first chapter of a novel by Donna Tartt.

The Goldfinch

1 Things would have turned out better if my mother had lived. As it was, she died when I was a kid;
2 and though everything that's happened to me since then is thoroughly my own fault, still when I
3 lost her I lost sight of any landmark that might have led me someplace happier, to some more
4 populated or congenial* life.

5 Her death the dividing mark: Before and After. And though it's a bleak thing to admit all these
6 years later, still I've never met anyone who made me feel loved the way she did. Everything came
7 alive in her company; she cast a charmed theatrical light about her so that to see anything through
8 her eyes was to see it in brighter colours than ordinary – I remember a few weeks before she died,
9 eating a late supper with her in an Italian restaurant down in the Village, and how she grasped my
10 sleeve at the sudden, almost painful loveliness of a birthday cake with lit candles being carried in
11 procession from the kitchen, faint circle of light wavering in across the dark ceiling and then the
12 cake set down to blaze amidst the family, beatifying* an old lady's face, smiles all round, waiters
13 stepping away with their hands behind their backs – just an ordinary birthday dinner you might
14 see anywhere in an inexpensive downtown restaurant, and I'm sure I wouldn't even remember it
15 had she not died so soon after, but I thought about it again and again after her death and indeed
16 I'll probably think about it all my life: that candlelit circle, a tableau vivant* of the daily,
17 commonplace happiness that was lost when I lost her.

18 She was beautiful, too. That's almost secondary; but still, she was. When she came to New York
19 fresh from Kansas, she worked part-time as a model though she was too uneasy in front of the
20 camera to be very good at it; whatever she had, it didn't translate to film.

21 And yet she was wholly herself: a rarity. I cannot recall ever seeing another person who really
22 resembled her. She had black hair, fair skin that freckled in summer, china-blue eyes with a lot of
23 light in them; and in the slant of her cheekbones there was such an eccentric mixture of the tribal
24 and the Celtic Twilight that sometimes people guessed she was Icelandic. In fact, she was half
25 Irish, half Cherokee, from a town in Kansas near the Oklahoma border; and she liked to make me
26 laugh by calling herself an Okie even though she was as glossy and nervy and stylish as a
27 racehorse. That exotic character unfortunately comes out a little too stark and unforgiving in
28 photographs – her freckles covered with makeup, her hair pulled back in a ponytail at the nape of
29 her neck like some nobleman in *The Tale of Genji* – and what doesn't come across at all is her
30 warmth, her merry, unpredictable quality, which is what I loved about her most. It's clear, from
31 the stillness she emanates in pictures, how much she mistrusted the camera; she gives off a
32 watchful, tigerish air of steeling herself against attack. But in life she wasn't like that. She moved
33 with a thrilling quickness, gestures sudden and light, always perched on the edge of her chair like
34 some long elegant marsh-bird about to startle and fly away. I loved the sandalwood perfume she
35 wore, rough and unexpected, and I loved the rustle of her starched shirt when she swooped down
36 to kiss me on the forehead. And her laugh was enough to make you want to kick over what you
37 were doing and follow her down the street. Wherever she went, men looked at her out of the
38 corner of their eyes, and sometimes they used to look at her in a way that bothered me a little.

*Glossary

congenial = pleasant

beatifying = blessing, making saintly

tableau vivant = a living picture/painting

Section A: Reading

Answer **all** questions in this section.

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

Q1. Read again the first part of the Source from **lines 1 to 6**.

List **four** things from this part of the text about the narrator.

[4 marks]

Q2. Look in detail at this extract from **lines 5 to 20** of the Source:

Her death the dividing mark: Before and After. And though it's a bleak thing to admit all these years later, still I've never met anyone who made me feel loved the way she did. Everything came alive in her company; she cast a charmed theatrical light about her so that to see anything through her eyes was to see it in brighter colours than ordinary – I remember a few weeks before she died, eating a late supper with her in an Italian restaurant down in the Village, and how she grasped my sleeve at the sudden, almost painful loveliness of a birthday cake with lit candles being carried in procession from the kitchen, faint circle of light wavering in across the dark ceiling and then the cake set down to blaze amidst the family, beatifying* an old lady's face, smiles all round, waiters stepping away with their hands behind their backs – just an ordinary birthday dinner you might see anywhere in an inexpensive downtown restaurant, and I'm sure I wouldn't even remember it had she not died so soon after, but I thought about it again and again after her death and indeed I'll probably think about it all my life: that candlelit circle, a tableau vivant* of the daily, commonplace happiness that was lost when I lost her.

She was beautiful, too. That's almost secondary; but still, she was. When she came to New York fresh from Kansas, she worked part-time as a model though she was too uneasy in front of the camera to be very good at it; whatever she had, it didn't translate to film.

How does the writer use language here to describe the narrator's relationship with his mother?

You could include the writer's choice of:

- words and phrases
- language features and techniques
- sentence forms

[8 marks]

Q3. You now need to think about the **whole** of the Source.

This extract comes from the opening chapter of the novel.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:

- what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
- how and why the writer changes this focus as the Source develops
- any other structural features that interest you

[8 marks]

Q4. Focus this part of your answer on the second part of the Source from **line 18 to the end**.

A student, having read this section of the text, said: 'The description is so vivid that the character of the mother really seems to come to life.'

To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

- write about your own impressions of the mother
- evaluate how the writer has created these impressions
- support your opinions with references to the text

[20 marks]

Section B: Writing

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

Write in full sentences.

You are reminded of the need to plan your answer.

You should leave enough time to check your work at the end.

Q5. Either: Write a description suggested by this picture:



Or: Write the opening of a story with the title 'The Outsider'.

(24 marks for content and organisation
16 marks for technical accuracy)

[40 marks]