

**Pearson Edexcel International GCSE**

**English Language A**

**Paper 1: Non-fiction Texts and Transactional Writing**

Extra assessment material for first teaching  
September 2016  
**Extracts Booklet**

Paper Reference

**4EA1/01**

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SECTION A: READING

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

Text One: *The Letter 'A'*

*The writer, Christy Brown, was born with cerebral palsy which meant that he could not control his speech or his movement apart from his left foot. In this account, he describes the moment when his mother realised what he could achieve.*



It was Mother who first saw that there was something wrong with me. At six months I could not sit up without having a mountain of pillows around me; at twelve months it was the same. Very worried by this, Mother told my father her fears, and they decided to seek medical advice without any further delay.

Almost every doctor who examined me labelled me a very interesting but also a hopeless case. Many told Mother very gently that I was mentally defective and would remain so. They assured her that nothing could be done for me. 5

She refused to accept this truth, the inevitable truth – as it then seemed – that I was beyond cure, beyond saving, even beyond hope. Mother decided there and then to take matters into her own hands. I was *her* child, and therefore part of the family. That was a momentous decision as far as my future life was concerned. It meant that I would always have my mother on my side to help me fight all the battles that were to come, and to inspire me with new strength when I was almost beaten. 10

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I was now five, and still I showed no real sign of intelligence. I used to lie on my back all the time in the kitchen or, on bright warm days, out in the garden, a little bundle of crooked muscles and twisted nerves, surrounded by a family that loved me and hoped for me and that made me part of their own warmth and humanity. I was lonely, imprisoned in a world of my own, unable to communicate with others, cut off, separated from them as though a glass wall stood between my existence and theirs. I longed to run about and play with the rest, but I was unable to break loose from my bondage. 15 20

Then suddenly, it happened! In a moment everything was changed, my future life

moulded into a definite shape, my mother's faith in me rewarded and her secret fear changed into open triumph.

It happened so quickly, so simply after all the years of waiting and uncertainty, that I can see and feel the whole scene as if it had happened last week. It was the afternoon of a cold, grey December day. The streets outside glistened with snow, the white sparkling flakes stuck and melted on the windowpanes and hung on the boughs of the trees like molten silver. The wind howled dismally, whipping up little whirling columns of snow that rose and fell at every fresh gust. And over all, the dull, murky sky stretched like a dark canopy, a vast infinity of greyness. 25 30

Inside, all the family were gathered round the big kitchen fire that lit up the little room with a warm glow. In a corner Mona and Paddy were sitting, writing down little sums onto an old chipped slate, using a bright piece of yellow chalk.

It was the chalk that attracted me so much. It was a long, slender stick of vivid yellow. I had never seen anything like it before, and it showed up so well against the black surface of the slate that I was fascinated by it as much as if it had been a stick of gold. 35

Suddenly, I wanted desperately to do what my sister was doing. Then – without thinking or knowing exactly what I was doing, I reached out and took the stick of chalk out of my sister's hand – *with my left foot*.

I held it tightly between my toes, and, acting on an impulse, made a wild sort of scribble with it on the slate. 40

My mother crossed over to me and knelt down beside me, as she had done so many times before.

"I'll show you what to do with it, Chris," she said, very slowly and in a queer, jerky way, her face flushed as if with some inner excitement. She hesitated, then very deliberately drew, on the floor in front of me, *the single letter 'A'*. 45

"Copy that," she said, looking steadily at me. "Copy it, Christy."

I couldn't.

Mother held the slate steady for me. "Try again, Chris," she whispered in my ear.

I did. I stiffened my body and put my left foot out again. I drew one side of the letter. I drew half the other side. Then the stick of chalk broke. I wanted to fling it away and give up. Then I felt my mother's hand on my shoulder. I tried once more. Out went my foot. I shook, I sweated and strained every muscle. But – I drew it – the letter 'A'. Shaky, with awkward, wobbly sides and a very uneven centre line. But it *was* the letter 'A'. I looked up. I saw my mother's face for a moment, tears on her cheeks. 50 55

I had done it! It had started – the thing that was to give my mind its chance of expressing itself. True, I couldn't speak with my lips. But now I would speak through something more lasting than spoken words – written words.

That one letter, scrawled on the floor with a broken bit of yellow chalk gripped between my toes, was my road to a new world, my key to mental freedom. 60

## Text Two: *Young and dyslexic? You've got it going on*

*In this article, Benjamin Zephaniah describes his experience of dyslexia.*

As a child I suffered, but learned to turn dyslexia to my advantage, to see the world more creatively. We are the architects, we are the designers.

I'm of the generation where teachers didn't know what dyslexia was. The big problem with the education system then was that there was no compassion, no understanding and no humanity. I don't look back and feel angry with the teachers. The ones who wanted to have an individual approach weren't allowed to. The idea of being kind and thoughtful and listening to problems just wasn't done: the past is a different kind of country. 5

At school my ideas always contradicted the teachers'. I remember one teacher saying that human beings sleep for one-third of their life and I put my hand up and said, 'If there's a God isn't that a design fault? If you've built something, you want efficiency. If I was God I would have designed sleep so we could stay awake. Then good people could do one-third more good in the world.' 10

The teacher said, "Shut up, stupid boy. Bad people would do one-third more bad." I thought I'd put in a good idea. I was just being creative. She also had a point, but the thing was, she called me stupid for even thinking about it. 15

I remember a teacher talking about Africa and the "local savages" and I would say, "Who are you to talk about savages?" She would say, "How dare you challenge me?" – and that would get me into trouble.

Once, when I was finding it difficult to engage with writing and had asked for some help, a teacher said, "It's all right. We can't all be intelligent, but you'll end up being a good sportsperson, so why don't you go outside and play some football?" I thought, "Oh great," but now I realise he was stereotyping me. 20

I had poems in my head even then, and when I was 10 or 11 my sister wrote some of them down for me. When I was 13 I could read very basically but it would be such hard work that I would give up. I thought that so long as you could read how much the banknote was worth, you knew enough or you could ask a mate. 25

I got thrown out of a lot of schools, the last one at 13. I was expelled partly because of arguing with teachers on an intellectual level and partly for being a rude boy and fighting. I didn't stab anybody, but I did take revenge on a teacher once. I stole his car and drove it into his front garden. I remember him telling us the Nazis weren't that bad. He could say that in the classroom. When I was in borstal I used to do this thing of looking at people I didn't want to be like. I saw a guy who spent all his time sitting stooped over and I thought, "I don't want to be like that," so I learned to sit with a straight back. Being observant helped me make the right choices. 30 35

A high percentage of the prison population are dyslexic, and a high percentage of the architect population. If you look at the statistics, I should be in prison: a black man brought up on the wrong side of town whose family fell apart, in trouble with the police when I was a kid, unable to read and write, with no qualifications and, on top of that, dyslexic. But I think staying out of prison is about conquering your fears and finding your path in life. 40

When I go into prisons to talk to people I see men and women who, in intelligence and

other qualities, are the same as me. But opportunities opened for me and they missed theirs, didn't notice them or didn't take them.

I never thought I was stupid. I didn't have that struggle. If I have someone in front of me who doesn't have a problem reading and writing telling me that black people are savages I just think, "I'm not stupid – you're the one who's stupid." I just had self-belief. 45

For my first book I told my poems to my girlfriend, who wrote them down for me. It really took off, especially within the black community. I wrote "wid luv" for "with love." People didn't think they were dyslexic poems, they just thought I wrote phonetically. 50

At 21 I went to an adult education class in London to learn to read and write. The teacher told me, "You are dyslexic," and I was like, "Do I need an operation?" She explained to me what it meant and I suddenly thought, "Ah, I get it. I thought I was going crazy."

I wrote more poetry, novels for teenagers, plays, other books and recorded music. I take poetry to people who do not read poetry. Still now, when I'm writing the word "knot," I have to stop and think, "How do I write that?" I have to draw something to let me know what the word is to come back to it later. If I can't spell "question" I just put a question mark and come back to it later. 55

When I look at a book, the first thing I see is the size of it, and I know that's what it's like for a lot of young people who find reading tough. When Brunel University offered me the job of professor of poetry and creative writing, I knew my students would be officially more educated than me. I tell them, "You can do this course and get the right grade because you have a good memory – but if you don't have passion, creativity, individuality, there's no point." In my life now, I find that people accommodate my dyslexia. I can perform my poetry because it doesn't have to be word perfect, but I never read one of my novels in public. When I go to literary festivals I always get an actor to read it out for me. Otherwise all my energy goes into reading the book and the mood is lost. 60

If someone can't understand dyslexia it's their problem. In the same way, if someone oppresses me because of my race I don't sit down and think, "How can I become white?" It's not my problem, it's theirs and they are the ones who have to come to terms with it. 70

If you're dyslexic and you feel there's something holding you back, just remember: it's not you. In many ways being dyslexic is a natural way to be.

What's unnatural is the way we read and write. If you look at a pictorial language like Chinese, you can see the word for a woman because the character looks like a woman. The word for a house looks like a house. It is a strange step to go from that to a squiggle that represents a sound. 75

So don't be heavy on yourself. And if you are a parent of someone with dyslexia don't think of it as a defect. Dyslexia is not a measure of intelligence: you may have a genius on your hands. Having dyslexia can make you creative. If you want to construct a sentence and can't find the word you are searching for, you have to think of a way to write round it. This requires being creative and so your "creativity muscle" gets bigger. 80

Kids come up to me and say, "I'm dyslexic too," and I say to them, "Use it to your advantage, see the world differently. Us dyslexic people, we've got it going on – we are the architects. We are the designers." It's like these kids are proud to be like me and if that helps them, that is great. I didn't have that as a child. I say to them, "Bloody nondyslexics ... who do they think they are?" 85

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**Source information:**

Text One adapted from *The Letter 'A'*, Christy Brown.

Text Two adapted from *Young and dyslexic? You've got it going on*, Benjamin Zephaniah.

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