



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;
5 her limbs were heavy and tense.
She would get up and go into the
bedroom, to examine her clothes, to
see if there was anything she could
do: any bit of embroidery, or an
10 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 the house to get a glass of
15 water.

16 As time passed, the heat became an
obsession. Outside, there was a
rough heap of giant boulders, and
she would watch the heat-waves
20 beat up out of the hot stone, where
the heat lizards, vivid red and blue
and emerald, darted over the rocks
like flames. Inside, she could not
bear the sapping, undermining
25 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 panting softly,
or whining with exasperation
30 because of the flies. She would lock
them out of the house, and in the
middle of the morning she would tell

[Turn over]

a worker to carry a petrol tin full of lukewarm water into the bedroom, 35 and, having 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 hissed with 40 dryness.

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

'Oh, not for another month yet,' he answered easily, but looking 45 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 been 50 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;
55 but it was something happening independently of her. Here, body and mind were subservient to the slow movement of the seasons; she had never in her life watched the
60 implacable sky for signs of rain, as she did now, standing on the verandah, and screwing up her eyes at the great massed white cloud, like blocks of glittering crystal quartz
65 sailing through the blue.

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

It was fetched twice a week from the bottom of the hill where the well

[Turn over]

**70 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,
75 drawn by two slow-moving beautiful
oxen, straining their hindquarters up
the slope.**

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

‘What, wasting it like that?’

**‘I am not wasting it,’ she said coldly.
85 ‘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 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 don't you fill the bath with water and get into it, instead of wasting it and throwing it away each time?'

100 She was furious. This seemed the last straw. Here she was, living here uncomplainingly, suffering these hardships; and then she could not use a couple of gallons of water!

105 She opened her mouth to shout at

[Turn over]

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
110 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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