



GCSE

English Language

8700/2

Paper 2 Writers' viewpoints and perspectives

Insert

- **Source A:** A newspaper article called *Could you do your child's homework?*
- **Source B:** Two letters from the 1820s.

Source A:

Could you do your child's homework?

The Observer, Sunday 15 December 2013



A typical father son scenario

Children appear increasingly weighed down by homework. But how tough can it be? Jay Rayner attempts his son Eddie's maths assignment.

I am staring at a finely printed sheet of paper and trying not to let the bad feelings seep in. This sheet is all my childhood Sunday-night feelings of dread come at once. It is humiliation and "could do better" and "pay attention now".

I only have myself to blame. A few months ago over dinner Eddie announced that, in English, they were experimenting with food writing. "I have to come up with metaphors. Give me a metaphor about this pizza," he said. "I don't think I should do your homework for you," I said. He raised his eyebrows. "You can't think of one, can you?" This is what happens if you feed and educate your children. They grow up, become clever and remorselessly take the mickey out of you. 5

He was right. I didn't. On the spot I couldn't think of a single food metaphor worth dragging out and slapping on the table. And so the memories of homework came flooding back: of long nights of carefully planned idleness ruined by the imposition of essays and work sheets, of tasks flunked, of a chilly emptiness at the thought of the way my efforts would be received by teachers. The fact is that I was not especially academic. On the results sheet, my grades lined up like a line of Pac-Men¹ doing a conga². 10 15

And so, having failed the English homework test, I decide to show a little solidarity. I will have a go at his maths homework just to get a sense of what it's like to be 14-year-old Eddie. Which is why I'm now staring at the sheet of paper. Ah yes, algebra, the merry dance of x and y . Simplify. Wrench things out of brackets. Calculate values. This, I used to be able to do. Or at least I think I used to be able to do this. 20

Hmmm. Right. Yes. I mean... I stare at the page again, wondering whether I might be able to will a nosebleed to obscure the equations. There are three marks out of a total of 25 available here. Not getting it right would be an early setback.

The next one looks more straightforward. $a^4 \times a^3$. I'm pretty sure I remember this. Just add the powers together. Which would mean... 25

There is an "expand and simplify" question, which refuses to grow or be simple. In his special mocking voice, Eddie tells me just to draw a sad face. I do as I'm told. Better than a blank. Eddie returns to his room and I press on. Some of them I can manage. I appear to know how to multiply out $3(5-2x)$. But with the next one I am firmly back in the weeds. I am so baffled that, shamelessly, I Google a maths website. 30

A few days later Eddie receives his marks. He got 20 out of 25, or 80%, a low score for him. Me? I've got 12 out of 25, or less than 50%. Does it need saying that my biggest miscalculation was to take on Eddie over maths? He doesn't labour the point but he's irritatingly good at it. I knock on his bedroom door. He doesn't look up from his computer screen. He is too busy killing things, while talking on Skype to his friend Theo, who is also in the game trying to kill the same things. 35

Finally he looks up at me from the computer. Who needs teachers to humiliate you when your son can do it so effectively?

Glossary:

- 1: Pac Man: a popular computer game in the 1980's in which the character follows the lines of a maze to collect points as it goes.
- 2: Conga: a dance in which participants follow behind a leading person in a long line.

Turn Over for Source B

Source B consists of two letters:

The first letter is from a young boy called Henry writing to his father. Henry is living far away from home at a boarding school. A boarding school is a school where you go to live as well as study and was a very popular way of educating boys, especially from wealthier families, in the 1800s.

Cotherstone Academy Aug. 7. 1822	
Dear Father	
Our Master has arrived at Cotherstone, but I was sorry to learn he had no Letter for me nor anything else, which made me very unhappy. If you recollect, I promised that I would write you a sly Letter, which I assure you I have not forgot, and now an opportunity has come at last. I hope, my dear Father, you will not let Mr. Smith know anything about it for he would flog me if he knew it. I hope, my dear Father, you will write me a Letter as soon as you receive this, but pray don't mention anything about this in yours; only put a X at the bottom, or write to my good Friend Mr. Halmer, who is very kind to me and he will give it to me when I go to Church. He lives opposite and I assure you, my dear Father, they are the kindest Friends I have in Yorkshire and I know he will not show it to Mr. Smith for the Letters I write you are all examined before they leave the School. I am obliged to write what Mr. Smith tells us and the letters you send me are all examined by Mr. Smith before I see them, so I hope, my dear Father, you will mention nothing of this when you write.	5 10 15
It is now two years come October since I left you at Islington, but I hope, my dear Father, you will let me come home at Xmas that we may once more meet again alive - if God permit me to live as long.	
Our bread is nearly black; it is made of the worst Barley Meal, and our Beds are stuffed with chaff and I assure you we are used more like Bears than Christians ¹ . Believe me, my dear Father, I would rather be obliged to work all my life time than remain here another year.	20
George is quite well but very unhappy.	
Your respectful son	
Henry	25

The second letter, written two weeks later, is from the boy's father to a family friend, asking him to investigate the problem. The father has two sons at the school, Henry and George.

Public Office, Worship Street, 21st August 1822.	
Sir,	
Having lately received a Letter from my Son Henry, who is at Mr. Smith's School close by you, complaining of the Treatment he receives, I am induced to write to you, confidentially, to request you will do me the favour to endeavour to see both of them, privately, (at your own House) if possible and ascertain whether you think it would be advisable for me to send for them home. I will certainly be guided by what you say; Boys will sometimes complain without cause, and therefore I hope you will	30

excuse the liberty I take in troubling you. Henry speaks very highly of your kind attention.	35
I do not approve of the System of Education, for they do not appear to have improved. When they left home, they could both spell, and in Henry's Letter I see several words wrong spelt – I also do not like the injunction laid upon them of not being allowed to write to me without the Master's seeing the contents of their Letters.	
If you should not be able to get a private interview with them in the course of a fortnight, I shall be obliged by your writing to me to say so and I will immediately give notice to Mr. Smith that I intend to have them home at Christmas. I should prefer your seeing George if you can, and hear what he says, as I can rely more on the truth of his story, than Henry's, for I believe Henry's principal object is to get home. We have all a great desire to see him, but particularly to see George, our other son, who is a meek Boy and not so able to endure ill treatment as Henry – George is a great favourite with us all, and so he was with his late dear Mother who is now no more.	40 45
You will no doubt see my object in thus troubling you and I hope you will excuse the liberty I take, but as I know you have been very kind to the Boys. I shall esteem it an additional favour by your attention to this, and an answer at your earliest convenience.	50
I remain Sir, very respectfully	
Your obliged honorable servant	
William Heritage	55

Glossary:

1: Chaff: chopped straw or hay.

2: Bears than Christians: bears were sometimes mistreated, perhaps suggesting he feels he's being treated more like an animal than a human being, or in a Christian way.

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Source A : *Could you do your child's homework?* By Jay Rayner, The Observer 2013, © Guardian News and Media Ltd 2013

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