

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1: Explorations in creative reading and writing

SET M

Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 20th Century prose-fiction

An Egyptian Cigarette by Kate Chopin

An extract from a short story published in 1900

Source A

This extract is from the beginning of a short story by Kate Chopin. The story is about a woman who has a vivid and disturbing dream about being abandoned after smoking a mysterious Egyptian cigarette.

My friend, the Architect, who is something of a traveller, was showing us various curios* which he had gathered during a visit to the Orient. "Here is something for you," he said, picking up a small box and turning it over in his hand. "You are a cigarette-smoker; take this home with you. It was given to me in Cairo by a species of fakir*,
5 who fancied I had done him a good turn."

The box was covered with glazed, yellow paper, so skilfully gummed as to appear to be all one piece. It bore no label, no stamp — nothing to indicate its contents.

"How do you know they are cigarettes?" I asked, taking the box and turning it stupidly around as one turns a sealed letter and speculates before opening it.

10 "I only know what he told me," replied the Architect, "but it is easy enough to determine the question of his integrity." He handed me a sharp, pointed paper-cutter, and with it I opened the lid as carefully as possible.

The box contained six cigarettes, evidently hand-made. The wrappers were of pale-yellow paper, and the tobacco was almost the same colour. It was of finer cut than the
15 Turkish or ordinary Egyptian, and threads of it stuck out at either end.

"Will you try one now, Madam?" asked the Architect, offering to strike a match.

"Not now and not here," I replied, "after the coffee, if you will permit me to slip into your smoking-den*. Some of the women here detest the odour of cigarettes."

20 The smoking-room lay at the end of a short, curved passage. Its appointments were exclusively oriental. A broad, low window opened out upon a balcony that overhung the garden. From the divan upon which I reclined, only the swaying treetops could be seen. The maple leaves glistened in the afternoon sun. Beside the divan was a low stand which contained the complete paraphernalia* of a smoker. I was feeling quite comfortable, and congratulated myself upon having escaped for a while the incessant*
25 chatter of the women that reached me faintly.

I took a cigarette and lit it, placing the box upon the stand just as the tiny clock, which was there, chimed in silvery strokes the hour of five.

30 I took one long inspiration of the Egyptian cigarette. The grey-green smoke arose in a small puffy column that spread and broadened, that seemed to fill the room. I could see the maple leaves dimly, as if they were veiled in a shimmer of moonlight. A subtle, disturbing current passed through my whole body and went to my head like the fumes of disturbing wine. I took another deep inhalation of the cigarette.

Glossary

**curios = rare or unusual objects*

**fakir = a holy man*

**smoking-den = a private place to smoke*

End of source