

YEAR 9

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

END OF YEAR EXAM

SECTION A OF IGCSE PAPER:

NON-FICTION TEXTS

EXTRACTS BOOKLET

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SECTION A: READING

Read the following passages carefully and then answer Section A in the Question Paper.

Text one: *Ice Swimming in Tromsø*

In the passage, the writer describes an experience he had in Tromsø, north of the Arctic Circle.

By the time we've found the right beach, the fire is already lit and it's burning beautifully. There's no clubhouse, as it turns out, just a circle of stones on the beach with this glorious blaze in the middle and gathered around it are a small group of hearty Tromsø Ice Swimmers. There were two men and two women, all in late middle age, all in enviably good condition to be honest (is this down to the Ice Swimming?), and all hilarious. 'Welcome!' they shout mirthfully.



I feel like our son Rex looks before he's got an important line in a school assembly: all puffy-faced and grey (he's a pupil not a headmaster). I do quite a lot of laughing rather too loudly. Then, suddenly, all of the things that have stood between me and the Ice Swimming (the morning, the journey here, the walk to the beach, the banter) seem to have disappeared with shocking speed. Gone, all gone, and now the moment is cruelly upon us. The professional Ice Swimmers have all come in their swimwear under their outer clothes (which bear impressive national credentials like 'Norwegian Ice Swimming Team 2012'), so they are all ready in seconds, but I have to change right here on the snowy beach.

'What do I stand on while I'm getting ready?' I ask poignantly (does it really matter? I'm going Ice Swimming, after all). Someone takes pity on me and produces a small square of neoprene¹ that is actually a godsend; there is just room to perch on one foot at a time while I hop out of trousers, thermals, socks, etc. Then I'm ready. If I'm going to do this, then 'twere well it were done quickly.

We move heartily towards the waterline like an infantry regiment gathering below the lip of a trench. Strangely, being almost naked in that temperature (-4°C) already feels like quite a commitment to the world of cold, so what comes next seems to follow on uninhibitedly. The water is -1°C . ('Look, minus one!' shouts one of the swimmers, who's dutifully brought his water thermometer with him.) There's nothing for it but to push on and hope to be home by Christmas. I don't think anyone blows a whistle, but it wouldn't be entirely out of place if they did.

With a final instruction to watch out for sea urchins (!) we walk on into the water, adrenaline dulling the searing pain of the icy hit as the gun-metal-grey sea stretches ahead of us. We keep up a decent pace, so ankles, knees, crotch, waist (each of which used to be a milestone when we were little and easing ourselves into cold rivers, lakes or seas) all fall to the enemy advance in quick succession. The next and final cruelty, the moment when the wildebeest falls to the lions, is the shoulders-under moment. It happens in a blur and is followed by several involuntary spasms of frantic swimming (people watching from the beach worry that perhaps I'm going too far out – such is my mania to swim and keep moving) but I am IN.

Apparently six minutes is the longest time anyone has done, though a stout Russian lad² they all know who can do twenty does get a respectful mention in dispatches.

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Apparently you just have to get through the initial three minutes of hyperventilation² then the body adjusts, but you don't want to adjust too much because if you stop feeling the cold it's definitely time to get out. The danger point is when the blood leaves the extremities to concentrate on the core. I last little over a minute, after which I feel I can make for the bank without having to let myself down. 45

It's not uncommon, I'm later told, for people to drown as a result of inhaling water while in the early throes of shock. 'Oh really?' I reply, sipping on hot coffee. This whole 'people dying' thing was rather downplayed in the pre-bathe pep talk. 50

'So why do you do this?' seems a reasonable question to put to the group once we are safely gathered around the fire. 'There must be wonderful health benefits.'

'No' says the stouter of the two men, the one with what I now see is an impressively purple nose, 'not really. It's about doing something crazy, because we all need a bit of craziness in our lives.' 55

It certainly feels good to be alive, standing on that snow-covered beach wrapped in towels and coats and fleeces. There is something faintly exciting (in a hot-curry, endorphin-rush kind of a way) about the pain I've just put myself through. After maybe two or three seconds of utter bafflement, you start to feel the rough jolting friction of so many urgent messages barrelling along so many neural pathways – there's no way this doesn't have a stimulating effect mentally. The only danger is that in your post-swim euphoria you stand about patting yourself on the back for too long with nothing on your feet and wonder why, two hours later, once the sensation has returned to every other part of you, your toes are still numb. But there's no time to hang around worrying about circulation; we've got to fly further north. 60 65

¹ *neoprene* – protective rubber material

² *hyperventilation* – breathing very quickly

Text two: 127 hours – Between a Rock and a Hard Place

In the passage, the writer describes his experience of a rock-climbing accident.

I come to another drop-off. This one is maybe eleven or twelve feet high, a foot higher and of a different geometry than the overhang I descended ten minutes ago. Another refrigerator chockstone is wedged between the walls, ten feet downstream from and at the same height as the ledge. It gives the space below the drop-off the claustrophobic feel of a short tunnel. Instead of the walls widening after the drop-off, or opening into a bowl at the bottom of the canyon, here the slot narrows to a consistent three feet across at the lip of the drop-off and continues at that width for fifty feet down the canyon.

Sometimes in narrow passages like this one, it's possible for me to stem my body across the slot, with my feet and back pushing out in opposite directions against the walls. Controlling this counterpressure by switching my hands and feet on the opposing walls, I can move up or down the shoulderwidth crevice fairly easily as long as the friction contact stays solid between the walls and my hands, feet, and back. This technique is known as stemming or chimneying; you can imagine using it to climb up the inside of a chimney.

Just below the ledge where I'm standing is a chockstone the size of a large bus tire, stuck fast in the channel between the walls, a few feet out from the lip. If I can step onto it, then I'll have a ninefoot height to descend, less than that of the first overhang. I'll dangle off the chockstone, then take a short fall onto the rounded rocks piled on the canyon floor.

Stemming across the canyon at the lip of the drop-off, with one foot and one hand on each of the walls, I traverse out to the chockstone. I press my back against the south wall and lock my left knee, which pushes my foot tight against the north wall. With my right foot, I kick at the boulder to test how stuck it is. It's jammed tightly enough to hold my weight. I lower myself from the chimneying position and step onto the chockstone. It supports me but teeters slightly. After confirming that I don't want to chimney down from the chockstone's height, I squat and grip the rear of the lodged boulder, turning to face back upcanyon. Sliding my belly over the front edge, I can lower myself and hang from my fully extended arms, akin to climbing down from the roof of a house.

As I dangle, I feel the stone respond to my adjusting grip with a scraping quake as my body's weight applies enough torque to disturb it from its position. Instantly, I know this is trouble, and instinctively, I let go of the rotating boulder to land on the round rocks below. When I look up, the backlit chockstone falling toward my head consumes the sky. Fear shoots my hands over my head. I can't move backward or I'll fall over a small ledge. My only hope is to push off the falling rock and get my head out of its way.

The next three seconds play out at a tenth of their normal speed. Time dilates, as if I'm dreaming, and my reactions decelerate. In slow motion: The rock smashes my left hand against the south wall; my eyes register the collision, and I yank my left arm back as the rock ricochets; the boulder then crushes my right hand and ensnares my right arm at the



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wrist, palm in, thumb up, fingers extended; the rock slides another foot down the wall with my arm in tow, tearing the skin off the lateral side of my forearm. Then silence.

My disbelief paralyzes me temporarily as I stare at the sight of my arm vanishing into an implausibly small gap between the fallen boulder and the canyon wall. Within moments, my nervous system's pain response overcomes the initial shock. Good God, my hand. The flaring agony throws me into a panic. I grimace and growl... My mind commands my body, "Get your hand out of there!" I yank my arm three times in a naive attempt to pull it out. But I'm stuck.

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Anxiety has my brain tweaking; searing-hot pain shoots from my wrist up my arm. I'm frantic, and I cry out... My desperate brain conjures up a probably apocryphal story in which an adrenaline-stoked mom lifts an overturned car to free her baby. I'd give it even odds that it's made up, but I do know for certain that right now, while my body's chemicals are raging at full flood, is the best chance I'll have to free myself with brute force. I shove against the large boulder, heaving against it, pushing with my left hand, lifting with my knees pressed under the rock. I get good leverage with the aid of a twelve-inch shelf in front of my feet. Standing on that, I brace my thighs under the boulder and thrust upward repeatedly, grunting, "Come on... move!" Nothing.

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