



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

English - Higher Level - Paper 1

Total Marks: 200

Duration: 2 hours 50 minutes

- This paper is divided into two sections, Section I COMPREHENDING and Section II COMPOSING.
- The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of **OTHER PEOPLE'S STORIES**.
- Candidates should familiarise themselves with each of the texts before beginning their answers.
- Both sections of this paper (COMPREHENDING and COMPOSING) must be attempted.
- Each section carries 100 marks.

SECTION I – COMPREHENDING

- Two Questions, A and B, follow each text.
- Candidates must answer a Question A on one text and a Question B on a different text. Candidates must answer only one Question A and only one Question B.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer a Question A and a Question B on the same text.

SECTION II – COMPOSING

- Candidates must write on **one** of the compositions 1 – 7.

Do not hand this up.

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TEXT 1 – TELLING OTHER PEOPLE’S STORIES

This text is based on edited extracts from a manifesto Kit de Waal delivered at A National Day for Writers organised by Words Ireland in 2018. A manifesto is a public declaration of ideas or opinions. In TEXT 1 the writer shares her views on telling other people’s stories, especially stories rooted in cultures other than the writer’s own.

Was there ever any worse advice than write what you know? Who of the greats ever wrote what they knew? Did Charlotte Brontë live in a grand country house with a man called Edward Rochester who tried to commit bigamy with her before she wrote *Jane Eyre*? Was Gustave Flaubert a woman who committed adultery before he wrote *Madame Bovary*? And how many of us could write a good book if we only wrote what we know? I would have to write about a middle-aged woman who lives in a midlands town, visits the supermarket and tends her garden. No story there.

No bestseller. Because it's not interesting. As writers we have to make things up if we want to spin a good yarn. We have to have a murder or two, a broken heart, a bank robbery, a ride in a spaceship.

But what those writers, Flaubert and Brontë, had in common is that they made you feel they did know those lives, that they did have those experiences. So we have men writing as women, we have women writing as men. We have people writing from the point of view of someone with learning difficulties, from the point of view of an animal and most common of all, people who write historical fiction from the middle ages to the second World War and beyond. And thank goodness for those books that tell us something about other worlds and other lives. Without authors who cross the boundary from what they know to what they imagine, we would have a poor library. *No Curious Incident Of The Dog in the Night Time*, *no Remains of the Day*, *no To Kill a Mockingbird*, etc.

So what is the big problem when we come to



Kit de Waal

writing about different cultures? What’s the problem when it comes to race, when it’s white people writing in the voice of a black person, of a Chinese person, of an Indian? Isn’t this the same as crossing gender and ability? What is this thing called cultural appropriation and what should we think about or do about it?

The dictionary definition is this: “Cultural appropriation is the adoption of elements of a minority culture by members of the dominant culture. It is distinguished from equal cultural exchange due to the presence of a colonial element and imbalance of power.” There’s a couple of words there that might give us a clue as to why it’s become a thing, a talking point not just in literature but in dance, in music, in dress, in film. Those words are minority, dominant and imbalance. So when one culture, the dominant one uses stuff that belongs to a minority culture, that minority culture can feel offended, a sense of loss or injustice.

For example, in an American university some white students dressed up in sombreros and ponchos and the Latino students took offence.

There has also been public debate about a girl who wore a Chinese dress for her prom night.

As writers we do not want to give offence, no one wants to be called a racist yet we want the freedom to write the book we choose, to inhabit other lives and to explore the full range of our imagination and ability. How can we do that? How do we walk the line between cultural appropriation and artistic licence?

We have to ask ourselves who we are and what we are trying to say in speaking as “the other”. What are we trying to accomplish in our writing that needs that perspective? Are we the best person to say it? Have we examined our privilege and our attitudes sufficiently to give us the necessary perspective to be authentic, sympathetic and true? Are we sure that we are not dabbling in exotica, in that fascination with the other that prevents us portraying

a rounded, rich culture with all its nuances, diversity and reality? By writing our story are we taking the place of someone better placed to tell it? Our aim should be not only to write well but to do no harm along the way.

We need to think again of the impact of taking another’s story and using it as we want. One writer put it this way, do not dip your pen in somebody else’s blood. As writers we have to be the other – without it we would have no literature, no great stories, no murder mysteries, no great romances, no historical novels, no science fiction, no fantasy – but when we become the other we need always to act with respect, to recognise the value of what we discover, and to show by our attitudes and our acknowledgements that we aren’t just appropriating but are seeking to understand.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 1, explain three insights you gain into Kit de Waal’s perspective on telling other people’s stories. Support your explanation with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) We can engage with other people’s fictional stories in different ways. Explain the reasons why you prefer to engage with other people’s fictional stories through novels **or** plays **or** films. (15)
- (iii) Identify four features of the writing style, evident in TEXT 1, and discuss how effectively these stylistic features are employed to provide both an engaging and thought-provoking exploration of the issues raised. Support your answer with reference to TEXT 1. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

You have been asked to write **an introduction** to a collection of fictional and non-fictional writing called *Other People’s Stories*. The book includes a selection of short stories, personal essays, novel extracts and interviews. In your introduction you should: explain why you find the mix of fictional and non-fictional writing in the text attractive, discuss the value you see in engaging with other people’s stories through reading, and explain why you would recommend this particular collection to readers.

TEXT 2 – SHUGGIE’S STORY

The following text is based on edited extracts from the opening paragraphs of Douglas Stuart’s Booker Prize winning novel, *Shuggie Bain*. In this extract, we are introduced to the novel’s main character, the young Glaswegian, Shuggie.

The day was flat. That morning his mind had abandoned him and left his body wandering down below. The empty body went listlessly through its routine, pale and vacant-eyed under the fluorescent strip lights, as his soul floated above the aisles and thought only of tomorrow. Tomorrow was something to look forward to.

Shuggie was methodical in setting up for his shift. All the pots of oily dips and spreads were decanted into clean trays. The edges were wiped free of any splashes that would go brown quickly and ruin the illusion of freshness. The sliced hams were artfully arranged with fake parsley sprigs, and the olives were turned so that viscous juice slid like mucus over their green skins.

Ann McGee had the brass neck to call in sick again that morning, leaving him with the thankless task of running his deli counter and her rotisserie stand all alone. No day ever started well with six dozen raw chickens, and today of all days, it was stealing the sweetness out of his daydreams.

He pushed industrial skewers through each cold, dead bird and lined them up neatly in a row. There was a time he would have taken pride in this orderliness. In reality, pushing the metal through the bumpy pink flesh was the easy part; the difficult part was resisting the urge to do the same to the customers. They would pore over the hot glass and study each of the carcasses in detail. They would choose only the best bird, ignorant to the fact that battery farming meant that they were all identical. Shuggie would stand there, his back teeth pinching the inside of his cheek, and indulge their indecisiveness with a forced smile. Then the pantomime would really



begin. *“Gies three breasts, five thighs, and just wan wing the day, son.”*

He prayed for strength. Why did no one want a whole chicken anymore? He would lift the carcass using long prongs, careful not to touch the birds with his gloved hands. He felt like a fool standing there against the broiler lights. His scalp was sweating under the hairnet. And all the time he kept smiling.

If he was very unlucky, the tongs would slip and the chicken would thud and slide its way across the gritty floor. He’d have to make an apologetic pretence of starting again, but he never wasted that dirty bird. When the women turned away he would put it back with its sisters under the hot yellow lights. He believed in hygiene well enough, but these little private victories stopped him from starting a riot. Most of the judgy, man-faced housewives who shopped here deserved it. The way they looked down on him flushed the back of his neck scarlet.

He had worked for Kilfeathers for over a year. It was never meant to be that long. It was just

that he had to feed himself and pay his own rent each week, and the supermarket was the only business that would take him. Mr Kilfeather was parsimonious; he liked to staff the shop with anyone he didn't have to pay a full adult wage, and Shuggie found himself able to take short shifts that fit around his patchy schooling. In his dreams he always intended to move on. He'd always loved to brush and play with hair; it was the only thing that made time truly fly.

When he had turned sixteen he had promised himself he would go to the hairdressing college that sat south of the River Clyde. He had

gathered up all of his inspiration, the sketches he had copied from the Littlewood catalogue and pages ripped from the Sunday magazines. Then he had gone to Cardonald to see about the evening classes. At the bus stop outside the college he alighted with half a dozen eighteen-year-olds. They wore the newest, most-fashionable gear and talked with a buzzing confidence that masked their own nerves. Shuggie walked half as fast as they did. He watched them go in the front door, then he recrossed the street to catch the bus going the other way. He started at Kilfeathers the following week.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 2, explain three insights you gain into the struggles in Shuggie Bain's life. Support your explanation with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) We can engage with other people's fictional stories in different ways. Explain the reasons why you prefer to engage with other people's fictional stories through novels **or** plays **or** films. (15)
- (iii) Identify four features of the writing style, evident in TEXT 2, and discuss how these stylistic features contribute to making the above text both a realistic and an evocative portrayal of Shuggie's story. Support your answer with reference to TEXT 2. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

Every year your former school produces a Careers Handbook. As well as information and advice on courses and careers, the handbook features articles by former students who have followed interesting or unusual career paths. It is 2043, and you have been invited to submit **an article** on your journey through the world of work for the Careers Handbook. In your article you should: explain what inspired or motivated you to follow your particular career path, outline some of the challenges and set-backs you overcame and reflect on what you have learned about yourself in the process.

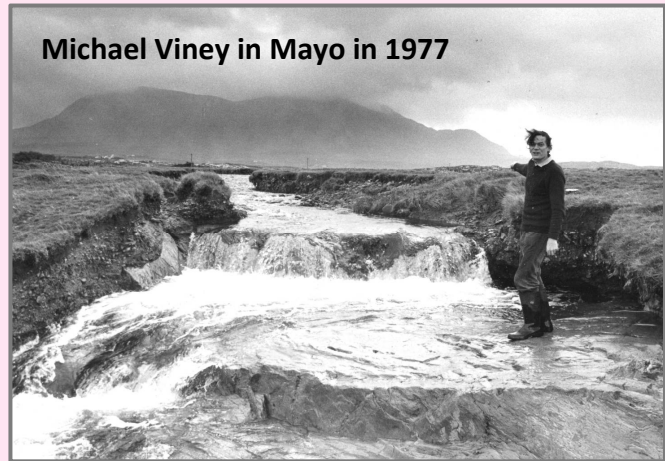
TEXT 3 – THE STORY OF ANOTHER LIFE

For more than 45 years Michael Viney captivated readers with his weekly newspaper column, *Another Life*. Each week Viney detailed the story of his family's sustainable lifestyle in rural Mayo and shared his enthusiasm for natural history. This text is based on edited extracts from Viney's first column in the series. It originally appeared in *The Irish Times* in 1977.

Looking for the germ of it, the fatal nudge, I'd settle for the day the local JCB bit deep into the meadow and came up with jaws full of dark, sandy loam. Up to that moment, our cottage in the West was just the traditional perk of a Dublin professional family; there for the Friday-night dash once a month and ultimately for enfeebled retirement. The land that came with the house had been just a part of the view grazed by the neighbours' sheep and by the finches and linnets that flocked to the thistles in the autumn. We thought it must surely be lean land, here on a hillside of boulders and streams. The digger, trenching for a tank, proved us wrong. The soil was deep, and as clean and crisp in the hand as any potting mixture. It dared us not to wait until we were too old to work it.

Once countenanced at all, the idea of this move promoted itself with a fine disregard of other events in our lives. It fed on our belief that anyone can do almost anything, given the will, the muscle and the right advice. As, tacitly, "if" became "when", we rummaged through the options of setting up a homestead of frugal comfort. It was during this process that we found that we had become part not merely of a trend but of a whole international subculture.

There was a time when a move like ours was merely the folly of middle-aged romantics. But that was before the energy crisis, before organic gardening, macrobiotics and the herbalist revival. Self-sufficiency today goes way beyond growing your own courgettes and brewing your own beer. At the ultimate, it experiments with "alternative" social groupings and "alternative" technologies



Michael Viney in Mayo in 1977

exemplified by windmill and solar power. Far from exalting the noble savage or trying to get back to nature by ignoring technology, it tries to demystify it, and bring it under domestic or communal control. Having a freezer is quite respectable, but running it off a windmill would earn us extra points.

Like it or not, therefore, we find ourselves apprenticed to a movement of protest against waste and consumerism, energy monopolies, junk foods and the rape of earth and sea. And so long as we're allowed to keep a sense of humour and don't have to wear sandals carved from tractor tyres as a mark of the truly, truly self-sufficient, we are happy to follow the way and the light.

The committed alternative technologist would be ecstatic at our location – not for its views of mountains and sea but for its mean annual windspeed (among the highest in Ireland) and for the stream that runs beside the house. Technologists may deal in averages; we've seen the extremes and found them frightening. There is, for example, a special menace in the wind from Mweelrea, the great

pillared mountain that lifts our morning sun. The gales from the Atlantic may lean upon us until the walls creak, but the wind from Mweelrea, curling around the summit, slams the townland with a destructive punch. What would happen to a windmill in stresses like that?

The stream brings us water from the high ridge to the north. It looks tame enough in dry weather, muttering along in its own little glen and ducking out under the fuchsia: one might think of damming it for a trout pond or using it to drive a modest waterwheel. But we have seen it in quite a different form, swollen by freak rains into a foaming torrent yards across. No weir or fingerlings [small fish] would have survived that roaring night, as bridges all along the road were smashed or swept away.

One of the reasons for changing our lives was to

shape a better balance between the mental and the physical. We are not retiring, nor are we “opting out” if that means a social withdrawal. This townland is a community, all the more tightly knit for being remote. The nearest town is ten miles away, the nearest market town twice that. In such a location, you don’t hold aloof from your neighbours and then expect help in a crunch.

In this first column, I have tried to give the feel of what we’re about. We appreciate our privilege in having portable skills such as journalism to help with some kind of cash flow. The social “movement” I have sketched in is real enough, if somewhat new to Ireland. It offers a wider context for our fairly straightforward attempts at self-sufficiency, and at integration into country life. Next week, I’ll introduce the bees.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 3, explain three reasons why the above article, written in 1977, is still current in its content and philosophy in 2023. Support your explanation with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) We can engage with other people’s true stories in different ways. Explain the reasons why you prefer to engage with other people’s non-fictional stories through biographies **or** memoirs **or** documentary films. (15)
- (iii) Identify four features of the writing style, evident in TEXT 3, and discuss how these stylistic features may have helped to give Michael Viney’s weekly newspaper column an enduring appeal. Support your answer with reference to TEXT 3. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

Imagine you are a teenage member of a family who move from Dublin to live a self-sufficient lifestyle in rural Ireland. You decide to write a blog in which you share this experience. Write **three blog posts**: the first on the night before you leave Dublin in which you reflect on what you are leaving behind and the changes ahead, the second after a month in your new home as you struggle to adjust, and the third in which you share your thoughts and feelings after a year of living in a rural area.

SECTION II

COMPOSING

(100 marks)

Write a composition on **any one** of the composition assignments that appear in **bold print** below.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. In TEXT 2, we see Shuggie Bain abandon his dream to become a hairdresser.
Write an inspirational speech, to be delivered at a national youth event, on the transformative power of dreams both for individuals and for entire communities.

2. The theme of this examination paper is “Other People’s Stories”.
Write a feature article, to be published in a popular magazine, which explores our endless fascination with the lives of others, both celebrities and people we know well.

3. In TEXT 2, we find Shuggie Bain working in a supermarket.
Write a short story, set in a fictitious supermarket, in which at least one of the employees is involved in ongoing tension with both the manager and the customers.

4. In TEXT 2, Shuggie, like many young people, has a part-time job that fits around his schooling.
Write a personal essay in which you reflect on the appropriate balance in life between work and leisure and evaluate your own lifestyle in this respect.

5. In TEXT 3, we learn Michael Viney’s thoughts on pursuing a self-sufficient lifestyle.
Write a discursive essay in which you consider some of the lifestyle choices you believe to be environmentally ethical and appropriate in 2023.

6. In TEXT 1, Kit de Waal poses the question, “Was there ever any worse advice than write what you know?”.
Write a personal essay in which you reflect on some of the worst advice you were ever given. Your essay may be serious or humorous or both.

7. In TEXT 1, Kit de Waal observes that the life of a middle-aged woman who lives in a midlands town, visits the supermarket and tends her garden is not interesting.
Write at least one scene for a radio play in which a middle-aged woman living in a midlands town becomes embroiled in a bitter dispute with her next-door neighbours.

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Acknowledgements

Images and texts that appear on this examination paper were sourced as follows:

TEXT 1: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/don-t-dip-your-pen-in-someone-else-s-blood-writers-and-the-other-1.3533819>

Image: Photograph: Justine Stoddart sourced as per TEXT 1

TEXT 2: *Shuggie Bain*, Stuart, D., Picador, London, 2020

Image: <https://www.dw.com/en/douglas-stuarts-shuggie-bain-wins-2020-booker-prize/a-55677396>

TEXT 3: <https://www.irishtimes.com/environment/2023/02/04/the-first-another-life-those-who-see-us-as-retiring-should-try-humping-sacks-of-potatoes-and-cement/>

Image: <https://www.irishtimes.com/environment/2022/09/03/michael-vineys-first-article-for-the-irish-times-the-man-in-the-cottage/> Another Life: Michael Viney in 1977. Photograph: Tom Lawlor

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Leaving Certificate – Higher Level

English

2 hours 50 minutes