



Answer Question 1 **and either** Question 2 **or** Question 3.

- 1 The following text is taken from an account of the writer's experience of extreme weather in Vietnam, in South East Asia.
- (a) Comment on the ways in which language and style are used to convey the impact of the weather and people's reactions to it. [15]
- (b) The writer produces another account of extreme weather (real or imaginary) in a different part of the world.

Write a section of this account (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the style and features of the original extract. [10]

Mornings in Vietnam in the rainy season: I must remember to push the mattress up on its side when I get up, before doing anything else. If not, it becomes heavier and heavier with moisture, the pungent stink of mildew<sup>1</sup> pinching my nose at night.

In the rainy season, everything I do is a strategy for coping with the damp chill and the water. I didn't grow up here. The water infiltrates my consciousness. I learn to accept it, like the others around me, to see it as a minor disruption. 5

In the rainy season, I must remember to keep my showers to a few minutes, no matter how good it feels to have the water pounding my back, soothing away the chill. The water slowly seeps through the cement between the shower stall and bedroom, impregnates the wall, a sheen of tiny droplets over my bed. Another thing to remember: never leave the pillows propped up against the wall. 10

In the rainy season, I mustn't boil water for tea or cook anything that produces too much steam, adding to the weight of moisture hanging in the air. The excess humidity settles: a visible mist upon the clothes hanging in my closet, turning them into a new life form, furry and spotted. Every surface a wick for moisture. 15

In the rainy season, I am thankful that my home is in this neighbourhood, this alley, so much higher than the main road. While the rich sleep in their attics, or on their roofs, the swirling, muddy water laps at my door sill, but doesn't enter.

I grab my umbrella and head out for breakfast. I push open the waterlogged left panel of my carved wooden door. My umbrella mushrooms out with a snap and a dull whomp, displacing water-filled air. Rain sheets down from our red tiled roof. 20

My nephew, radiant in his purple rain poncho, a canary yellow motorcycle helmet pushed down over the hood, stands under the eaves, rain rat-a-tat-tatting down from the roof onto the helmet. A duet with the drumming rain on my umbrella. Pausing a moment in the ankle-deep water, we listen to the call-and-response rhythm we make together. He laughs a great belly-laugh and roars off on his motorbike, the water a tall rooster-tail behind him. 25

Looking at the world from under my rose-coloured umbrella, I wade down the alley with its gold walls, under grey skies and green leaves. The lane falls to meet the road. The water rises to my knees, threatens my jeans, rolled up thigh-high. Each step an eternity, pushing against the flow, my toes seeking the edge of the sidewalk. Stepping out into the main road triggers a memory from the year before: this corner 30

is where the pavement dips into a pothole, where I twisted an ankle under the murky water. 35

I can't see my feet, or even my knees. The Perfume River, not knowing its boundaries, or refusing to have any, overflows the banks, invades the road and climbs the steps of shops and homes.

In the rainy season, instead of my usual coffee and soup on the bank of the river, I head for the very back of a restaurant I never set foot in during good weather. The tables near the front are prone to the fine mist that kicks up from the water-skimmed entrance, pummelled by the onslaught of rain. I'm lucky to find an empty seat. Waiting for breakfast, I watch the river swelling over the road, up the three steps and into the crowded restaurant. 40

Inhaling the aroma of bitter coffee, I watch boys swimming and casting their fishing lines, shouting and laughing in the river that used to be the road. A group of teens cycles past, four abreast, wearing purple and pink ponchos. Laughing, pushing at the pedals, they move in slow motion, tires submerged. One of them struggles but cannot avoid a branch drifting into his path. 45

Across from the restaurant, several tourists raise their cameras to snap souvenirs of a small girl hugging her wiry dog on the roof of her home. Down the road the water is higher; another dog stands on the hood of a taxi, barking at the water as it rises, lapping over the hood. 50

Awaiting my food, I peer through the breakfast bustle to watch the tourists point their cameras at the rising river and the falling rain. They laugh and curse and squeal as the water soaks their pant legs, rolled up to their crotches, giving them a bowlegged gait<sup>2</sup> as they enter the restaurant in squelching shoes. 55

After breakfast, I venture out of the shelter of the restaurant and back into the flood, the chill soaking into my bones. Bits of flotsam—a plastic water bottle, a piece of someone's front door—bob against me as I struggle against the current until I reach my alley. I wonder if this is the year the water will rise up my walls. 60

<sup>1</sup>*mildew*: damp mould

<sup>2</sup>*gait*: way of walking

2 The following text is taken from a newspaper review of a biography about Simon Cowell, the creator of, and judge on, the international television programme *The X Factor*, a show in which contestants compete in a talent competition to become stars in the music world.

- (a) Comment on the ways in which language and style are used to portray Simon Cowell. [15]
- (b) One of Simon Cowell's personal assistants writes to the newspaper to offer a far more positive view of his employer. Write a section of this letter (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the material of the original extract. [10]

Simon Cowell, I've heard it said, is so vain that if he went to a funeral he'd want to be the corpse.

But the net effect of this admirably level-headed biography is that Cowell seems dead already.

Suffocated by his vast wealth – sums such as \$300 million, \$700 million and \$6 billion are bandied about – Cowell's life has become positively and transcendently boring, drained completely of colour, bustle and humour.

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He spends six solid hours a day clamped to the phone, policing his vast empire, discussing sponsorship and licensing deals and calculating all the advertising revenue and royalties.

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He can never relax, for fear his power will ebb. The rest of his waking hours are devoted to examining DVDs of *The X Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent*, fretting about the sound-mix or the lighting. When not doing this, he is in his private jet, looking at his iPhone to scan the Google alerts of his name.

Apart from five housekeepers, an estate manager, two groundsman, a chef and a chauffeur, three personal assistants and a personal manager, Cowell mistrusts friendship or ordinary human relationships, with their obligations and unpredictability.

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He was always spoilt rotten. Scholastic achievements were scoffed at, and Cowell's reward for achieving two O-levels 'at the lowest grade' was a red TR6 sports car, worth £7,000.

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Proud to have been 'outspoken, obnoxious, cheeky and bored easily,' Cowell's personality was in place at the age of five, though he didn't leave home until he was twenty-six. Briefly a supermarket management trainee, he then became a tea boy at a music and record company.

He saw at once that the way to get ahead in the music business was to pretend to be camp, so he began 'wearing a V-neck white T-shirt exposing his hairy chest'. He pulled his trousers up to his armpits and called everybody darling.

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His fortune wasn't made instantly, however. Nor were his instincts spot-on. He let Kylie Minogue, fresh from Australia, sit in reception for a week, 'ignored by everyone'.

He turned down Take That. 'I don't like the lead singer,' Cowell said. 'He's too fat.' Poor Gary Barlow. He told Britney Spears, 'You're mad. No one can be successful with a name like that.' He got tremendously excited by 'a fabulously sexy Brazilian girl called Karen' who was later exposed as having mimed along 'to words sung by a Spanish vocalist'. That's scoffing at scholastic achievements for you. Genuine Brazilians speak Portuguese.

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It was when he went before the cameras in person that Cowell really impinged on the national consciousness. I personally can't tell my *X Idol* from my *Got Talent*: Cowell's innovation, back in 2001, was to realise that though the pretence was 'we're looking for contestants with star quality whom we can turn into stars,' his programmes were in fact going to be soap operas. Viewers were to accompany the poor saps following a dream who'd be mocked and patronised by the judges. 40

Cowell himself was instantly memorable as television's Mr Nasty, doling out the humiliation and barbed put-downs, such as 'I'm afraid to say that really hurt my ears' or 'That used to be my favourite song. Not any more.' He was equally as acerbic<sup>1</sup> about his fellow panellists. Though considered 'reality' television, because it utilised real (unpaid) people rather than trained members of Equity,<sup>2</sup> Cowell's shows were as carefully edited and shaped as any film by Francis Ford Coppola. 'I want a more ruthless feel,' Cowell told his producers, 'as if someone's got to win. I want the losers to feel gutted.' 45

There is a strong element of exploitation here. It's not about music or dancing, what Cowell is doing, but about power. We could be in the Roman arena, with Cowell the emperor giving the thumbs up or the thumbs down. His approval or disapproval is like a matter of life or death. But not even the victors last long: the winners are in the limelight only briefly and are soon consigned to cruise ships or switching the Christmas lights on in remote provincial towns. The promised millions don't pour in, either, as all the considerable expenses are deducted from fees. 50  
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Cowell, meantime, keeps tearing down and rebuilding his homes, tasteless palaces with shiny granite work surfaces and underfloor heating, suede walls and marble chairs. 'Pull it down!' he said of a new staircase. 'I want a circular one.' The immaculate lawns were similarly ripped up and the garden removed because 'I can't stand flowers.' Crystal chandeliers went on a skip. 60

<sup>1</sup>*acerbic*: sharp

<sup>2</sup>*Equity*: a trade union for actors

3 The following text is taken from an article which describes the writer's experience of returning to her home country of Liberia, West Africa.

(a) Comment on the ways in which language and style are used to convey the writer's thoughts and feelings. [15]

(b) Basing your answer closely on the style and features of the original extract, continue the account (between 120–150 words). You do not need to bring the account to a close. [10]

Every day of those two weeks in Ghana, my soul ached to be home in Liberia. The ocean behind my room at the Afia Beach Hotel in Accra teased me with its flapping and rolling all day and night. But, this was not yet home, I told myself. I wanted to see Liberia again, where not only the ocean waves had survived a bloody war, where the sunshine also reigned, a home of lost ghosts and falling rockets, of runaways like us who had already been forgotten by the stay-at-home survivors, a home of lost youths, wandering the streets after their survival of one of the world's bloodiest wars, a home of tears and unimaginable stories of cruelty. 5

I wanted to hug my father again, to see him in his old age, his gray hair that had defied death and time, to see my brothers again after the lost years of their youth, the war having sapped opportunities away from them. They were the younger ones, the ones that had not yet died in all of the after-war diseases and calamities. I wanted to cry and laugh with them, survivors who still needed answers. 10

Today, I was on a Kenyan airliner. The plane was filled with others who had been away too long; they'd also been forgotten. Sitting next to me was a young woman looking younger than a teenager. Her light brown skin sparkled with beauty. She seemed a 'been to',<sup>1</sup> with a soft face made up to the letter, her smile, prepared. On her fingers were gold and diamond rings. Bracelets and fine linens draped around her arms as if she were some queen from a past world. She had ordered a huge perfume case from the airline's Duty Free catalogue, so the stewardess came looking for her. She pushed her hands from under the *hajib*<sup>2</sup> to receive the package from the beautiful Kenyan stewardess. She quickly opened the package to show it off to me. Pride took over her features as she examined the perfume, smiling at me. We were not yet introduced. 15 20 25

She was only twenty-two, I would learn; and her English, simple and rough, very much in contrast to her appearance. She had not gone to school all these years, I thought to myself, yet, she looked schooled and well-kept. She quickly excused her attire: she was flying in from a far away country in the Middle East. 'I'm a real Liberian girl,' she smiled. She was coming in from Saudi Arabia where she had stationed herself comfortably with an Italian man. Her conversation was not brief. She pulled her hands out of her chiffon-laced *hajib* and other wraps every few minutes to speak with her hands even though I could understand Liberian English perfectly. She lived an *arrangement*, she said softly. The man was old, much older, but he took good care of her and her family. He was old enough to be her grandfather, she smiled. But that was okay. There was room, she said, for him to do what he wanted and room for her too, to move around in their arrangement. 30 35

Here she was, she told me, flying back and forth whenever she wanted. She'd been everywhere, she said, everywhere in the Middle East and Africa. She was on her way to see her mother in Liberia, to give them gifts, to take care of those who had survived the years. With his money lavished on her, she could come twice a month if she wanted. She smiled, looking into my eyes as if for approval. 40

I turned away to the window. I was in the window seat. I love window seats. Because of invitations to read and present my poetry, I am a frequent flyer around the US, and now, though less frequently, outside the US. I had taken to window seats over the last few years. They are my solace when I end up next to an annoying passenger — or a sweet little Liberian girl who had chosen the soft road through the rocky desert the war had set her on. I wanted to jump through that window today. I was angry — not at the girl, her mother, or her man. I was angry at the world, at the war, and at those who had brought this sort of calamity upon us. I was angry that such a beautiful, soft-skinned girl looking like my own daughter had given herself away to an old man because of the times, had sold herself into slavery. 45

I kept looking through the window. I could not look at her now, I told myself. 50

I turned away from the window and took her in my arms. She could have been my daughter, I thought. She held on tightly to me, tears rolling down her cheeks as I too, wept. 55

<sup>1</sup>*'been to'*: a well-travelled person

<sup>2</sup>*hajib*: veil or body covering

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