

Comprehension Question A

- Question A is worth **50** marks. This is the same as the marks given for the prescribed poetry section, so it is well worth taking the time to prepare for this task.
- You must answer Question A from one comprehension text and Question B from another. It is a good idea to check all the Question Bs first and choose one that suits you, and then decide which comprehension text you will use for Question A.
- There may be a visual element to the written text, so be prepared to discuss this.
- Remember that each year Paper One is centred around a different theme. In 2012, the theme was 'Memory'. Each of the texts will reflect this theme.
- If there is an introduction to the text, it is vital that you read it carefully. It might give you valuable information and help you to answer the questions which follow the text.
- To date, there have been three questions set after each of the texts: two fifteen mark questions and one twenty mark question.
- As a general rule, you should think that for every five marks, you should make one well-developed point. This means that you should make a point, support it with suitable quotation or reference, and develop or expand on the point.
- Write one point per paragraph. Move on to a new paragraph for each new point. Planning is essential here. Jot down a brief plan for every single answer. This will ensure that you stay focused and that you don't just repeat the same point several times.

The Visual Element

Think of the visual text in the same way as you think of the written text. Just as the written texts are all examples of a certain language genre, so the visual text has a purpose, which may be one of the following:

- Information – Particularly if it's in the form of a graph, a map or a diagram of some sort, the picture may give us a great deal of information. Think how helpful photographs can be in filling in the gaps when you are reading a newspaper report, for example.
- Narration – "Every picture tells a story".
- Argument – Photographs in particular can be extremely effective in putting forward a certain viewpoint, (anti-war or anti-vivisection, for example).
- Persuasion – Advertisements are the obvious examples of this.
- Aesthetic pleasure – The majority of pictures in our homes are chosen for this reason.

Ask yourself : What is the image about? Is there a central figure which draws our attention? Is the lighting bright or subdued and does this make a difference? Is the picture in black and white or in colour? Does this matter? What camera angles have been used? If it's a photograph, has it been touched up or airbrushed (in your opinion) to make the image more appealing?

When you are describing the visual text, be as precise as possible. Use the following terms:

1. Background
2. Foreground – the space to the front of the photograph.
3. Frame – the borders of the picture.
4. Left, right, centre, top etc.

If the visual text is part of a group or accompanies a written text, ask yourself:

- What is the overall impression created by the group?
- Is the theme handled differently in the different pictures?
- Is there a connection between the visual and the written text?
- Is the visual text effective?

Other Types of Question

1. You may also be asked a question on **character**.
2. You may be tested on your **understanding** of the piece you have just read. This type of question is usually (but not always) one of the first ones asked. Watch out for the following:

What did we learn about...

What is the writer's attitude towards...

What does the writer see as the main advantages/disadvantages/problems/highlights etc.?

What does the writer tell us about...?

What happened when...?

Do not give a personal response or introduce your own views at this stage. Stick to the question and plan your answer carefully. You should give a clear account and show that you understood the piece. Make a note in the margin beside the section or sections of the text which you think answer the question. Use quotes to support your answer but beware of simply re-telling the piece in your own words.

- You may be asked for your personal response to the passage. Such questions may be phrased in the following ways:

1. Do you agree with the writer that...?
2. Did you find this piece interesting?
3. Do you think...?

Remember that it is better to be positive than to be negative. You have a choice of three texts so try to choose one which you genuinely do like if possible. Be careful that you do not go off the point in this question. It may seem quite general but your answer should be based on the text. You will get a chance to express yourself more freely in the composition, but in this section of Paper 1, you must stick to the passage.

- In the Leaving Cert, you are usually asked to analyse a writer's **style**. This is one of the most difficult questions but with a little preparation and practice, you can become quite adept at it. Such questions may be phrased in the following ways:

1. How does the writer convey...?
2. How does the writer give us a clear impression of...?
3. How does the writer show the atmosphere of tension and fear...?
4. Does the writer succeed in convincing you that...?

When you are answering these questions, think about the five language genres. Remember that there may be a mixture of several of these in any given piece. If you know the main purpose of the passage and can identify the language genres used, then you will be able to approach this type of question without any difficulty. If, for example, the text is a persuasive piece and you are asked how the writer succeeds in convincing you of something, then you simply go through the text and pick out the features of the language of persuasion/argument. Always have your notes on the language genres to hand when you are answering these questions for homework.

If you are asked whether you find a writer's style **effective** or not, try to use **verbs** to explain your answer. **Never, ever point out a feature of the language used in the text without saying what that feature does in the context of the text.** (The same rule applies to your literary essays, of course.) For example, you might say that the use of rhetorical questions provokes you to think about the topic under discussion and draws you into the debate. If the piece is narrative, you might say that the anecdotes engaged you.

It is always a good idea to think of the following:

- Identify language genre – point out features of that genre in the text – use a verb to describe the effect each feature had on you, the reader.
- Here are some verbs you may wish to use:
Clarifies, excites, provokes, interests, fascinates, angers, proves, shows, emphasises, personalises...

It can help if you think in terms of your poetry answer; you should use literary terms and back up each point you make with a quote. It is essential to quote from the text when answering a question on style. Mention dialogue, colloquialisms and so forth but be sure to explain why they are effective, e.g. 'The use of informal language and dialect in the passage brings the reader into the community and into the mind of the main character, Alice', or 'The first person narration draws us into the story and helps us to empathise with John as we see the events unfolding from his perspective and we hope for a positive outcome.'

Use varied language when answering the comprehension questions. Below is a list words you may find helpful when planning your answer:

Poignant	Exciting
Moving	Fascinating
Striking	Gripping
Effective	Interesting
Absorbing	Intriguing
Attention-grabbing	Remarkable
Compelling	Riveting
Engrossing	Stimulating
Enjoyable	Thought-provoking

Sample Answers: 2010 – Higher Level Paper 1

A Global Future

This text is adapted from Al Gore's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech delivered in Norway in 2007.



Your Majesties, Honourable members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I have a purpose here today. It is a purpose I have tried to serve for many years. The distinguished scientists with whom it is the greatest honour of my life to share this award have laid before us a choice between two different futures – a choice that to my ears echoes the words of an ancient prophet: “Life or death, blessings or curses? Choose life, so that both thou and thy seed may live”.

We, the human species, are confronting a planetary emergency – a threat to the survival of our civilization that is gathering ominous and destructive potential even as we gather here. But there is hopeful news as well: we have the ability to solve the crisis and avoid the worst - though not all - of its consequences, if we act boldly, decisively and quickly. We must act.

Our world is spinning out of kilter. Major cities in North and South America, Asia and Australia are nearly out of water due to massive droughts. Desperate farmers are losing their livelihoods. Peoples in the frozen Arctic and on low-lying Pacific islands are planning evacuations of places they have long called home due to rising sea-levels. Unprecedented wildfires, and stronger storms in the Pacific and Atlantic, have threatened whole cities.

Millions have been displaced by massive flooding in South Asia, Mexico and Africa. As temperature extremes have increased, tens of thousands have lost their lives. We are recklessly burning and clearing our forests and driving more and more species into extinction. The very web of life on which we depend is being ripped and frayed.

We never intended to cause all this destruction, just as Alfred Nobel never intended that dynamite be used for waging war. He had hoped his invention would promote human progress. We shared that same worthy goal when we began burning massive quantities of coal, then oil and methane. But unlike most other forms of pollution, CO₂ is invisible, tasteless, and odourless – which has helped keep the truth about what it is doing to our climate out of sight and out of mind.

<p>We also find it hard to imagine making the massive changes that are now necessary to solve the crisis. And when large truths are genuinely inconvenient, whole societies can, at least for a time, ignore them. Yet, as George Orwell reminds us: “Sooner or later a false belief bumps up against solid reality, usually on a battlefield”. Indeed without realising it, we have begun to wage war on the earth itself. As the American poet, Robert Frost, wrote, “Some say the world will end in fire; some say in ice”. But neither need be our fate. It is time to make peace with the planet.</p>	<p>These are the last few years of decision, but they can be the first years of a bright and hopeful future if we do what we must. No one should believe a solution will be found without effort, without cost, without change. The way ahead is difficult. We have to expand the boundaries of what is possible. In the words of the Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, “Pathwalker, there is no path. You must make the path as you walk”.</p>
<p>There is an African proverb that says, “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”. We need to go far, quickly.</p>	<p>We are standing at the most fateful fork in that path. So I want to end as I began, with a vision of two futures – each with a palpable possibility – in the hope that we will see with vivid clarity the necessity of choosing between those two futures, and the urgency of making the right choice now.</p>
<p>The world needs an alliance – especially of those nations that weigh heaviest in the scales where earth is in the balance. The outcome will be decisively influenced by two nations that are now failing to do enough: the United States and China, the two largest CO₂ emitters will need to make the boldest moves or stand accountable before history for their failure to act.</p>	<p>The great Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, wrote, “One of these days, the younger generation will come knocking at my door”. The future is knocking at our door right now. Make no mistake, the next generation will ask us one of two questions. Either they will ask: “What were you thinking; why didn’t you act?” Or they will ask instead: “How did you find the moral courage to rise and successfully resolve a crisis that so many said was impossible to solve?”</p> <p>We have everything we need to get started, save perhaps political will, but political will is a renewable resource. So let us renew it, and say together: “We have a purpose. We are many. For this purpose we will rise, and we will act”.</p>

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

Questions A and B carry 50 marks each.

QUESTION A

- (i) Al Gore asserts that we are “confronting a planetary emergency”.
In your own words outline the argument he makes in support of this view. (15)
- (ii) Al Gore includes several quotations in his speech.
Select the quotation that made the greatest impact on you. Give reasons for your choice. (15)
- (iii) Identify and comment on four elements of effective speech-writing evident in this text. (20)

Text 2 – Question A

- (i) Al Gore asserts that we are ‘confronting a planetary emergency’.
In your own words outline the argument he makes in support of this view.

Note:

You could focus on the planetary emergency on its own or you could bring in our failure to deal with it.

As this is a fifteen mark question, you would be expected to write three well-developed points. Use a separate paragraph for each new point.

Plan:

1. Effect on people – livelihoods, homes ruined by drought/flooding/rising sea levels
2. Animals pushed to extinction – ‘web of life’ frayed
3. Urgent situation but not enough being done by major powers

Sample Answer:

Al Gore makes a strong case for the idea that we are 'confronting a planetary emergency. He outlines the effect on humanity and other creatures as well as pointing out our failure to face up to and tackle this 'inconvenient truth'.

This brief introduction touches on the three points that will be dealt with in this answer.

According to Gore, there is hardly a place in the world that is not being negatively affected by climate change. Some countries are struggling with 'massive droughts' which destroy farmers' livelihoods, while at the same time millions of people in other countries are forced to evacuate their homes due to flooding and rising sea levels. Whole cities around the globe are threatened by storms and wildfires. Extremes of heat and cold have killed tens of thousands.

It is not just people who are suffering the effects of our rapidly-changing planet. Al Gore tells us that we are destroying our forests and driving an increasing number of species into extinction. This destruction of the world around us is akin to waging a war on our own planet and is, Gore claims, putting our very survival at risk. We depend on 'the web of life' but are wiping it out at such a rate that we will be eradicated with it.

Try to link your paragraphs whenever possible.

Gore makes it clear that the 'planetary emergency' is exacerbated by our reluctance to recognise the seriousness of the situation and take steps to remedy it. He says we must act 'boldly, quickly and decisively' if we are to have any hope of avoiding the worst of the consequences. However, he believes that the two largest offenders in terms of CO₂ emissions – the United States and China – are not doing enough to tackle the problem. These major world powers have an important role to play in helping to make life on earth sustainable.

'Exacerbated' means 'made worse or more severe'. It is important to use a rich and varied vocabulary in your answers.

(ii) Al Gore includes several quotations in his speech.

Select the quotation that made the greatest impact on you. Give reasons for your choice. (15)

Note:

The choice of quotation is up to you. There is no right or wrong answer here. However, if you choose a quotation that genuinely made a strong impression on you, you are likely to get a better mark than if you simply choose one at random.

Think of the way you approach your unseen poetry when answering this question. Be prepared to discuss the quote in some detail, focusing on your personal response.

As this is a fifteen mark question, you would be expected to write three well-developed points. Use a separate paragraph for each new point.

Plan:

1. Idea of team work to achieve meaningful results is a good one.
2. Simple language, powerful message
3. Represents people from the developing world / ordinary people

Sample Answer:

The quotation which made the strongest impression on me is the African proverb that says 'If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together'.

The first thing that struck me favourably about this quotation

Justify your choice in the context of the passage.

was the idea that endurance and long-term results depend on team work. This is especially relevant in the context of Al Gore's argument as he is adamant that in order for us to have a positive influence on our future on this planet, we need to work together. Humankind has for too long been focused on competition and that is the reason for our 'burning massive quantities of coal, then oil and methane' in the race to have the latest and the greatest in industry and technology. But now we must pull together in the long journey to repair the damage we have done to our planet.

The second thing that appealed to me about this proverb was the simplicity of its message and the straightforward, uncomplicated language used. It is no less powerful for that, in fact it is more striking because it is so easily understood. There is no avoiding the truth contained within those words. The repetition of the word 'go' drives home the idea that we are all on a journey. The

proverb doesn't tell us what we must do, but rather offers us possibilities by using the phrase 'If you want to go...' I like this as it puts the onus on us to make the right choice and at the same time gives us hope that we can still make a difference if we form an alliance. This simple proverb is both instructive and positive and is one which I will easily remember.

Finally, I liked the fact that Al Gore chose to use a popular African saying in his speech. The rest of his quotations are from prophets, poets, authors and playwrights but this proverb is the voice of the ordinary people, which I think is appropriate as the message is that each and every one of us – not just scientists and politicians - has a role to play in our future. I noticed that Gore consciously chose quotations representing different nationalities but this was the only one from the developing world. I thought this was a nice touch as it is the developing world that has gained least from all the 'progress' made by burning of fossil fuels over the last hundred years or so, but has arguably suffered most from the devastating effects of climate change.

Each paragraph must show evidence of personal response as you were asked which quotation made the greatest impact on you.

(iii) Identify and comment on four elements of effective speech-writing evident in this text. (20)

Note:

Speech writing uses the language of persuasion and/or argument. What are the key features of these language genres? Remember to comment on the effectiveness of each feature you identify.

The question clearly requires you to write four points. Use a separate paragraph for each new point.

You may also wish to add a brief introduction and/or conclusion.

Plan:

1. Inclusive language / 'we' / engaging, puts responsibility on all of us
2. Quotations / illustrations lend force to argument and make it memorable.
3. Urgency of tone clear in language: 'emergency', 'threat to survival of civilisation' etc. Also, constant urging to move fast.
4. Rhetorical devices are persuasive

Sample Answer:

One of the most effective features of Al Gore's speech is the use of inclusive language throughout. The personal pronouns 'we' and 'our' are used repeatedly and this has the effect of **engaging**

Use verbs such as 'engaging' to show the effect the feature of style has.

the listeners and making it seem as if this speech is a conversation rather than a lecture. Al Gore does not distance himself from his audience by saying 'you' or 'they' but instead appears to take his share of the blame for what is happening to our planet. The result is that the audience is likely to feel that they are on the same side as the speaker and thus more inclined to agree with his point of view.

Gore also uses quotations and illustrations to great effect.

This is the topic sentence. The rest of the sentences in this paragraph will develop this idea.

The quotations are cleverly chosen from poets, playwrights and authors from a variety of countries and this gives the impression that Gore's argument is one which is supported by intelligent and learned people around the world. Further weight is added to Gore's case by his use of compelling and sobering illustrations. He says that millions of people have already 'been displaced by massive flooding in South Asia, Mexico and Africa' and that 'whole cities' are threatened by wildfires and storms. These examples are likely to make the audience realise the catastrophic effects of climate change and the danger it poses for everyone, everywhere.

Another way in which Gore makes his argument convincing is by the urgency of his tone. His language is carefully chosen to create fear and concern in the audience.

Short quotes woven into the fabric of the sentence are more effective than entire sentences copied from the extract.

Phrases such as 'planetary emergency', 'threat to the

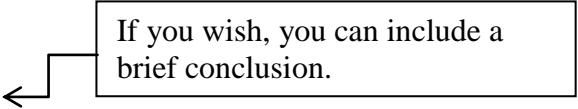
survival of our civilisation', 'all this destruction' and 'wage war on the earth itself' are highly

emotive and may well evoke a sense of panic in the listeners. This makes them more receptive to any solution Gore proposes to the dreadful scenario he has placed before them. Gore urges his audience to act quickly and stresses the 'urgency of making the right choice now' as we stand at this 'fateful fork' in our history. This is a powerful technique in speechwriting as the audience is led to believe that they must decide on a course of action immediately and while they are still under the influence of Gore's compelling argument.

Gore's use of rhetorical devices in this speech is particularly impressive and is a common feature of effective speech-writing. Repetition is used to drive home the points being made and to help them stick in the listener's mind. The word 'act' is used repeatedly and this motivates the audience to do something concrete about the problem of climate change. Another idea which is repeated is that of

humans waging war on the planet. This is a clever use of imagery as it drives home the idea that climate change equates to violence, suffering and death. Similarly clever is the use of rhetorical questions towards the end of the speech. The language in these questions is emotive, forcing the audience to wonder if they have 'the moral courage' to save the planet for the next generation.

All in all, this is a most convincing speech and one which is likely to have a profound effect on all who hear or read it.



If you wish, you can include a brief conclusion.

