

GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 21st Century prose fiction

The Silent Land by Graham Joyce

An extract from the beginning of a novel written in 2010.

Please turn over to see the source

Source A

This extract is from the beginning of a novel by Graham Joyce. A young married couple, Zoe and Jake, are on a skiing holiday in the French Pyrenean mountains.

1 It was snowing again. Gentle six-pointed flakes from a picture book were settling on
her jacket sleeve. The mountain air prickled with ice and the smell of pine resin.
Several hundred metres below lay the dark outline of Saint-Bernard-en-Haut, their
Pyrenean resort village; across to the west, the irregular peaks of the mountain
5 range.

Zoe pulled the air into her lungs, feeling the cracking cold of it before letting go.
And when the mountain seemed to nod and sigh back at her, she almost thought
she could die in that place, and happily.

9 If there are few moments in life that come as clear and as pure as ice, when the
10 mountain breathed back at her, Zoe knew that she had trapped one such moment
and that it could never be taken away. Everywhere was snow and silence. Snow
and silence; the complete arrest of life; a rehearsal and a pre-echo of death. She
pointed her skis down the hill. They looked like weird talons of brilliant red and gold
14 in the powder snow as she waited, ready to swoop. *I am alive. I am an eagle.*

15 The sun was up now; in a few minutes there would be more skiers to break the
eerie morning spell. But right now they had the snow and the morning entirely to
themselves.

There was a whisper behind her. It was the effortless track of Jake's skis as he
came over the ridge and caught up with her.

20 'This is perfection.'

'You ready to go?' she asked.

'Yep. Let's do it.'

They'd got up early to beat the holiday-making hordes for this first run of the
morning. Because this – the tranquillity, the silence, the undisturbed snow and the
25 feeling of proximity to an eagle's flight – was what it was all about. Jake hit the west
side of the steep but broad slope and she took the east, carving matching parallel
tracks through the fresh snow.

28 But at the edge of the slope, near the curtain of trees, she felt a small slab of snow
slip from underneath her. It was like she'd been bucked, so she took the fall-line* to
30 recover her balance. Before she'd dropped three hundred metres, the whisper of
her skis was displaced by a rumble.

Zoe saw at the periphery of her vision that Jake had come to a halt at the side of the
piste and was looking back up the slope. Irritated by the false start they'd made,
she etched a few turns before skidding to a halt and turning to look back at her

35 husband.

The rumble became louder. There was a pillar of what looked like grey smoke unfurling in silky banners at the head of the slope, like the heraldry of armies. It was beautiful. It made her smile.

40 Then her smile iced over. Jake was speeding straight towards her. His face was rubberised and he mouthed something as he flew at her.

‘Get to the side! To the side!’

She knew now that it was an avalanche. Jake slowed, batting at her with his ski pole. ‘Get into the trees! Hang on to a tree!’

45 The rumbling had become a roaring in her ears, drowning Jake’s words. She pushed herself down the fall-line, scrambling for traction, trying to accelerate away from the roaring cloud breaking behind her like a tsunami at sea. Jagged black cracks appeared in the snow in front of her. She angled her skis towards the side of the slope, heading for the trees, but it was too late. She saw Jake’s black suit go bundling past her as he was turned by the great mass of smoke and snow. Then
50 she too was punched off her feet and carried through the air, twisting, spinning, turning in the white-out. She remembered something about spreading her arms around her head. For a few moments it was like being agitated inside a washing machine, turned head over heels a few times, until at last she was dumped heavily in a rib-cracking fall. Then there came a chattering noise, like the amplified jaws of
55 a million termites chewing on wood. The noise itself filled her ears and muffled everything, and then there was silence, and the total whiteness faded to grey, and then to black.

END OF SOURCE

Glossary

* fall-line – the most direct route downhill

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