



GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 20th Century prose fiction

The Midwich Cuckoos by John Wyndham

An extract from near the beginning of a novel written in 1957

Please turn the page over to see the source

Source A

This extract is taken from near the beginning of a novel by John Wyndham. The story begins on the night of 26th September in the quiet village of Midwich.

- 1 From 10.17 that night, information about Midwich became episodic. Its telephones
remained dead. The bus that should have passed through it failed to reach its destination,
and a truck that went to look for the bus did not return. Someone in Opley reported a
house on fire in Midwich, with, apparently, nothing being done about it. The Trayne fire
5 engine turned out – and thereafter failed to make any reports. The Trayne police station
despatched a car to find out what had happened to the fire engine, and that, too, vanished
into silence. Constable Gobby was sent off on his bicycle to Midwich; and no more was
8 heard of him, either...
- 9 The early morning of the 27th was an affair of slatternly* rags soaking in a dishwater sky,
10 with a grey light weakly filtering through. Nevertheless, in Opley cocks crowed and
other birds welcomed the dawn more melodiously. In Midwich, however, no birds sang.
In Opley, as in other places, hands were soon reaching out to silence alarm clocks, but
in Midwich the clocks rattled on until they ran down. For Midwich lay entranced.
- 15 While the rest of the world began to fill the morning with clamour, Midwich slept on. Its
men and women, its horses, cows and sheep; its pigs, its poultry, its larks, moles and
mice all lay still. There was a pocket of silence in Midwich, broken only by the rustling of
the leaves, the chiming of the church clock, and the gurgle of the River Opley as it slid
18 over the weir beside the mill.
- 19 And while the dawn was still a poor, weak thing, an olive-green van, with the words 'Post
20 Office Telephones' just discernible on it, set out from Trayne with the object of putting the
rest of the world in touch with Midwich again.
- 22 In Stouch it paused at the village phone box to enquire whether Midwich had yet shown any
signs of life. Midwich had not; it was still as deeply incommunicado as it had been since
10.17 the previous night. The van restarted and rattled on through the uncertainly
25 gathering daylight.
- A little out of Stouch the van swung sharply to the right and bounced along the byroad to
Midwich for half a mile or so. Then it rounded a corner to encounter a situation which
called for all of the driver's presence of mind.
- 30 He had a sudden view of a fire engine, half keeled over, with its nearside wheels in the
ditch, and a black saloon car which had climbed halfway up the bank on the other side a
few yards further on, with a man and a bicycle lying half in the ditch behind it. He pulled
hard over, attempting an S-turn which would avoid both vehicles. But before he could
complete it his own van ran on to the narrow verge, bumped along for a few more yards,
then ploughed to a stop, with its side in the hedge.
- 35 Half an hour later, the first bus of the day rattled round the same corner to jam itself neatly
into the gap between the fire engine and the van and block the road completely.

40 The mail van was the first vehicle to stop without becoming involved. One of its occupants got out and walked forward to investigate the disorder. He was just approaching the rear of the stationary bus when, without any warning, he quietly folded up and dropped to the ground. The driver's jaw fell open and he stared. Then, looking beyond his fallen companion, he saw the heads of some of the bus passengers, all quite motionless. He reversed hastily, turned and made for Opley and the nearest telephone.

* slatternly – adjective meaning dirty or untidy

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