



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2012

English – Higher Level – Paper I

Total Marks: 200

Wednesday, 6 June – Morning, 9.30 – 12.20

- This paper is divided into two sections, Section I COMPREHENDING and Section II COMPOSING.
- The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of MEMORY.
- 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.

TEXT 1

Personal Memories

This edited extract is adapted from “Where the World Began” by Canadian writer, Margaret Laurence, in which she remembers and reflects on the small prairie town where she grew up. This text has been adapted from the original, for the purpose of assessment, without the author’s prior consent.



A strange place it was, that place where the world began. A place of incredible happenings, splendours and revelations, despairs like multitudinous pits of isolated hells. A place of shadow-spookiness, inhabited by the unknowable dead. A place of jubilation and of mourning, horrible and beautiful.

It was, in fact, a small prairie town.

Because that settlement and that land were my first and for many years my only real knowledge of this planet, in some profound way they remain my world, my way of viewing. My eyes were formed there. Towns like ours, set in a sea of land, have been described thousands of times as dull, bleak, flat, uninteresting. All I can say is – well, you really have to live there to know that country. The town of my childhood could be called bizarre, agonizingly repressive or cruel at times, and the land in which it grew could be called harsh in the violence of its seasonal changes. But never merely flat or uninteresting. Never dull.

In winter, we used to hitch rides on the back of the milk sleigh, our moccasins squeaking and slithering on the hard rutted snow of the roads, our hands in ice-bubbled mitts hanging onto the box edge of the sleigh for dear life. Those mornings, rising, there would be the perpetual fascination of the frost feathers on windows, the ferns and flowers and eerie faces traced there during the night by unseen

artists of the wind. Evenings, coming back from skating, the sky would be black but not dark, for you could see a cold glitter of stars from one side of the earth’s rim to the other. And then the sometime astonishment when you saw the Northern Lights flaring across the sky, like the scrawled signature of God. After a blizzard, when the snowploughs hadn’t yet got through, school would be closed for the day, the assumption being that the town’s young could not possibly flounder through five feet of snow in the pursuit of education.

We would then gaily don snowshoes and flounder for miles out into the white dazzling deserts, in pursuit of a different kind of knowing. If you came back too close to night, through the woods at the foot of the town hill, the thin black branches of poplar and chokecherry now meringued with frost, sometimes you heard coyotes. Or maybe the banshee wolf-voices were really only inside your head.

Summers were scorching, and when no rain came and the wheat became bleached and dried before it headed, the faces of farmers and townsfolk would not smile much. Yet the outside world had its continuing marvels. The poplar bluffs and the small river were filled and surrounded with a zillion different grasses, stones, and weed flowers. The meadowlarks sang undaunted from the twanging telephone wires along the gravel highway. Once we found an old flat-bottomed scow (boat), and launched

her, poling along the shallow brown waters, mending her with wedges of hastily chewed Spearmint, grounding her among the tangles of yellow marsh marigolds that grew succulently along the banks of the shrunken river, while the sun made our skins smell dusty-warm.

The oddities of the place were endless. An elderly lady used to serve, as her afternoon tea offering to other ladies, soda biscuits spread with peanut butter and topped with a whole marshmallow. Some considered this slightly eccentric, when compared with chopped egg sandwiches, and admittedly talked about her behind her back, but no one ever refused these delicacies. Another lady dyed her hair a bright and cheery orange, by strangers often mistaken at twenty paces for a feather hat. My own beloved stepmother wore a silver fox neckpiece, a whole pelt, with the embalmed head still on.

When I was eighteen, I couldn't wait to get out of that town, away from the prairies. I did not know then that I would carry the land and town all my life within my skull, and they would form the mainspring and source of the writing I was to do, wherever and however far away I might live.

This was my territory in the time of my youth, and in a sense my life since then has been an attempt to look at it, to come to terms with it. Stultifying to the mind it certainly could be, and sometimes was, but not to the imagination. It was many things, but it was never dull.

My true roots were here. This is where my world began. A world which formed me, and continues to do so, even while I fought it in some of its aspects, and continue to do so. A world which gave me my own lifework to do, because it was here that I learned the sight of my own particular eyes.

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

Questions A and B carry 50 marks each.

QUESTION A

- (i) Margaret Laurence claims that the world of her childhood was 'never dull'. In your opinion, which **three** pieces of evidence from the text most effectively support her claim? In each case, briefly explain your choice. (15)
- (ii) What do the last three paragraphs reveal about the writer's present attitude to the small prairie town where she grew up? (15)
- (iii) Do you think this passage is a good example of effective autobiographical writing? Give reasons for your answer. (20)

QUESTION B

Write a **letter** to Margaret Laurence, in response to Text 1, commenting on what you find interesting in the extract, and telling her about your home place and its impact on you. (50)



TEXT 2

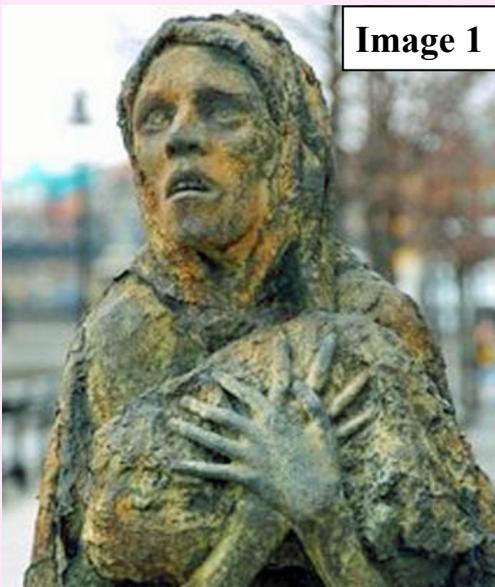
Shared Memories

This text consists of an edited extract from a speech, delivered by former President Mary Robinson to an international conference on hunger. In it she considers the commemoration of the Irish famine of 1845 and explores how society's memory of the past, our collective social memory, shapes our response to contemporary issues. This text has been adapted from the original, for the purpose of assessment, without the author's prior consent.

The Irish famine is an event which more than any other shaped us as a people. It defined our will to survive. It defined our sense of human vulnerability. It remains one of the strongest, most poignant links of memory and feeling that connects us to our diaspora.

Historians recognise that it is important, indeed imperative, that we the survivors, and future generations, should know about those who had no one to speak for them at the time of their greatest need and suffering. The story of the silent people should be heard. But the story is not confined just to Ireland. I think particularly of Charles Fanning's fine book, *The Exiles of Erin*, which painstakingly lays before its readers the stories of those who escaped from famine and came to the United States and began to make a new present, which has now become a shared past.

At the conclusion of another book which I have read with enormous interest - *The End of Hidden Ireland*, by Robert Scally - there is a striking and moving sentence. Describing the emigrants who set out on the desolate journey from Ireland to America, he writes, "Peering from the stern rather than the bow of the emigrant ship, that backward glance at the incongruous palms and gaily painted houses



Detail from Famine Memorial, Dublin

along the shore near Skibbereen was not only their last sight of Ireland but the first sight of themselves." It is the backward glance leading to self-knowledge which in this sentence is so striking.



Mary Robinson with Nadhifa Ibrahim Mohamed, a health-worker in Somalia

We need to reflect carefully on the purpose of commemorating an event such as the famine. The terrible realities of our past hunger present themselves to us as nightmare images. The bailiff, the famine wall. The eviction. The workhouse. And yet how willing are we to negotiate those past images into the facts of present-day hunger? How ready are we to realise that what happened to us may have shaped our national identity, but it is not an experience confined to us as a people? How ready are we to see that the bailiff and the workhouse and the coffin ship have equally terrible equivalents in other countries for other peoples at this very moment?

For every piece of economic knowledge our children gain about the crops exported from Ireland during the famine years, let them come to understand the harsh realities of today's markets which reinforce the poverty and helplessness of those who already experience hunger.

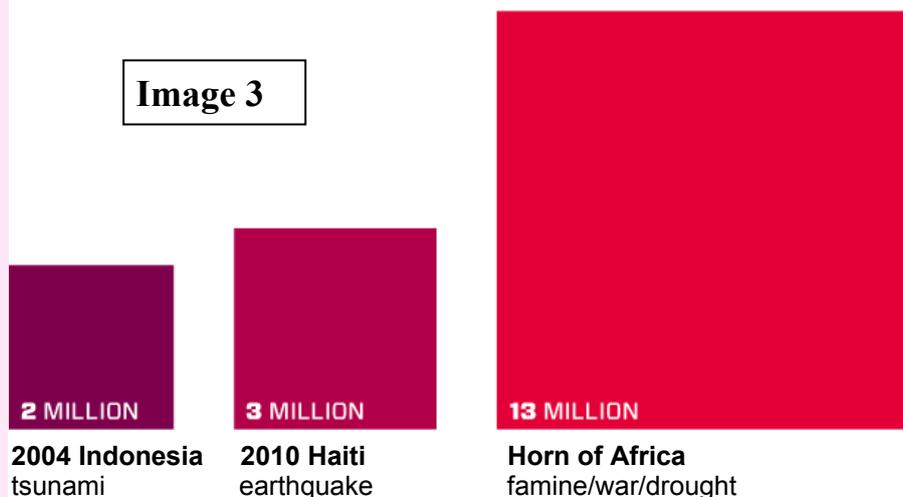
Let them learn, too, from the influence the famine has had on contemporary Irish poets. When Eavan Boland [in her poem, *The Famine Road*] reflects sadly on the limitation of the science of cartography because the famine road does not

show up on the map, or Seamus Heaney writes: “and where potato diggers are/you still smell the running sore” they are drawing inspiration from that dark moment of our past. They remind us that famine in our contemporary world also silences the culture of peoples who are portrayed to us all too often as mere statistics. That portrayal makes it easier for us to distance ourselves, to switch off.

If we are to account for the sheer horror of the

disparity between twelve million children who died in the developing world in one year and the few hundred thousand it could have been if the world’s resources were better distributed, then we will need to send young people into the world who have been prepared to close the gap between the idea of hunger and the fact of it. We need to help young people to face the future with the understanding that famine is not something which can be understood only through history. It must be understood with every fibre of our moral being.

FACT: THE CRISIS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA IS UNLIKE ANY OTHER – DISPLACING, STARVING, KILLING OVER 13 MILLION PEOPLE



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

Questions A and B carry 50 marks each.

QUESTION A

- (i) In the above extract, Mary Robinson explains why she thinks it is important to commemorate the Irish famine of 1845. Which **three** points from the text do you think most effectively support her viewpoint? In each case, briefly explain your choice. (15)
- (ii) Identify and comment on **three** elements of effective speech-writing in Mary Robinson’s address to the conference on hunger. In your answer you should refer only to the written text. (15)
- (iii) Consider the three visual images that accompany this text. Which **two** of the images would you have chosen to project as a backdrop to Mary Robinson as she delivered the above speech? Explain your choice, discussing the impact you think these images would make on the audience. (In your answer, you should refer both to your chosen images and to the written text.) (20)

QUESTION B

Write a **proposal**, to be submitted to the relevant authority (e.g. local council or national body), suggesting one event or person you believe should be commemorated. Explain why you feel this person or event should be commemorated and suggest what form this commemoration might take.

(50)



TEXT 3

A journey remembered and revisited

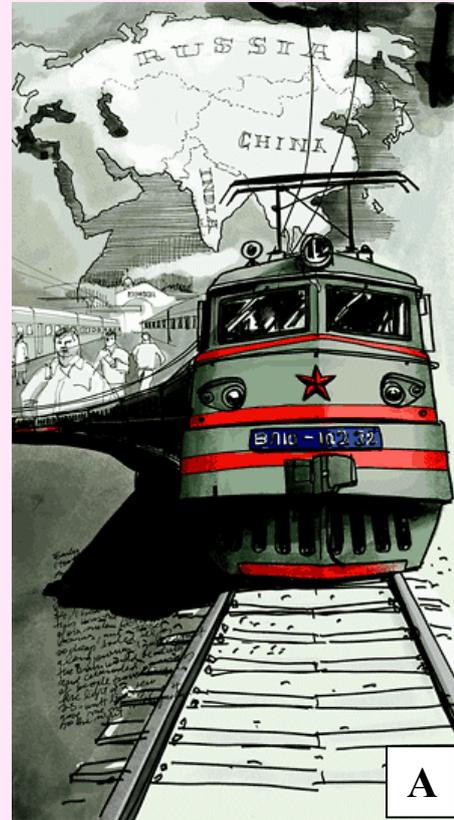
This text is adapted from Paul Theroux's book entitled *Ghost Train to the Eastern Star*. In this edited extract he describes travelling like a "ghost" through his own memories as he revisits places he had experienced earlier in his life. This text has been adapted from the original, for the purpose of assessment, without the author's prior consent.

Travel can induce such a distinct and nameless feeling of strangeness and disconnection in me that I feel insubstantial, like a puff of smoke, merely a ghost, a creepy spectre from the underworld, unobserved and watchful among real people, wandering, listening while remaining unseen. Being invisible – the usual condition of the older traveller – is much more useful than being obvious. Ghosts have all the time in the world, another pleasure of long-distance aimlessness. And this ghostliness, I was to find, was also an effect of the journey I had chosen, returning to places I had known many years ago. It is almost impossible to return to an early scene in your travelling life and not feel like a spectre. And many places I saw were themselves sad and spectral, while I was the haunting presence, the eavesdropping shadow on the ghost train.

Long after I took the trip I wrote about in *The Great Railway Bazaar*, I went on thinking how I'd gone overland, changing trains across Asia, improvising my trip, rubbing against the world. And reflecting on what I'd seen – the way the unrevisited past is always looping in your dreams. Memory is a ghost train too. Ages later you still ponder the beautiful face you once glimpsed in a distant country; or the sight of a noble tree, or a country road, or a happy tale in a café, or the sound of a train at night, striking that precise musical note of train whistles.

Thirty-three years went by. I was then twice as old as the person who had ridden those trains, most of them pulled by steam locomotives, boiling across the hinterland of Turkey and India. Had my long-ago itinerary changed as much as me? I had the idea of taking the same trip again, travelling in my own footsteps.

The decision to return to any early scene in your life is dangerous but irresistible. A great satisfaction in growing old – one of many – is assuming the role of a witness to the wobbling of the world and seeing irreversible changes. Older people are perceived as cynics – but no, they are simply people who have at last heard



the still, sad music of humanity played by an inferior rock band howling for fame. Going back and retracing my footsteps would be for me a way of seeing who I was, where I went, and what subsequently happened to the places I had seen.

The thing to avoid would be the tedious reminiscences of better days, the twittering of the nostalgia bore, whose message is usually *I was there and you weren't*. 'I remember when you could get four of those for a dollar.' 'There was a big tree in a field where that building is now'. 'In my day...' Oh, shut up!

What traveller backtracked to take the great trip again? You could ask, 'why should they bother?' Certain poets, notably Wordsworth and Yeats, enlarged their vision and found enlightenment in returning to an earlier landscape of their lives. My proposed trip to retrace the itinerary of *The Great Railway Bazaar* was mainly curiosity on my part, with a hankering to be away.

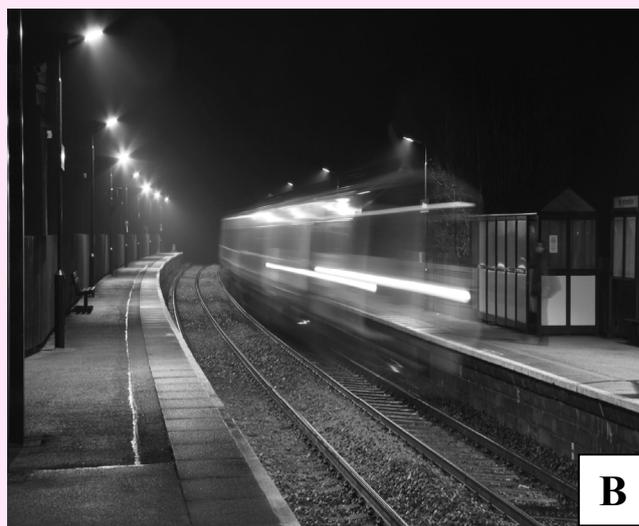
At Waterloo Station I found the right platform for the Eurostar, the 12.09 to Paris. The reminders of

my old London were almost immediate. The indifference of Londoners, their brisk way of walking, their fixed expressions, no one wearing a hat in the rain yet some carrying brollies – all of us striding past a gaunt young woman swaddled in dirty quilts, sitting on the wet floor at the foot of some metal steps at the railway station, begging.

I was a few minutes out of Waterloo, clattering across the shiny rain-drenched rails of Clapham Junction, thinking: I have been here before. On the line through south London, my haunted face at the window, my former life as a Londoner began to pass before my eyes. I got a glimpse of a cinema I had gone to until it became a bingo hall, the church that was turned into a daycare centre. Beyond the common the Alfarthing Primary School, where my kids, all pale faces and skinny legs, were taught to sing by Mrs Quarmby. These were streets I knew well: one where my bike was stolen, another where my car was broken into; greengrocers and butcher shops where I'd shopped; the chippie, the florist, the Chinese grocer, the newsagent, an Indian from Mwanza who liked speaking Swahili with me because

he missed the shores of Lake Victoria. From scenes like these I had made my London life.

But the wonderful thing was that I was whisked through south London with such efficiency, I was spared the deeper pain of looking closely at the past. I was snaking through tunnels and across viaducts and railway cuttings, looking left and right at the landscape of my personal history and, happily, moving on, to other places that held no ambiguous memories.



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

Questions A and B carry 50 marks each.

QUESTION A

- (i) Based on your reading of the above text, what impression do you form of the writer, Paul Theroux? Support your view with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) Which one of the visual images (A or B) do you think best illustrates the above text? In your response refer to both visual images. (15)
- (iii) Paul Theroux is a successful travel writer. Based on the above passage, what do you think makes his writing attractive to so many readers? In your answer, you should refer to both the content and style of the text. (20)

QUESTION B

Your school's Student Council is currently discussing the issue of school outings, educational trips, theatre visits, etc. Write a **persuasive article** for your school website supporting or opposing such events. (50)

Write a composition on **any one** of the following.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments (in **bold print** below) are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. “Yet the outside world had its continuing marvels...” (TEXT 1)

Write a personal essay on what you consider to be the marvels of today’s world.

2. “Memory is a ghost train too.” (TEXT 3)

Write a feature article for a newspaper or magazine on the role played by memory and the past in our lives.

3. “... an inferior rock band howling for fame.” (TEXT 3)

Write a short story inspired by the phrase, “... an inferior rock band howling for fame”.

4. “... another book which I have read with enormous interest ...” (TEXT 2)

Write a persuasive speech about the importance of literature in people’s lives.

5. “... all the time in the world...” (TEXT 3)

Write a light-hearted and entertaining article, intended for publication in a magazine aimed at young people, in response to the phrase, “...all the time in the world”.

6. “... shaped our national identity...” (TEXT 2)

Write the text of an address you could deliver to an international gathering of young people outlining what you believe helps to define Ireland’s distinctive national identity.

7. “When I was eighteen, I couldn’t wait to get out of that town ...” (TEXT 1)

Write a short story in which a young character is eager to leave home.

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