

The following will help prepare you for your Year 10 English exam and provide valuable practice for the actual G.C.S.E. exam next year.

Paper 1 contains three questions. Showing understanding of non-fiction is question two.

In both your mocks and in the actual G.C.S.E. you will be able to study the texts in advance of the exam – but having a go at an 'unseen' text, and then going through it, will help you focus closely, making use of your own skills. You will learn to read for meaning, select appropriate material and analyse the author's craft.

Task :

The extracts from Norman Lewis' 'Jackdaw Cake' are about his memories from his unusual family life. Describe what you learn about his strange family and childhood. You should respond to the following prompts:

- **Explain and show in detail the thoughts and feelings of Norman Lewis and the members of his family**
- **Show how Norman Lewis uses language to make his account interesting**

Top Tips :

- Ignore the first part of the task – just focus on the bullet points.
- You are asked two questions here – treat them separately

- The first bullet point is simply asking for facts. It's a 'What?' question!
- Focus on each character separately. Write a few lines on each – showing their thoughts, their feelings, their relationships with others – and their feelings towards the cockerels. (N.B. The writer, grandfather, Aunt Li, Aunt Polly, Aunt Annie)
- Simply join these points together in one piece of continuous writing, beginning a new paragraph for each character.
- Use your own words as far as possible (this proves that you actually understand the text and can 'read between the lines'!) – e.g. write 'The grandfather did not enjoy life at home with his eccentric daughters and spent little time there' rather than 'The grandfather returned as late at night as he decently could' .
- Summarise! Keep it short and to the point.
- You could start '*The grandfather was proud of his cockerels and...*'
- Find evidence from the passage to support your views

- The second question is different – it's a 'How?' question! This is more demanding. A good answer here will gain you higher grades – although you will be writing much less!
- Look closely at the way that the article is written and the examples that Norman Lewis gives. How does the style of the writing make the memories more interesting? Look carefully at the descriptions of the birds, the landscape, the snails (Adjectives! Verbs!).
- Look for metaphors and similes. Give examples and show their effect!

Section B Non-fiction Texts

Jackdaw Cake

In the following extracts from his autobiography, NORMAN LEWIS remembers his unusual childhood when he lived in Wales with his grandfather and his three aunts, Aunt Polly, Aunt Li and Aunt Annie.

My grandfather worked in his tea-merchants business in King Street, leaving the house early in the morning and returning as late at night as he decently could. On Sunday mornings, like all the rest of the community, he was hounded by his conscience to chapel, but in the afternoon he was accustomed to spend a little time with the Old English Game Fowl he bred, showed and - as the rumour went - had entered in secret cock-fights in his disreputable youth. They were kept in wire pens in the back garden: each cockerel, or 'king' as it was known, separately with its hens. Show judges used to visit the house to test a contestant's ferocity by poking at it through the wire netting with a stick to which a coloured rag had been attached - any bird failing to attack being instantly disqualified.

The game cocks often escaped from their pens and strutted about the back garden on the look-out for something to attack. My Aunt Li and I were usually chosen. They had enormously long legs - so long that they appeared to be walking on miniature stilts. My grandfather and my aunt Polly knew how to handle them and carried garden rakes to push them aside, but Li and I went in great fear of them. This they probably sensed, for any king that had managed to break out had the habit of lying in wait well out of sight until either of us came on the scene, when he would rush to the attack, leaping high into the air to strike at our faces with his spurs. In the end my aunt and I formed a defensive alliance, and this brought us closer together....

The hills all around were striped and patched with small bleak fields, with sheep - seen from our house as small as lice - cropping the coarse grass, and seas of bracken pouting down the slopes to hurl themselves against the walls of the town. In autumn it rained every day. The water burst through the banks of the reservoir on top of Pen Lan and sent a wave full of fish down Wellfield Road, and then, spilling the fish all the way along Waterloo Terrace, as far as the market.

What impressed me most were the jackdaws, and the snails, on which the jackdaws largely lived. The snails were of every colour, curled and striped like little turbans in blue, pink, green and yellow, and it was hard to walk down the garden path without crushing them underfoot. There were thousands of jackdaws everywhere in the town, and our garden was always full of them. Sensing that my mad aunts presented no danger, they were completely tame. They would tap on the windows to be let into the house and go hopping from room to room in search of scraps.

Weekly the great ceremony took place of the baking of the jackdaw cake. For this, co-operation was forced upon my three aunts, for ingredients had to be decided upon, and bought: eggs, raisins, candied peel and sultanas, required to produce a cake of exceptional richness. Li did the shopping, because Polly was unable to leave the house, and Annie too confused to be able to buy what was necessary, put down her money, and pick up the change.

Each aunt took turns to bake and ice the cake. While they were kept busy doing this they seemed quite changed. Annie wore an ordinary dress and stopped laughing. Li didn't cry any more, and Polly's fits were quieter than on any other day. While the one whose turn it was did the baking, the others stood about in the kitchen and watched, and were for once quite easy to talk to.

On Saturday mornings at ten o'clock the cake was fed to the jackdaws. This had been happening for years, so that by half past nine the garden was full of birds, up to a hundred of them balancing and swinging with a tremendous gleeful outcry on the bushes and the low boughs of the trees. This was the great moment of the week for my aunts, and therefore for me. The cake would be cut into three sections and placed on separate plates on the kitchen table, and then at ten the kitchen windows were flung wide to admit the great black, squawking cataract of birds. For some hours after this weekly event the atmosphere was one of calm and contentment, and then the laughter and the weeping would start again.

