



GCSE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

8700/1

Insert

The source that follows is:

SOURCE A: 20th Century prose fiction

‘The Grass is Singing’ by Doris Lessing

**An extract from the middle of a novel
published in 1950**

[Turn over]

SOURCE A

This extract is taken from the middle of a novel, set in Southern Africa in the 1940s. Mary has recently moved from town to a farm after marrying Dick, a poor farmer.

- 1 And then, suddenly, the heat became intolerable. Outside in the bush the cicadas shrilled incessantly, and Mary's head ached; her limbs were heavy and tense. She would get up and go
- 5 into the bedroom, to examine her clothes, to see if there was anything she could do: any bit of embroidery, or an alteration. With nothing to do, she would wander on to the verandah* until at last her head began to swim, and she had to go back to
- 10 the house to get a glass of water.
- 11 As time passed, the heat became an obsession. Outside, there was a rough heap of giant boulders, and she would watch the heat-waves beat up out of the hot stone, where the heat lizards, vivid red and
- 15 blue and emerald, darted over the rocks like flames. Inside, she could not bear the sapping, undermining waves that beat down from the iron roof. Even the usually active dogs used to lie all day on the verandah. Mary could hear them
- 20 panting softly, or whining with exasperation because of the flies. She would lock them out of the house, and in the middle of the morning she would tell a worker to carry a petrol tin full of

lukewarm water into the bedroom, and, having
25 made sure he was out of the house, she stood in a
basin on the brick floor, pouring it over her. The
scattering drops fell on the porous brick, which
28 hissed with dryness.

29 'When is it going to rain?' she asked Dick.

30 'Oh, not for another month yet,' he answered
easily, but looking surprised at her question.
Surely she knew when the rains were likely to fall?
She had been in the country longer than he had.
But it seemed to her that in the town there had
35 been no seasons, really, not as there were here.
She had been out of the rhythm of cold and heat
and rain. It had been hot, it had rained, the cold
weather had come – yes, certainly; but it was
something happening independently of her. Here,
40 body and mind were subservient to the slow
movement of the seasons; she had never in her life
watched the implacable sky for signs of rain, as
she did now, standing on the verandah, and
screwing up her eyes at the great massed white
45 cloud, like blocks of glittering crystal quartz sailing
through the blue.

'The water is going very quickly,' said Dick, one
day, frowning.

[Turn over]

50 It was fetched twice a week from the bottom of the
hill where the well was. Mary would hear shouting
and yelling, as if someone were in agonised pain,
and going out in front of the house, she watched
the water-cart come through the trees, drawn by
two slow-moving beautiful oxen, straining their
55 hindquarters up the slope.

‘What are you using it for?’ asked Dick. She told
him. His face darkened, and he looked at her in
incredulous horror, as if she had committed a
crime.

60 ‘What, wasting it like that?’

‘I am not wasting it,’ she said coldly. ‘I am so hot I
can’t stand it. I want to cool myself.’

Dick swallowed, trying to keep calm. ‘Listen to
me,’ he said angrily, in a voice he had never before
65 used to her. ‘Listen to me! Every time I order the
water-cart to fetch water for the house, it means a
driver, and two workers, and two oxen off other
work for a whole morning. It costs money to fetch
water. And then you go and throw it away! Why
70 don’t you fill the bath with water and get into it,
instead of wasting it and throwing it away each
time?’

She was furious. This seemed the last straw. Here
she was, living here uncomplainingly, suffering

75 these hardships; and then she could not use a
couple of gallons of water! She opened her mouth
to shout at him, but before she could, he had
become suddenly sorry because of the way he had
spoken to her; and there was another of those little
80 scenes which comforted and soothed her: he
apologising, blaming himself, and she forgiving
him.

Glossary:

* verandah – an open, roofed area along the
outside of a house.

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