

GCSE English Language Paper 2

Source A

This is an extract from a Victorian book of the 1800s. The writer describes London children and the acrobatic skills of one of the boys. It is written by Albert Smith.

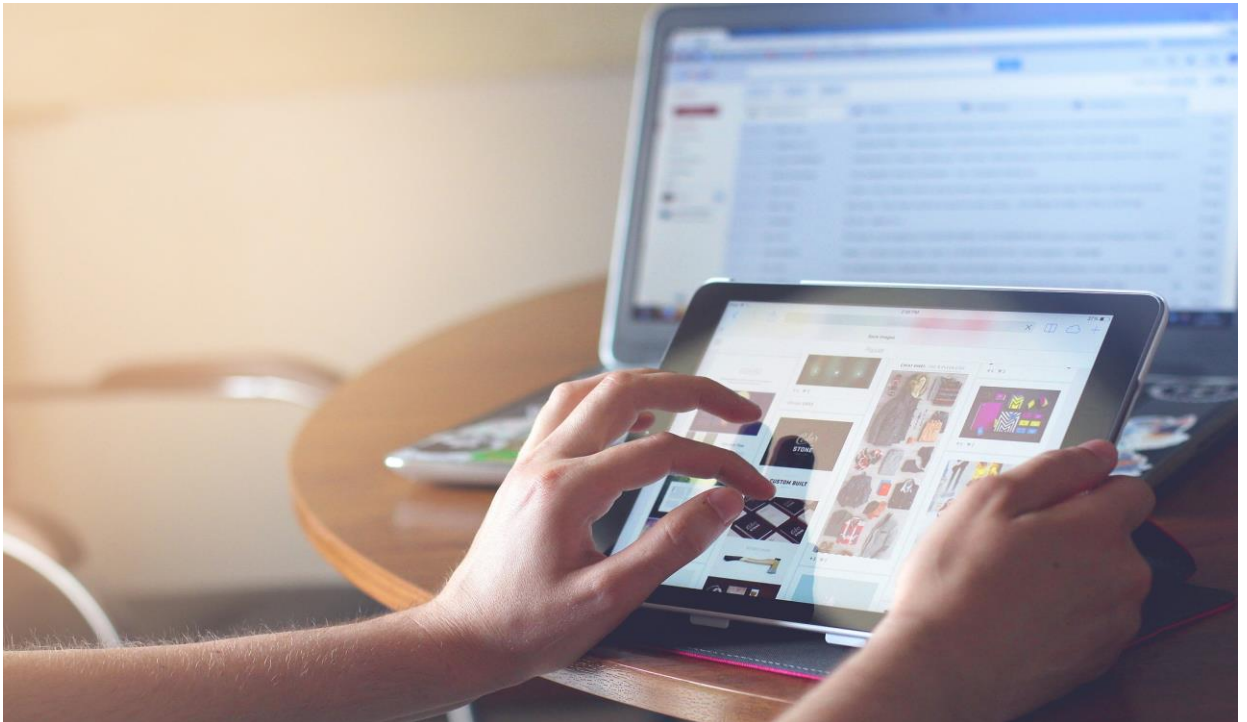
Acrobats

- Poor children's families are by no means large. You occasionally see a girl of seven or eight years staggering under the weight of a baby whose sole nurse she is; but seldom find them with brothers and sisters. Their parents live huddled up in dirty single rooms, - and whenever the rain is not actually pouring down in torrents, they turn their children out to find means of
5 amusement and subsistence, at the same time, in the streets.
- 6 As you pass through one of those narrow dirty streets, which connect to the openings of courts, narrower and dirtier still, and these again connect to alleys, so dark and close, that sunlight never comes lower down the houses than the parapets of their roofs, you will be struck, above all things, by the swarms of children everywhere collected. They scuffle about, and run across your path, and disappear, like rabbits in a warren, in obscure holes. They wait on the kerb until a coach approaches, and run under the very knees of the horse. They collect round the open water plug, and spend the entire day there, all returning wet through to the
13 skin.
- 14 Of the children's favourite haunts, there is not one more popular than the bit of open ground where a mass of houses have been pulled down to make room for a new street or building. If they find an old beam of timber, so much the better. They turn it into a see-saw, and, this accomplished, a policeman is the only power that can drive them from the spot. They build forts with brick-bats. They flatten the mounds of rubbish perfectly smooth by running, or being dragged up and down them; they make huts and nothing in the world gives them more delight
20 than taking up some pavement.
- 21 Picture such a bit of ground, on a fine afternoon, alive with children. There is a boy, who for the last five minutes has been hanging by his legs to a bit of temporary railing, with his hair sweeping the ground. Others would have had a fit long before, but this appears to be his natural position. On quitting it, without caring for the empty applause of the crowd, he goes to a corner of the plot, and, putting his head and hands upon the ground, at a short distance from the wall, turns his heels up in the air, until he touches the house with his feet. This accomplished, he claps his shoeless soles together and then calmly resumes his normal
28 position, and walks away, not caring whether anybody regards him or not.
- 29 This boy is destined to become an Acrobat - at a more advanced period of his life to perform feats of suppleness and agility in the mud of the streets, the sawdust of the circus, or the turf of a race-course. His life will pass in a marvellous series of positions. He will look upon chairs as articles of furniture only used to support people with the crown of their heads on the top back rail, or their legs on the seats of two stretched out to the utmost extent allowed by their length. Ladders, with him, will in future only be ascended by twisting in and out the rounds like a serpent; and his fellow-tumblers will be regarded merely as parts of the living pedestal
36 which is to elevate him, when required, to the level of the first-floor windows.

Source B

This is an article published in a newspaper in 2017. The writer, Pete Swift, explores how he feels about his daughter and how she has grown up.

From Upsy Daisy to Instalikes



1 Yes, my name is Iggle Piggle...'. If I had a pound for every time I had to endure the annoyance of that CBBC tune when Beth was growing up, then I'd be a rich man. I'd probably be rich enough to fund her through the financial minefield of university when the time comes.

But university is somewhere done the line, thankfully. Although she's in that funny teen phase now, I now look back at her childhood with a mixture of fondness *and* horror. Nappies and CBBC **6** I could do without, but the anarchy, creativity and general stupidity of having a toddler in the house is brilliant.

The magic of snow delighted Beth, yet the accepted rule of parenthood is snow plus children equals exhaustion. Making snowdogs, sledging, snow angels...I'm not sure how I kept up to be honest. It was always her play that fascinated me. She was always creative, making robots out of toilet rolls, building a plasticine house for the hamster, and digging a well in the back garden. She did it with a knowing smirk, reserving her maddest and most energy-sapping efforts until I'd just **13** sat down.

Somewhere along the line though, plasticine gave way to WiiU and drawing became Instagram. Beth still plays, but the games she plays are not in the family home, they're somewhere in the digital ether. It's a world I'm no longer required to be part of, the words and memes beyond my reach. The screen of her phone is also out of my reach, often tilted away from my view, and hidden behind a passcode. I'm still not sure what I think about children, parents and privacy.

Everyone thinks their childhood was better than their own kids. Less technologically advanced, but time-rich. Outdoors rather than indoors. Yet when I really think about it, I reckon the children of this generation have got much to celebrate. Technology has made them communicate, albeit in a different way. Social media is primarily about feelings. And Beth is fantastic at reading people. She knows how to challenge, comfort and entertain.

So my daughter's digital teen years are mainly good ones. At the swipe of a screen, she finds a recipe for the occasional family meals she makes, she learns how to do CPR (let's hope I'm not the first recipient of her new found skills) and also engages with the issues I want her to know about: global poverty, justice and equality. Most profoundly, the thing her childhood has taught her most is to love. Beth is a carer. She cares for people, animals and anything that exists.

In recent years, she's become a carer for me. I'm often housebound and have good days and bad. The one constant is my precocious, maddening, self-absorbed, yet deeply caring daughter. I'd love to be building snowdogs again in a carefree past, but would I swap the fourteen-year-old of now for the four-year-old of the past? No chance.

Section A: Reading

Answer **all** questions in this section.

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

1. Read again the first part of the source from lines 1 to 13.

Choose **four** statements below which are **true**.

- Shade the **circles** in the boxes of the ones that you think are true.
- Choose a maximum of four statements.
- If you make an error cross out the **whole box**.
- If you change your mind and require a statement that has been crossed out then draw a circle around the box.

[4 marks]

A The writer describes a girl who is a young mother.

B The children are outside no matter how bad the weather is.

C The parents live in cramped conditions

D The children entertain themselves.

E The children are from very big

families.

F The writer describes the rabbits.

G The streets are dark and unclean.

H The writer describes the things poor children do.

02. You need to refer to **Source A** and **Source B** for this question.

The ways the children spend their time playing is different.

Use details from **both** sources to write a summary of the different ways the children in Source A and the girl in Source B play.

[8 marks]

03. You now need to refer only to **Source A** from **lines 6 to 20**.

How does the writer use language to describe the children and their surroundings?

[12 marks]

04 For this question, you need to refer to the **whole of Source A**, together with the **whole of Source B**.

Compare how the writers convey their different perspectives and feelings about the children they write about.

In your answer, you could:

- compare their different perspectives and feelings
- compare the methods the writers use to convey their different perspectives and feelings
- support your response with references to both texts.

[16 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.*

05 'Children have so many opportunities today. They have better education, access to technology and live in a society which values children.'

Write an article for a broadsheet newspaper in which you argue for **or** against this statement.

(24 marks for content and organization and
16 marks for technical accuracy)
[40 marks]

Sample Responses

Q1

C
D
G
H

Q2

The children in source A play in the outside world, seeming to be wild and free 'like rabbits'. This suggests that either they have more latitude than most children, or may be less well cared for. There seems to be little control over their play, with the suggestion that they are allowed to do as they please. In source B, the places where Beth plays are within and without the family home, but it seems as if there is a tighter bond between her and her father - her play is centred around their relationship and he seems to be ever present, perhaps suggesting that the child in source B is more cared for, or perhaps is not given much time to play by herself.

The types of play undertaken by the children in source A seem fairly dull at times, but also quite dangerous. The thrill of standing around a water plug all day seems tame by today's standards, but it is clear that some of the activities pose a risk. For instance, running under a horse could prove fatal. Source A presents children's play as a fairly unruly pastime, but also a one which brings pleasure and 'delight' to children. The implication is that a world free from adult interference is much appreciated. Beth's experiences are more shaped and although they may seem energetic, there is nothing dangerous about making snowdogs and digging wells. It seems that her childhood play is superficially exciting and varied, but it's not clear whether it brings her the same pleasure that the children in source A enjoy.

There are also clear differences in the objects the children play with. In source A, the children improvise playthings, finding discarded objects to entertain themselves. The main activity - acrobatics - is one requiring little else apart from one's own agility. In source B, the girl also finds pleasure in nature to an extent and uses discarded materials, but also relies on her father and objects such as plasticine and technology to entertain her. Both sources show how children are creative, but it appears the children in source A are more self-reliant and possibly more imaginative with their play because they have less to stimulate them.

Q3

The writer focuses heavily on the description of the streets where the children are, drawing attention to the labyrinthine world where they live. The multi-clausal sentence describing their streets seems to mirror the twisting nature of them, with a range of words connected with impoverishment such as adjectival phrases like 'narrow dirty streets'.

The images of darkness and squalor seem to be suggesting a link to the children who appear impoverished and unruly at times. This is reinforced by the use of animal imagery to characterise the children, who are described as 'swarms' and then later compared to 'rabbits in a warren'. This has the effect of making them seem anarchic and many: they seem to act as one uncontrolled mass. Verbs like 'scuffle' make them seem underhand and dirty, as if somehow their manner is a threat to 'normal' people.

The writer's attitude towards these children appears to change however. Some of the word choices imply a sort of respect for the children's irrepressible nature. For example, the consecutive collection of sentences beginning 'They...' gives the impression that the children have a kind of admirable energy. The language becomes more positive here, with attention being drawn to their ability to make a mound of rubbish 'perfectly smooth' and their effervescent 'delight' in their play.

Q4

The writer of source A is a much more detached observer of the children he writes about than the writer of source B whose admiration for his daughter is plain to see. In source A, the initial parts of the text seem to be more factual than judgmental - the writer describes the process of childhood in a fairly matter-of-fact way, telling the reader about poor children. But looking more closely, some emotive words indicate the writer's sympathy. For instance, he uses verbs and verb phrases such as 'staggering' and 'turn their children out' to imply that these children's lives are tough.

The writer of source B is clearly proud of his daughter. At first, he seems to be comically complaining about her annoying obsessions, but he baldly states the 'brilliant' experiences of her childhood and focuses on her 'creative' side and how he 'fascinated' her. These positive adjectives and verbs reveal a man who is openly proud of his daughter.

As source A continues, the writer's admiration for the skills of the children emerges more clearly. The writer describes the acrobatic qualities of the boy in such a way that the boy appears almost heroic: the insouciance of the boy is shown to be admirable as he has no 'caring for the empty applause' and seem heroically distant. Positive, almost poetic, language is used here to suggest he is 'destined' and 'marvellous'. The writer imagines his future, using the simile 'twisting...like a serpent' to convey the boy's skills. It is clear that the writer very much admires the skills of this child, perhaps particularly because of his impoverishment background.

The writer of source B also makes his daughter appear heroic and talented too, but in a different way. After focusing on his daughter's digital secrecy, he draws attention to her caring qualities, suggesting that she is far more mature than her years. He refers to her as almost an adult in the way she fulfils a maternal role as well as a political one. The language used is glowing, referring to her 'love' and her 'deeply caring' manner. Yet he also portrays her as spirited, perhaps wanting to show her as lively as well as thoughtful. To do so, a range of negative adjectives such as 'maddening' and 'self-absorbed' are placed alongside more positive ones to suggest a balance in her personality. He wants to make her seem 'normal' as well as heroic.

Q5

The snowflake generation. Soft, cosseted and firmly aware of their rights. The opportunities presented to the boys and girls in the 21st century are outrageous examples of how indulgent the world has become. Every kid has a smartphone. Every kid demands top grades. Every kid is the darling of their family.

Or so some people would have you believe.

Underlying all those assumptions is a sort of jealousy. The jealousy of an older generation who have some dewy-eyed notion of the past where life was tough but 'it didn't do me any harm!'. Life may have been less exciting or tougher in days gone by, but surely only a sadist longs for the days of chimney sweeps, corporal punishment and withheld love.

Every generation has its romantic sense of the past. It's part of the pattern of life for adults to look back at their supposedly less privileged past and compare it favourably to the experiences of their children. It's the stuff of comedy.

Do children have a better education these days? Certainly, if by better you mean endless testing, grading and the creeping accusation of underperformance. Schools are hotbeds of misery. No longer are they carefree places of inspiration. They're factories where the product is results and the victims are all of those involved. Every one is a customer. The teachers are depressed. The students are depressed.

Technology is a blessing and a curse. It brings people together and it separates them. The current generation are empowered and enslaved by it. At best, it brings truth and knowledge, at worst it's a tool for bullying and low self-esteem. Teenagers are constantly on show and judged. Call that opportunity?

I'm also uncertain as to how society values children these days. Even children don't know. To be honest, I'm not even certain that 'children' exist. They're just mini adults, subjected to adult pressures and forced to grow up and win at life before they've even been introduced to the game. Look at the figures. Child cruelty exists. Teenage suicide exists. Self-harm exists. Something has suggested to them that hiring limos for an end-of-primary-school party or wearing a 'porn star' T-shirt is somehow normal.

Behind all of the societal worries about the supposedly easy life of our youth is a more disturbing idea. It seems to me that debates about children's privilege centres on a certain type of child - the child of the privileged. It's never about the child whose parents have to use foodbanks. For privileged children, life can be a smooth road. Education can be purchased. Technology can be purchased. But what of those without such a ticket to life's feast? How much opportunity comes their way?

Children certainly do have 'better' education and technological access these days. If they live in the right families. Even then, does it bring happiness? I'm not convinced.