

PAPER 1

Source A is taken from the beginning of a short story written by Joanne Harris. Mr Fisher, a teacher of English for forty years, works at St Oswald's Grammar School for Boys.

1 Mr Fisher lived alone in a small terraced house in the centre of town. He did not own a car,
and therefore preferred to do as much as he could of his weekend marking in the form room
4 after school. Even so, there were usually two or three stacks of books and papers to take
home on the bus.

5 It had been a disappointing term at St Oswald's. For most of the boys in 3F, creative
writing was on a par with country dancing and food technology. Oh, he'd tried to engage
their interest. But books just didn't seem to kindle the same enthusiasm as they had in the
old days.

9 Mr Fisher remembered a time – surely, not so long ago – when books were golden, when
10 imaginations soared, when the world was filled with stories which ran like gazelles and
pounced like tigers and exploded like rockets, illuminating minds and hearts. He had seen
it happen; had seen whole classes swept away in the fever. In those days, there were
heroes; there were dragons and dinosaurs; there were space adventurers and soldiers of
fortune and giant apes. In those days, thought Mr Fisher, we dreamed in colour, though
15 films were in black and white, and good always triumphed in the end.

Now everything was in black and white, and though Mr Fisher continued to teach with as
much devotion to duty as he had forty years before, he was secretly aware that his voice
had begun to lack conviction. To these boys, these sullen boys with their gelled hair and
perfect teeth, everything was boring. Shakespeare was boring. Dickens was boring.
20 There didn't seem to be a single story left in the world that they hadn't heard before. And
over the years, though he had tried to stop it, a terrible disillusionment had crept over Mr
Fisher, who had once dreamed so fiercely of writing stories of his own. They had come to
the end of the seam, he understood. There were no more stories to be written. The magic
had run out.

25 This was an uncharacteristically gloomy train of thought, and Mr Fisher pushed it away.
Not all his boys lacked imagination. Alistair Tibbet, for instance, even though he had
obviously done part of his homework on the bus. An amiable boy, this Tibbet. Not a
brilliant scholar by any means, but there was a spark in him which deserved attention.

Mr Fisher took a deep breath and looked down at Tibbet's exercise book, trying not to think
30 of the snow outside and the five o'clock bus he was now almost certain to miss. Four
books to go, he told himself; and then home; dinner; bed; the comforting small routine of a
winter weekend.

But, gradually sitting there in the warm classroom with the smell of chalk and floor polish in
his nostrils, Mr Fisher began to experience a very strange sensation. It began as a
35 tightening in his diaphragm, as if a long unused muscle had been brought into action. His
breathing quickened, stopped, quickened again. He began to sweat. And when he
reached the end of the story, Mr Fisher put down his red pen and went back to the
beginning, re-reading every word very slowly and with meticulous care.

40 This must be what a prospector feels when, discouraged and bankrupt and ready to go home, he takes off his boot and shakes out a nugget of gold the size of his fist. He read it again, critically this time, marking off the paragraphs with notes in red. A hope, which at first Mr Fisher had hardly dared to formulate, swelled in him and grew strong. He found himself beginning to smile.

45 If anyone had asked him what Tibbet's story was about, Mr Fisher might have been hard put to reply. There were themes he recognised, elements of plot which were vaguely familiar: an adventure – a quest, a child, a man. But to explain Tibbet's story in these terms was as meaningless as trying to describe a loved one's face in terms of nose, eyes, mouth. This was something new. Something entirely original.

Q3. You now need to think about the **whole** of the source. This text is from the beginning of a short story.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader? You could write about:

- what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning of the source
- how and why the writer changes this focus as the source develops
- any other structural features that interest you.

Question 3 - sample answer

At the opening of the extract, the writer focuses on Mr Fisher, describing him as a seemingly boring English teacher. The reader is intrigued as to what lies behind this teacher and what role he plays in the story. The writer then zooms out to describe his despair with his class. Again, this seems bland and usual, and the reader is interested as to what will happen. ~~The~~

The writer then 'zooms in' on Mr Fisher again, showing his rich memories of books in the past, and contrasting those memories with the dullness and "disillusionment" he feels when teaching his superficial class. This causes the reader to wonder if there will be a change, and what it will be.

Q4. Focus this part of your answer on the second part of the source, from **line 25 to the end**.

A student said, 'This part of the story, where Mr Fisher is marking homework, shows Tibet's story is better than Mr Fisher expected, and his reaction is extreme.'

To what extent do you agree? In your response you could:

- consider your own impressions of what Mr Fisher expected Tibet's homework to be like
- evaluate how the writer conveys Mr Fisher's reaction to what he discovers
- support your response with references to the text.

STUDENT 1 - Q4

I agree with this statement because Mr Fisher has no faith in the boy to start with. This is evident in the quote "Not a brilliant scholar by any means". The use of the adjective "brilliant" suggests that Mr Fisher has lower expectations of the boy due to his behaviour and attitudes towards learning. This would give the reader the impression that his lack of effort would be represented in his work.

STUDENT 2 - Q4

I agree to an extent. That Tibet's story is unexpected for Mr Fisher who originally didn't. However I disagree completely that Mr Fisher's reaction is extreme and in fact he was right to react in this way.

Tibet is primarily described as having a 'spark' which becomes a symbol for hope to contrast Mr Fisher's 'gloomy train of thought'. There is a dynamic between the characters as Mr Fisher is completely in despair whilst Tibet is characterized to having potential. This dynamic is one of the ways in which Harris shows how Tibet's story is unexpected for Mr Fisher. However it can be argued that the acknowledgement of Tibet's 'spark' indicates an expectedness of Tibet's story being great. Tibet is immediately characterized as different to the rest of the 'boys (who) lacked imagination'. There is a potential within Alistair that isn't obscured and is obvious to see [.....]

It is obvious to see the physical impact of Tibet's story on Mr Fisher. He began to 'sweat' and his diaphragm was 'tightening'. What is clever to see is his organs transpiring from being 'unused' to being 'brought onto action'. The activity given to Mr Fisher's organs becomes a symbol to indicate the activity given to Mr Fisher as a result of Tibet's story. Mr Fisher has been galvanised by the story so much so the room becomes 'warm' despite there being 'snow outside'. His reaction is not extreme at all, It is completely justifiable as books are Mr Fisher's delight and pleasure. After a long time of the same routine and expectedness, Tibet's story has the ability to rejuvenate Mr Fisher and now he is 'beginning to smile'.

Notes/ my own work