

Edexcel International GCSE

English Language B

Paper 1

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Source Booklet

Paper Reference

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PEARSON

Text One

After exams, a real test of nerve

The stress of GCSEs behind them, Liz Boulter and her son, Aidan, headed to Spain on an activity holiday with a guaranteed adrenaline rush.



We're not close, adrenaline and me. Like many grown women, I don't see the attraction in paying to get scared - no horror films or bungee jumping for me. But as I stood up to my waist in fast-flowing water in a deep gorge in the Spanish Pyrenees, I realised that was about to change.

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"Just trust yourself, and the rope," said our guide, a muscular youth. The rope looked sturdy enough, and had already borne the weight of several members of our group. But trust myself to manipulate the rope correctly and abseil¹ over a ledge in the path of the mountain torrent? There were children of primary school age who were managing this fine, for heaven's sake, and it was only a "level 1" canyon.

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The new sport of canyoning involves wading, scrambling and sliding, arms crossed over your chest for safety, down natural water slides scooped out of the rock by the raging water. The sun beating down on your wetsuit makes your top half feel as if it is boiling, but your bottom half, submerged in the icy torrent, is cool as only a mountain stream can make it.

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I had beaten my inner fear, which felt great. And I didn't disgrace myself in front of my 16-year-old son Aidan, who, along with the rest of the teenagers in the group, had coped with canyoning as if it was as ordinary as walking to school.

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The adrenaline-activity industry is so tightly regulated and safety conscious that every trip has to start with a talk on how to behave, how to avoid accidents, and strict procedure for if something does go wrong. For the cowardly among us, this tends to point up the dangers rather than the fun of a trip, and so it was with pounding heart that I hoisted my corner of the inflatable raft and followed our instructor, Alex, into the water.

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The names given to various rapids in this area reflect a white-knuckle attitude to fun. Following Alex's instructions we negotiated rapids with such safe, cosy names as the Wall, the Washing Machine and the Storm. And guess what? It was brilliant fun - once I realised that being thrown out of the raft and dashed to pieces on jagged rocks was not going to happen to a sensible adult who followed the rules and kept her feet jammed into the safety straps on the raft's bottom.

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As the seven of us relaxed into the rafting experience, Alex deliberately crashed our raft into a rocky bank, took one rapid in such a way as to make us spin and took another backwards. After this last effort I, seated "safely" at the back of the raft, ended up just as wet as the braver types at the front, which included a grinning Aidan.

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As the week went on the youngsters formed a tight-knit group happy to spend hours splashing in the pool or playing endless games of cards.

Optional extras included a more challenging canyoning trip, and a full day's white-water rafting on a more dangerous stretch of river. Level 2 canyoning involved many more abseils - one of them over 40ft - and the all-day rafting included a chance to dive into

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deep water from 20ft high cliffs as rare vultures flew overhead. It was all “awesome”.

Or so Aidan tells me. For yes, I waded my son off on these extra activities and spent the days on solitary hikes in these beautiful mountains before resting by the poolside with a book. This adrenaline business is great fun, but you don’t want to take it too far.

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¹ *abseil* – a controlled descent down a cliff using a rope

Text Two

Pushing your physical and mental limits at Strathcona Park Lodge by Hans Tammemagi



Strapped into a harness like a fly tangled in a spider web, I was perched high — ever so high — in a tall fir tree in the depths of the forest. I clung to the edge of a small platform, and a rope connected me to a steel cable that stretched 200 feet far down the slope. “Go ahead and jump,” encouraged my instructor, “you have to trust the equipment.”

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Easy for him to say, I thought, with my heart pounding and every muscle in my body resisting what my brain was asking it to do. I closed my eyes and carefully pushed off. Instantly I was in free fall. Then the rope attaching me to the zip line¹ jerked tight and sent me hurtling down the slope at an alarming speed until the slope flattened and, thankfully, slowed me down.

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I swung back and forth a few times until the instructor raised a ladder. Gratefully I descended and kissed the ground, vowing never to part from her again. But the instructor paid no heed. “If you thought that was extreme, you’ll love abseiling¹,” he said leading me toward a sheer, hulking cliff.

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I was sampling a small part of the range of activities offered at Strathcona Park Lodge. It is surrounded by peaks soaring to 7000 feet, sparkling alpine lakes, dense forests of fir and cedar. It is the perfect base to enjoy outdoor activities, explore nature and, as I learned, test your personal limits.

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During my stay the laughter and enthusiasm of about 240 young students bubbled through the forest like a heady froth. It’s all about active participation ranging from a quiet paddle, to pulse-thumping abseiling, to scaling a snow-capped mountain. I watched a group of young students negotiate the high-rope course, carefully working their way across sections called Leap of Faith, Ninja’s Crossing, and Burma Road. It was good to see their initial nervous giggles and apprehension turn to confidence as they progressed. At the sheer cliff where they were rock climbing and abseiling, I saw the students encourage and support each other, even when the occasional one could not conquer their fear.

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One morning, I met Myrna Boulding, the founder of the Lodge. Although over 70 she is fit, articulate, and brimming with enthusiasm. “The Lodge is all about building character,” she exclaimed. “I want every student to leave as a better person. Our philosophy is aimed at people getting to know themselves, having them gain confidence, having them come closer to nature and the environment, and having them bond with and understand others. We have succeeded in this, and that’s what gives me the greatest satisfaction.”

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She explained that here there is no competition against others. "But," she added, "I want all of you to test your own personal boundaries. First you'll do what's necessary (learn safety procedures). Then you'll do what's possible. And then, just maybe you'll do what you thought was impossible."

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Brian Gunn, Myrna's partner, explained how he (age 69) and two friends (age 68 and 70) hiked for six days in the wilderness ending in climbing Mount Haig-Brown. With a sparkle in his eye he described the thrill of coming on a herd of elk, hiking along snow-covered ridges and camping among wild flowers high in an alpine meadow. He said that next year they were hiking to see and feel the mist of the towering Della Falls, the tallest waterfall in Canada.

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That evening, sitting on the porch of my cabin, I watched the sun set over the lake with the mountains forming dark soft shadows against the mauves and pinks of the sky. Only two days had passed, but I already felt a better person.

¹ *Zip line* – a cable stretched between two points of different heights with a rope and harness to attach the rider

² *abseiling* – a controlled descent down a cliff using a rope