

2007 Comprehension Question A – Ordinary Level

Text 1: The Rescue

Sample answers

A (i)

The writer conveys the harshness of the Antarctic landscape by using rich and vivid language to describe the physical difficulties of the terrain Tom Crean has to cross and the suffering he endures while doing so.

The area that Crean has to traverse is exceptionally hazardous and the conditions appalling. We are told of the deep crevasses that pose a constant danger, the 'glassy ice' which causes Crean to slip and slide, and the dreadful weather which blows the snow into Crean's eyes, blinding him.

The language the writer uses really brings the scene to life for us. The onomatopoeic word 'crashing' in the second sentence conjures up a dreadful image of a traveller breaking suddenly through the ice and plunging to his death.

Crean's struggle to cope with the ever-present dangers and to overcome his own exhaustion is clearly conveyed by the use of powerful verbs and adverbs. Crean is not just cold and tired, but is 'bitterly cold' and 'physically drained' as he heads for the hut. We see clearly how hostile the landscape is when we read of Crean either sinking up to his thighs in the deep snow or slipping and scrambling on the glassy ice.

A (ii)

The excitement of the rescue is shown in a number of ways. First, the tension and suspense is built up by the description of the men waiting in their 'tiny green tent' on the 'vast Barrier landscape'. Their situation seems hopeless but then the mood changes instantly with the arrival of the rescue party. The use of the word 'suddenly' signals this change of mood and marks the transition from 'stillness and silence' to the joyful, noisy reunion of men and dogs.

The second half of the paragraph, after the arrival of the rescue party, is filled with

movement and sound. The excitement of the men is shown in their uncontrollable laughter and Evans' burying his head in the dog's coat to hide his emotions. The verbs in this section are dynamic: the dogs are 'howling and yelping' as they gallop up to the tent, and Evans grabs the grey dog and sinks his face into its mane.

It would be almost impossible not to relate to the emotions that Evans and Lashly must have felt on seeing the rescue party. Their relief is vividly described: they 'couldn't believe that they had been saved' and feel as if 'a heavy weight had been lifted from their shoulders.' Our empathy with their feelings engages us and makes us share their delight and excitement.

A (iii)

I would have preferred to be making the dangerous journey to base camp rather than remain sitting in a tent, waiting to be rescued.

While there is no doubt that the solo walk to Hut Point sounds arduous and hazardous, at least Tom Crean was doing something. He was in danger, but he was exercising some control over his own destiny and choosing to face death head on rather than sit and wait for it to come to him. This is an attitude I admire and I would hope that if I were in his position I would be brave enough to volunteer to do the same thing.

Lashly and Evans' situation was, I feel, worse than Crean's. They must have felt utterly helpless as they waited in their 'tiny green tent' and they could not have had any way of knowing that Crean had made it to safety and that the rescue party was on its way. I think it would be unbearable to have to sit in the tent and know that your fate rested in the hands of another.

Crean must have felt an incredible sense of triumph and relief when he finally 'stumbled into the hut' and 'blurted out the alarming news' about Lashly and Evans. Admittedly, such relief was probably short-lived as he collapsed immediately after delivering his message, but I am sure he would have felt tremendous when he came to again. I would love to be in a position to do something as courageous and heroic as Crean's impressive trek across the snow and ice. I would imagine success must have brought with it a fantastic sense of satisfaction at having achieved what he set out to do, against all the odds.

The description of Evans' and Lashly's relief on greeting the rescue party convinces me that I

would not like to have remained behind in the tent. They had to endure 'stillness and silence' and what must have been an almost soul-destroying sense of hopelessness. The writer says that they 'couldn't believe' they had been saved and felt 'as if a heavy weight had been lifted from their shoulders.' I would hate to have to suffer such a feeling of despair and helplessness, even if there was a happy ending. Far better, I think, to risk sudden death 'crashing through a crevasse' and to actually head out and do something positive rather than have to stay behind and not know until the last moment if you would ever be found or if you would die on those snowy wastes.