

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE**Monday 14 January 2019**

Morning (Time: 3 hours)

Paper Reference **4EB1/01****English Language B****Paper 1****Extracts Booklet****Do not return this Extracts Booklet with the Question Paper***Turn over* ►**P55917A**

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Text One

Why our future depends on libraries, reading and daydreaming

adapted from a lecture given in London by Neil Gaiman

In this passage, the writer talks about the importance of reading.



It's important for people to tell you what side they are on and why, and whether they might be biased. So, I am going to be talking to you about reading. I'm going to suggest that reading fiction, that reading for pleasure, is one of the most important things one can do. And I am biased, obviously and enormously: I'm an author, often an author of fiction. I write for children and for adults. For about 30 years I have been earning my living through my words, mostly by making things up and writing them down. It is obviously in my interest for people to read, for them to read fiction, for libraries and librarians to exist and help foster a love of reading and places in which reading can occur. So I'm biased as a writer. But I am much, much more biased as a reader.

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And I'm here giving this talk tonight, to support the Reading Agency: a charity whose purpose is to give everyone an equal chance in life by helping people become confident and enthusiastic readers, which supports literacy programmes, and libraries and individuals and unashamedly encourages the act of reading. Because, they tell us, everything changes when we read. And it's that change, and that act of reading, that I'm here to talk about tonight. I want to talk about what reading does. What it's good for.

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Fiction has two uses. Firstly, the drive to know what happens next, to want to turn the page, the need to keep going, even if it's hard, because someone's in trouble and you have to know how it's all going to end ... that's a very real drive. And it forces you to learn new words, to think new thoughts, to keep going. To discover that reading is pleasurable. Once you learn that, you're on the road to reading everything. And reading is key. There were comments made briefly, a few years ago, about the idea that we were living in a post-literate world, in which the ability to make sense out of written words was somehow redundant, but those days are gone: words are more important than they ever were: we navigate the world with words, and as more and more reading matter is found online, not in books, we need to follow, to communicate and to comprehend what we are reading. People who cannot understand each other cannot exchange ideas, cannot communicate.

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The simplest way to make sure that we raise literate children is to teach them to read, and to show them that reading is a pleasurable activity. And that means, at its simplest, finding books that they enjoy, giving them access to those books, and letting them read them. I don't think there is such a thing as a bad book for children. Every now and again it becomes fashionable among some adults to point at a subset of children's books, a genre, perhaps, or an author, and to declare them bad books, books that children should be stopped from reading. I've seen it happen over and over: comics have been accused of promoting illiteracy. Well-meaning adults can easily destroy a child's love of reading: stop them reading what they enjoy, or give them worthy-but-dull books that you like, the 21st-century equivalents of Victorian 'improving' literature. You'll wind up with a generation convinced that reading is uncool and worse, unpleasant.

And the second thing fiction does is to build empathy. When you watch TV or see a film, you are looking at things happening to other people. Prose fiction is something you build up from 26 letters and a handful of punctuation marks, and you, and you alone, using your imagination, create a world and people it and look out through other eyes. You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone else out there is a me, as well. You're being someone else, and when you return to your own world, you're going to be slightly changed. Empathy is a tool for building people into groups, for allowing us to function as more than self-obsessed individuals. As you read you're also finding out something vitally important for making your way in the world. And it's this: the world doesn't have to be like this. Things can be different.

Literacy is more important than ever it was, in this world of text and email, a world of written information. We need to read and write, we need global citizens who can read comfortably, comprehend what they are reading, understand shades of meaning, and make themselves understood.

Albert Einstein was asked once how we could make our children intelligent. His reply was both simple and wise. 'If you want your children to be intelligent,' he said, 'read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.' He understood the value of reading, and of imagining. I hope we can give our children a world in which they will read, and be read to, and imagine, and understand.

Text Two

Do Teens Read Seriously Anymore?

adapted from an article in *The New Yorker* magazine by David Denby

In this passage, the writer presents his ideas about teenagers' reading habits.



A common sight in malls, in pizza parlours, in Starbucks, and wherever else American teens hang out: three or four kids, hooded, gathered around a table, leaning over like monks or druids, their eyes fastened to the smart phones held in front of them. The phones, converging at the centre of the table, come close to touching. Looking at them, you can envy their happiness. You can also find yourself wishing them immersed in a different kind of happiness - in a superb book or a series of books, in the reading obsession itself! You should probably keep on wishing. 5

It's very likely that teenagers, attached to screens of one sort or another, read more words than they ever have in the past. But they often read scraps, excerpts, articles, parts of articles, messages, pieces of information from everywhere and from nowhere. It's likely that they are reading fewer books. Yes, millions of kids have read the Harry Potter series, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hunger Games*, and other fantasy fiction; also vampire romance, graphic novels (some very good) and young-adult novels. 10

Yet what happens as they move toward adolescence? When they become twelve or thirteen, kids often stop reading seriously. The boys veer off into sports or computer games, the girls into friendship in all its wrenching mysteries and satisfactions of favour and exclusion. Much of their social life, for boys as well as girls, is now conducted on smart phones, where teenagers don't have to confront one another. 15

Work by the Pew Research Center and other organisations has confirmed the testimony of teachers and parents and the evidence of one's eyes. Few late teenagers are reading many books. A recent summary of studies quoted by Common Sense Media indicates that American teenagers are less likely to read 'for fun' at seventeen than at thirteen. The category of reading 'for fun' is itself a little depressing, since it divides reading into duty (for school) and pleasure (sitting on a beach towel), as if the two were necessarily opposed. My own observation, after spending a lot of time talking to teenagers in recent 25

years, is that reading anything serious has become a chore, like doing the laundry. Or, if it's not a chore, it's just an activity, like swimming or shopping, an activity like any other. It's not something that runs through the rest of their lives. In other words, reading has lost its privileged status; few kids are ashamed that they're not doing it much. The notion that you should always be reading a book - that notion, which all real readers share - doesn't flourish in many kids. Often, they look at you blankly when you ask them what they are reading on their own. 30

Of course, these kids are very busy. School, homework, jobs, parents, brothers, sisters, half-brothers, half-sisters, friendships, love affairs, hanging out, music and, most of all, screens (TV, Internet, games, texting, Instagramming) - compared with all of that, reading a book is a weak claim on their time. Reading frustrates their smart phone sense of being everywhere at once. Suddenly, they are stuck on that page, anchored, moored and many are glum about it. Being unconnected makes them anxious and even angry. 'Books smell like old people,' I heard a student say in New Haven. 35

Yes, I know: this is not a new story. We have known it since the iPhone was introduced, in 2007. Yet teenage time on screens has recently increased to the point where it takes over many young lives altogether. Digital culture has enveloped us more quickly and more thoroughly than most of us had imagined. But what can be done about it? Many adults, overwhelmed by a changed reality, shrug off the problem. You don't want to become a crank. After all, reading technologies have changed in the past; television altered consciousness and social patterns sixty years ago, and kids survived and became adults. Literature will survive too, *somehow*. Or so we would like to think. 40 45

Making the case that serious reading is one of life's great blessings - that screen-bound kids are in danger of missing something tremendous - has become awkward, square-headed, emotionally difficult. Lifetime readers know that reading literature can be life-changing, but they can't prove it. What they know about literature and its effects is literally and spiritually immeasurable. 50

In high-school English, if the teachers are shrewd and willing to take a few risks, they will try to reach the students where they live emotionally. And if teachers can make books important to kids - and forge the necessary link to pleasure and need - those kids may turn off the screens. At least for a few vital hours. 55

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'Why our future depends on libraries, reading and daydreaming', by Neil Gaiman, 15 October 2013
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