

When I Was Ten GCSE English Language

AQA Paper One-style extract with Q1-4

Name _____ Date _____



This text is taken from the opening part of a novel: *When I Was Ten* by Fiona Cummins (2021)

The girl is twelve and she is running.

Her feet pound the grass, powered by the twin engines of grief and fear. She does not stop until she reaches the summit of Saltbox Hill.

Below her, the village huddles under the cloak of an impending storm. She bends at the waist, panting and crying, and it is hard to breathe. Across the bruised horizon, she glimpses Hilltop House and her nausea ripens into a darkness she dare not think about.

There are cars, so many cars with blue and white livery and flashing lights, and they snake along the stretch of road between the stuccoed mansion and her own smaller home.

The grown-ups are dead.

The sky trembles with thunder. The girl's body vibrates with it too. She glances upwards as a lightning arc blanches the clouds. Sporadic drops of rain hit her arms, as if they can't be bothered, and then harder and faster until she is soaked through.

She starts running again, seeking shelter from the downpour.

An oak tree crowns the hill and it's there the girl heads, damp seeping into her trainers, deep cuts of sorrow inflaming her heart. In this baptism of rain, she thinks: *The sky is grieving too.*

The air is sharp with ozone but it is not enough to rid her of the old-penny scent of blood, or the sweet-rot sickliness of the makeshift bedroom downstairs.

The grown-ups are dead.

Her mother.

Mrs Carter.

Dr Carter.

Deader than disco, her father would say, in that *deadpan* tone of his, and an appalled laugh spills from her.

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25 It is her birthday tomorrow but there will be no celebration. Cards, yes, but of condolence, the first pushed through the letterbox at lunchtime. No cake with pink icing, but still-warm lasagnes left on the porch, condensation collecting on their tinfoil lids. She swipes the back of her hand across her eyes and runs harder.

30 The girl is almost at the tree, spring thickening its leaves, branches spread in welcome. Their faces blink on and off in her memory like the rotating lights of a merry-go-round. *Mother. Mrs Carter. Dr Carter.* To her twelve-year-old self, their deaths are entwined like brambles, choking everything.

She has told a lie. A big one.

There is no way back from it now.

35 She pauses to catch her breath, bent in half, hands on knees. Across the valley, two private ambulances pull out of Hilltop House. She watches their slow progress though the village, but they are too far away to be anything more than grey smudges on the skyline.

The water sheets off her shoulders, trickles down her neck. Her hair hangs in clumps around her face. She is a handful of footsteps from the tree when the sky lights up again.

40 The girl lifts her head and watches the shape of lightning against violet clouds. She waits for it to happen again. She is still waiting when a crack opens up above her and a bright bolt strikes the right upper quadrant of her back.

The lightning moves at one-third the speed of light. It haloes her. It scorches the silver necklace at her throat, flashes across her torso, the current scrambling the electrical impulses of her heart. It exits through the soles of her feet, leaving two coin-shaped holes
45 and singe marks on her trainers.

The girl is thrown to the grass, her body smoking, the grumble of thunder in the air.

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Question 1: Read again lines 1 to 6. List four things about the girl.

(4 marks)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Question 2: Look at lines 4-15. How has the writer used language to describe the weather?

(8 marks)

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You could include the writer's choice of:

- words and phrases
- language features and techniques
- sentence forms.

Q3. This text is from the first part of a novel.

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
- how and why the writer changes this focus as the source develops
- any other structural features that interest you

(8 marks)

Q4. Focus this part of your answer on the second half of the source, from line 28 until the end.

A student, having read this section of the text said: “In this part of the extract, where the girl is trying to take shelter from the storm, the tone gets darker and more chilling.”

To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

- write about your own impressions of the tone
- evaluate how the writer has created these impressions
- support your opinions with references to the text.

(20 marks)