

# AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1: Explorations in creative reading and writing

**SET C**

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## Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 20th Century prose-fiction

*Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont* by Elizabeth Taylor

An extract from the novel published in 1971.

**Source A**

Source A is taken from a novel by Elizabeth Taylor. Mrs Palfrey, whose husband has recently died, moves into a hotel in London called The Claremont.

Mrs Palfrey first came to the Claremont Hotel on a Sunday afternoon in January. Rain had closed in over London, and her taxi sloshed along the almost deserted Cromwell Road, past one cavernous<sup>1</sup> porch after another, the driver going slowly and poking his head out into the wet, for the hotel was not known to him.

5 This discovery, that he did not know, had a little disconcerted<sup>2</sup> Mrs Palfrey, for she did not know it either, and began to wonder what she was coming to. She tried to banish terror from her heart. She was alarmed at the threat of her own depression.

10 If it's not nice, I needn't stay, she promised herself, her lips slightly moving, as she leaned forward in the taxi, looking from side to side of the wide, frightening road, almost dreading to read the name Claremont over one of those porches. There were so many hotels, one after the other along this street, all looking much the same.

15 She had simply chanced on an advertisement in a Sunday newspaper while staying in Scotland with her daughter Elizabeth. Reduced winter rates. Excellent cuisine. We can take *that* with a pinch of salt, she had thought at the time.

20 At last the cab slowed down. 'Claremont Hotel' she read, as clear as could be, in large letters across what must be two - even, perhaps, three - large houses made into one. She felt relieved. The porch pillars had been recently painted; there were spotted laurels in the window-boxes; clean curtains - a front of emphatic respectability.

She hauled herself out of the taxi and, leaning on her rubber-tipped walking-stick, crossed the pavement and climbed a few steps. Her varicose veins<sup>3</sup> pained her today.

25 She was a tall woman with big bones and a noble face, dark eyebrows and a neatly folded jowl. She would have made a distinguished-looking man and, sometimes, wearing evening dress, looked like some famous general in drag.

30 Followed by the driver and her luggage (for the hotel gave no sign of life), she battled with revolving doors and almost lurched into the hushed vestibule<sup>4</sup>. The receptionist was coldly kind, as if she were working in a nursing-home, and one for deranged patients at that. '*What a day!*' she said. The taxi-driver, lumbering in with the suitcases, seemed alien in this muffled place, and was at once taken over by the porter. Mrs Palfrey opened her handbag and carefully picked out coins. Everything she did was unhurried, almost authoritative. She had always known how to behave. Even as a bride, in strange, alarming conditions in Burma, she had been magnificent, calm -  
35 when (for instance) she was rowed across floods to her new home; unruffled, finding it more than damp, with a snake wound round the banisters to greet her. She had straightened her back and given herself a good talking-to, as she had this afternoon in the train.

<sup>1</sup> A deep, large space resembling a cave

<sup>2</sup> Concerned

<sup>3</sup> A condition that causes veins, particularly in the legs, to swell

<sup>4</sup> Hallway

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40 When the porter had put down her suitcases and gone, she thought that prisoners must feel as she did now, the first time they are left in their cell, first turning to the window, then facing about to stare at the closed door: after that, counting the paces from wall to wall. She envisaged this briskly.

45 From the window she could see - could see only - a white brick wall down which dirty rain slithered, and a cast-iron fire-escape, which was rather graceful. She tried to see that it was graceful. The outlook - especially on this darkening afternoon - was daunting; but the backs of hotels, which are kept for indigent<sup>5</sup> ladies, can't be expected to provide a view, she knew. The best is kept for honeymooners, though God alone knew why they should require it.

50 The bed looked rather high, and the carpet was worn, but not threadbare. Roses could be made out. A corner fireplace was boarded up, but still had a hearth<sup>6</sup> before it of peacock-blue tiles. The radiator gave off a dry, scorched smell and subdued noises. Heavy wooden knobs to the drawers of the chest, she noted. It was more like a maid's bedroom.

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<sup>5</sup> Poor/impooverished

<sup>6</sup> The floor of a fireplace that extends slightly into the room

**END OF SOURCE**



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