
AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 2: Writers' viewpoints and perspectives

SET L

Insert

The two sources that follows are:

Source A: 20th Century literary non-fiction

Travels with My Rucksack

An extract from a travel book

Source B: 20th Century non-fiction

Reinventing the Wheel by Charles Starmer-Smith

An extract from a cycling magazine article

Source A

Source A is taken from a travel book published in the 20th century. The author describes their journey across the country, detailing their humorous and often cynical views on modern-day public transport.

The great myth of travel is that it is supposed to be romantic. I've always found it to be a tedious* series of inconveniences, punctuated by the odd moment of genuine, jaw-dropping horror. And nowhere is this more true than on the modern railway. It's an experience in a class of its own.

- 5 My last journey was a mere two hours, or so the timetable promised, which in railway terms means anything between two and four. My destination was a small town in the Midlands, a place I had no pressing desire to visit, but as the alternative was another day spent trying to navigate the glorious labyrinth of London's traffic, a two-hour train ride seemed, for a nanosecond, to be a sensible alternative. I was not to be disabused*
10 of this notion until I was wedged into a window seat with a suitcase the size of a small car blocking my already restricted legroom.

- The carriage was, to put it mildly, full. I was squeezed into my seat with a physical precision that would have made a human jigsaw puzzle enthusiast weep with joy. The person opposite me was an immense individual whose knees, it seemed, were
15 designed to occupy a different postcode to the rest of them. My own knees were now so violently contorted that I could feel the tendons singing with the strain. The air hummed with the collective noise of a hundred people trying to consume food from rustling bags, all of it smelling of vinegar and despair. A woman behind me was conducting a very loud, very personal phone call that seemed to be a series of
20 revelations about a relative named Brenda. I've never met Brenda, but I now know she has a penchant* for lying about her age and an unfortunate fondness for glitter.

- Outside the window, a blur of grey fields and faceless suburban developments flickered past with an indifference that almost matched my own. This wasn't a journey, it was an endurance test. The windows, thick with the grime of a thousand previous
25 journeys, offered a view so obscured that it was less a landscape and more a Rorschach test* for the travel-weary. The "scenery" was a ghost, a suggestion, a distant, smeary hint of the world passing me by.

- I tried to read, but the vibration of the train, a constant, low-level shudder, made the letters dance tiresomely on the page. It felt less like a vehicle designed for transport and more like a poorly maintained washing machine on its final spin cycle. I thought of
30 the golden age of steam, of the romance of the rails, of the great adventures told in books. What an astonishing lie. What a brutal, cruel lie. The only adventure I was having was trying to avoid getting my head smashed against the window as the train jolted around a bend, its defiant and groaning metal protesting against the sheer
35 weight of human disappointment it carried. After what felt like a week, the train pulled into the station, and I was finally freed from my mobile prison. I'd had enough travel to last me a lifetime.

Glossary

*tedious = too long, slow, or dull

*disabused = to persuade someone that an idea or belief is mistaken

*penchant = a strong liking for something

*Rorschach test = an ink blot test where a person has to describe what they think the blots look like

Source B

Source B is an extract from a collection of personal letters published in the 19th century. The author writes to a friend about their first journey on a new canal boat, a journey that was considered a great innovation at the time.

My dearest Lydia,

I fear that no amount of ink will be sufficient to capture the raptures I have experienced on my latest travels. The journey that I write of was not by the familiar, dusty carriage, nor the tiresome railway, but by the most astonishing invention yet: the new canal boat! You cannot, my dear friend, begin to imagine the marvel of it. Our departure from the town was a moment of supreme elegance. We were not jolted into motion with a sudden lurch, nor were we shaken to and fro by an ill-tempered horse. Instead, the boat, a long and slender craft of varnished wood and polished brass, simply began to glide with a serenity that took my breath away. It felt as if we were not travelling at all, but rather being carried forward by some gentle, unseen hand.

The sensation of movement was utterly exquisite. My last journey by coach was a dreadful affair, a violent, rattling affair that left me bruised and weary. The dust choked us, the wheels groaned in protest, and every mile was an ordeal. By contrast, our progress on the canal was as smooth as glass. The boat, towed by a team of patient mules on the towpath, made no noise but for the faint lapping of the water against its hull. It was a perfect, unhurried pace, affording one the most splendid opportunity to absorb the landscape. I could have read or written with perfect ease, a feat entirely impossible on the road.

The world seen from the water's edge is a different one altogether. The landscape, which from a coach window is a mere flash of passing colour, here unfolded before us like a living tapestry. We passed through the most charming villages, their cottages reflected perfectly on the water's surface. We travelled through tunnels of green, where the branches of the trees on either bank met overhead, and then into open fields where we could see for miles. The birds sang, the cattle grazed peacefully, and a fresh, clean breeze filled the air. There was no trace of the dust or the cacophony* of the roads. I felt as if I was moving through a painting, a peaceful and idyllic scene from a book of romantic poetry.

We passed over a magnificent stone aqueduct*, which, to my astonishment, carried the canal high above a great river valley. I peered down from our gliding vessel at the tiny horse-drawn wagons on the road below and felt a profound sense of triumph. It seemed as if we had cheated the very earth itself, to travel in such an extraordinary manner. The people below looked up at us in wonder, like distant, curious dolls.

My companion, an older lady of much experience, remarked that such a journey would have been unthinkable in her youth. She spoke of how this quiet, elegant speed was a testament to the ingenuity of man and the promise of a future where journeys would be a pleasure rather than a trial. It is a new world, my dearest Lydia, and I have found nothing to fear in it, only new wonders to behold. I cannot wait for you to experience this divine new age of transport!

Glossary

*cacophony = a harsh mixture of sounds

*aqueduct = a bridge that carries the water of a canal over a river or valley

End of sources