

***AQA English Language Paper 2:
Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives***

RAIL DISASTERS



***Two non-fiction texts based on
the same theme or topic***

The Victorian era saw an horrific number of fatal train crashes. The writer Charles Dickens was involved in a train crash in Staplehurst on 9th June 1865 but fortunately survived. Here is his eyewitness account in a letter written to a friend:

SOURCE A

My dear Mitton,

I should have written to you yesterday or the day before, if I had been quite up to writing. I am a little shaken, not by the beating and dragging of the carriage in which I was, but by the hard work afterwards in getting out the dying and dead, which was most horrible.

I was in the only carriage that did not go over into the stream. It was caught upon the turn by some of the ruin of the bridge, and hung suspended and balanced in an apparently impossible manner. Two ladies were my fellow passengers; an old one, and a young one. This is exactly what passed:- you may judge from it the precise length of the suspense. Suddenly we were off the rail and beating the ground as the car of a half emptied balloon might. The old lady cried out "My God!" and the young one screamed. I caught hold of them both (the old lady sat opposite, and the young one on my left) and said: "We can't help ourselves, but we can be quiet and composed. Pray don't cry out." They both answered quite collectedly, "Yes," and I got out without the least notion of what had happened. **5**

Fortunately, I got out with great caution and stood upon the step. Looking down, I saw the bridge gone and nothing below me but the line of the rail. Some people in the two other compartments were madly trying to plunge out of the window, and had no idea there was an open swampy field 15 feet down below them and nothing else! The two guards (one with his face cut) were running up and down on the down side of the bridge (which was not torn up) quite wildly. I called out to them "Look at me. Do stop an instant and look at me, and tell me whether you don't know me." One of them answered, "We know you very well, Mr Dickens." "Then," I said, "my good fellow for God's sake give me your key, and send one of those labourers here, and I'll empty this carriage." **15**

We did it quite safely, by means of a plank or two and when it was done I saw all the rest of the train except the two baggage cars down in the stream. I got into the carriage again for my brandy flask, took off my travelling hat for a basin, climbed down the brickwork, and filled my hat with water. Suddenly I came upon a staggering man covered with blood (I think he must have been flung clean out of his carriage) with such a frightful cut across the skull that I couldn't bear to look at him. I poured some water over his face, and gave him some to drink, and gave him some brandy, and laid him down on the grass, and he said, "I am gone", and died afterwards. **20**

Then I stumbled over a lady lying on her back against a little pollard tree, with the blood streaming over her face (which was lead colour) in a number of distinct little streams from the head. I asked her if she could swallow a little brandy, and she just nodded, and I gave her some and left her for somebody else. The next time I passed her, she was dead. No imagination can conceive the ruin of the carriages, or the extraordinary weights under which the people were lying, or the complications into which they were twisted up among iron and wood, and mud and water. **30**

I don't want to be examined at the Inquests and I don't want to write about it. It could do no good either way, and I could only seem to speak about myself, which, of course, I would rather not do. But in writing these scanty words of recollection, I feel the shake and am obliged to stop. **35**

Ever faithfully, Charles Dickens

SOURCE B: *A newspaper interview with the parents of a woman who was killed in a train crash 15 years earlier known as the Paddington Rail Disaster, which occurred in London on October 5th 1999*

Those present at the scene of the Paddington rail crash have said that the worst memory they have endured over the past 15 years is the sound of mobile phones ringing from the bodies of the dead. Among the scorched metal carcasses of the two trains involved in one of Britain's worst-ever rail disasters, a cacophony of telephones beeped and buzzed. At the other end of the line were anxious family and friends, their desperation building with each missed call.

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Denman Groves first phoned his daughter, Juliet, at around 8.30am on October 5 1999. He and his wife Maureen had woken up in their home in the village of Ashleworth, near Gloucester, and as usual, switched on the television news. Like the rest of the nation watching that crisp autumn morning, they stared in shock at the plume of smoke rising from the wreckage of the two passenger trains that had collided just outside Paddington station. Neither could even imagine that their 25-year-old daughter might have been on board.

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"I didn't even think she was anywhere near Paddington that day," says Denman. Still, when he left for work, he tried to phone her from the car – just to make sure. There was no answer. "I thought I'd try again, but then I was so busy that I forgot. It wasn't until lunchtime that I called. I still couldn't get an answer, so phoned her company. They said: 'We're afraid she hasn't arrived yet, Mr Groves, and we're very worried.' At that point my heart sank."

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Juliet Groves, an accountant with Ernst & Young, was one of hundreds aboard a Thames Trains commuter service from Paddington station at 8.06am that morning. Petite, pretty and fiercely intelligent – the previous year she had come seventh in the entire country in her chartered accountancy exams, Juliet lived in Chiswick but was travelling by train to Slough, where she was winding up a company. Despite her young age, she was already a specialist in bankruptcy and was being fast-tracked to become a partner in the company. From birth she had suffered from partial blindness and was unable to drive. As a result, she travelled everywhere by rail.

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She was in the front carriage of the train when it passed through a red signal at Ladbrooke Grove and into the path of the oncoming Paddington-bound First Great Western express travelling from Cheltenham Spa in Gloucestershire. Both drivers were killed, as well as 29 passengers, and 400 others were injured. Juliet's body was one of the last to be discovered. She was finally found on the eighth day.

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The outcry that followed led to the biggest-ever safety shake-up of the country's rail network. In 2007, after years of campaigning by the families, Network Rail was fined £4 million for health and safety breaches.

Travelling by train on the same line from Paddington towards Gloucestershire, it is easy to imagine the scene in those carriages seconds before the impact. Passengers gaze out of windows across the snaking railway lines bordered by city scrub. A few talk business into mobile phones; others sip coffees and browse through their newspapers. The disaster, says Network Rail, "simply could not happen today".

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But that promise is not enough for Denman and Maureen Groves. Neither have boarded a British train since the crash, and never will again. Their grief would not allow it, nor the sense of lingering injustice. "I can't do it, I won't do it," says Denman. "I don't want any involvement with Network Rail. The last contact I had with them was at the trial in 2007. I told the chairman he ought to be ashamed of himself."

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Q1: Read lines **4 to 11** of Source **A**.

Choose four statements below which are TRUE.

[4 marks]

- Two carriages did not go over into the stream
- There were two ladies in the carriage with Dickens
- The young lady screamed. The old lady said “My God!”
- Two old ladies were in the carriage with Dickens
- Only one carriage did not go over into the stream
- The old lady screamed. The young one said “My God!”
- Dickens told the ladies to be quiet and calm down

Q2: Refer to Source A **and** Source B. Write a summary of the **differences** in the rail disasters they each describe.

[8 marks]

Q3: Refer to Source **A**.

How does Charles Dickens use **language** to convey his thoughts and feelings about the disaster?

[12 marks]

Q4: Refer to Source A **and** Source B.

Compare how the writers present their different **perspectives** of the national railway disasters they describe.

[16 marks]

In your answer, you should:

- compare their different perspectives
- compare the methods they use to convey their attitudes
- support your ideas with quotations from both texts

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

“The government should invest more money in public transport as there are so many good reasons to use it.”

Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, explaining your views on this statement.

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

[40 marks]

Source B taken from The Telegraph, published September 28th 2014

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/road-and-rail-transport/11124741/Paddington-rail-disaster-Her-last-words-to-me-were-goodbye-Daddy.html>

Source A taken from www.mytimemachine.co.uk

where lots of great 19th C and 20th C extracts already grouped by theme can be found!