



GCSE

C700U10-1A



MONDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2020 – MORNING

ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 1
20th Century Literature Reading and Creative Prose Writing

Resource Material for use with Section A

SECTION A: 40 marks

Read carefully the passage below.

The narrator of this short story is a young woman.

1 When I first moved to the country, my only companion was a horse. It was a big brown thing
that lived in a field at the end of my garden. I was not used to horses but soon it was hanging
its heavy head over my fence and I was feeding it chapatis. I come from London. So does my
husband. But we moved near to Swindon because he was making his way in the world. I was
5 proud of him then.

The neighbours weren't really unfriendly. We just didn't have that much in common, me having
no kids. I don't think it was to do with prejudice – after all, I didn't go round in a sari or anything.
I was born and bred in England, the same as them.

I talked to the horse when I was hanging out my washing. It might have looked funny otherwise.
10 I told it what I was cooking for dinner and what was going on in *EastEnders*. One day I said to
it, quite distinctly, 'I think I'm going mad.'

I should have told my husband but he didn't like disturbance. He's older than me and the grey
in his hair made him look as if he had deeper thoughts than me. So I cooked and cleaned the
house. I had been married two years.

15 I'm probably making him sound unattractive. But he was kind. He was always buying me
gadgets for the kitchen such as a microwave. I only used it once and after that I pretended.
He would spear a baked potato and pronounce, 'Ten minutes. A miracle.' The only thing Ranjit
worshipped was the silicon chip.

I told myself I was lucky. He didn't drink like other men. He kept himself fit. He never lost his
20 temper and he gave me generous amounts of money each week. My husband worked late; he
was a marketing manager of a computer firm.

One day I went into Swindon to buy a pair of shoes. A woman was there with her child. He
was a small boy, aged about six, and he wanted blue trainers. But she wanted him to have red
ones, and then he started crying and she shouted at him. That was all. And I burst into tears. I
25 felt such a fool. I had to leave the shop.

Soon after, the field was empty. The horse was gone. It had meant a lot to me and for a silly
moment I thought I had told it too many secrets. A week later the bulldozers arrived and they
ploughed up the field and started building a service station.

I should have got out more. Other women went off to garden centres and IKEA. People talked
30 about a local beauty spot – a hill with the shape of a white horse cut out in it. Standing there,
they said, you could see three counties. But by now, just thinking about the bus made my heart
thump. I was getting worse.

I had these panic attacks when I got into Swindon. It happened in supermarkets. I'd break out
in a sweat. I couldn't think what to choose. Little things suddenly made me sad. I'd fumble in my
35 bag for my purse. I'd forgotten it. I'd forgotten my keys. What could I possibly choose to buy?
How could I want all that stuff? And why? Was everybody looking at me?

I kept glancing at my watch and worrying I'd miss the bus. I'd hurry to the bus station but there
were so many buses, so many numbers. I pictured myself getting on the wrong bus, or my bus
just leaving, however early I turned up. My stomach churned.

40 I didn't tell Ranjit. He always seemed to be doing something else. Besides, I didn't want to
worry him when he was working so hard. They were about to launch a new product, he said,
and he was often away overnight. He had to give presentations, he said, to his network of sales
executives. He spent more and more time working late.

45 Then, one Monday, I did something that was out of character. That morning I picked up the
phone and ordered myself a taxi. Eric was the name of the driver. He was more responsive than
the horse and I could talk to the back of his head. The first journey he talked all the way about
his late wife. I think he was lonely.

The next Thursday I asked Eric to take me to the library in Swindon but as we drove I said, 'It's too hot. Let's go somewhere else.' To tell the truth I didn't mind where we went and I remember
50 Eric saying that if I'd never been there before I should see the famous beauty spot. He started going on about how ancient it all was and how you could see three counties from up there.

The drive took ages and I started to worry about the money. But then we were driving up a narrow lane and above me was a hill, bleached in the sunlight. Eric asked me if I could see the white horse carved out of the chalk on the hill, but I felt sick. I was too far from home. I wanted
55 my kitchen. I wanted to be safe.

I felt the panic swelling long before I saw the glint of Ranjit's car.

In front of me was a chalky car park. I remember it exactly. A few empty cars were parked there but not many because it was a weekday lunchtime. But there was one car parked in the far corner and for a moment I thought idly: a white Ford, just like Ranjit's.

60 Eric was asking me something but I didn't hear. We bumped across the car park, closer now. I told myself it was only one head in there, not two. I told myself I must be mistaken. I wanted to go home. I was telling myself, 'They are just looking at the view. That's why their heads are so close together.' Then we were close up and I saw what they were doing and I was saying to Eric, 'Take me home.'

65 When we got home, I told Eric to wait. I packed two suitcases and that was it. For the first time in years everything seemed clear. It hurt but it was clear.

I climbed into the car and told Eric to drive to London. As we turned into the main road I told myself I wasn't mad at all.

70 I'm living with my sister now. I never told her the real reason I left Ranjit. I just said I couldn't stand living in the country.

'Don't blame you,' she said. 'All those cows for company. It would drive me round the bend.'
'It did,' I said. 'No wonder I found myself talking to horses.'