

Source A: Extract adapted from Amrou Al-Kadhi's *Life as a Unicorn: A Journey from Shame to Pride and Everything in Between* (2020)

In the shop window sat an enormous marine fish tank, teeming with colourful coral, free-flowing anemones, gloriously ornamented fish, and constantly undulating starfish. As I gazed at it, I felt something entirely new – a distinct sense of belonging.

Have you ever seen or heard something – a film, a painting, something fleeting out of a car window, a song or a sound – and felt a sudden emotional clarity, as if
5 whatever you've just encountered has always been part of you, and in that moment, both parts have finally been reunited? That's what this felt like.

I was deeply stirred by the way that the marine creatures moved so freely; the way the soft corals and sea invertebrates seemed to exist without physical boundaries,
10 like warrior shape-shifters; the way the fish regally flaunted their colourful costumes. That's how I feel on the inside. In my soul, I'm that colourful; my sexuality, my gender – it's free-moving, like in the tank. Maybe my soul doesn't have any boundaries?

I had grown very accustomed to boundaries. I had spliced myself into different sections that existed in segregated spaces. But here was a parallel universe where
15 everything was fluid. I inched closer to the tank and was hypnotised by the way all the creatures interacted with each other. Cleaner shrimp politely mowed the scales of a fish that was half purple, half yellow; the corals, each with their own distinct texture and colour scheme, seemed to flow as one formless mass with the current of the water.

20 An adorable cylinder-shaped fish emerged from under a rock, its golden sheen with emerald spots iridescent under the tank's UV light, creating an Egyptian-tone shimmer that reminded me of a dress my mother had worn once in Dubai.

And then I met a tube-like structure from which emerged a fan of patterned feathers (a 'feather duster'); it was entrancing, infinitely complicated, yet utterly simple,
25 millions and millions of molecules coming together to caress the ocean water calmly,

GCSE English Language, AQA Paper 2 Questions:

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its texture as silky as Mama's hair. I edged as close as I could to see inside the creature, but my sudden movement caused the feather structure to retreat into its tube. I was desperate to dive inside this wormhole with it, for this new world clearly had so much to teach me.

30 I spent the evening surfing the internet, wanting to delve deeper into the mysteries of aquatic wonder. I stayed glued to the computer screen, learning of a universe that was untroubled by the strict boundaries that governed human beings on land. In the marine world, gender fluidity and non-conformism are the status quo.

There are sea slugs called nudibranchs that defy sexual categorisation, containing
35 both female and male reproductive organs, giving and receiving in each sexual encounter, with kaleidoscopic patterns to rival those of a resplendent drag queen.

Marine snail sea hares are able to change sex at will; cuttlefish can alter the pigments of their exterior with the sartorial flexibility of Alexander McQueen and can disguise themselves as the opposite gender as a social tool; while a male seahorse
40 is something of an underwater feminist, sharing the labour of pregnancy by carrying and 'birthing' the young.

This was where I needed to be. I mean, it just seemed so damn woke in the ocean. It was at this moment that I began to realise I wasn't fully a man. Now that I have the language to express myself, I identify as non-binary.

45 I like to be referred to with them/they pronouns, which helps me to feel that my gender is as fluid as the uninhibited curves of an oceanic nirvana; when people correctly use my preferred pronouns, it relaxes me, as if I'm being soaked in a lavender bath, making me feel seen as a person free from gender binaries.

I had so few linguistic, emotional or social tools to comprehend my gender dysphoria
50 back then, but as I learnt of these polymorphous beings whose bodies or colours didn't restrict them, I felt an aching sense of connection.