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General Certificate of Education
Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

8693/12

Paper 1 Passages for Comment

May/June 2012

2 hours

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet/Paper

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

If you have been given an Answer Booklet, follow the instructions on the front cover of the Booklet.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **two** questions.

You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers.

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.

The number of marks is given in brackets [] at the end of each question or part question.

This document consists of **7** printed pages and **1** blank page.



Answer **two** questions.

- 1 In the following passage, from a travel website, the writer describes her thoughts and feelings as she travels to a dance studio in the city of Buenos Aires in Argentina. She is about to experience the country's national dance, the tango.
- (a) Comment on the style and language of the passage. [15]
- (b) The same writer visits another country. She writes an account of her experience of one of its national customs on the same website. Write the opening of the account (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the style and language of the original extract. [10]

My cab is stuck to the asphalt like its tyres are melting in the thirty five degree heat. The Obelisco¹ looms up ahead from its restless bed in the centre of Avenida 9 de Julio. Horns hit my ears. The aircon blast can't mask the stale drift of cigarette from my *taxista's*² clothes, as he shifts to stare back at me. He's just found out I'm British, but speak enough Spanish to converse with him. My answers flow pat, the minutes tick slow, and the meter racks up, but I can bear it this afternoon: my mind is on the new four inch stiletto heels in my bag. 5

On the pavement opposite Suipacha 384 I look up. I always do. The suspended sign that will glow red neon by night; the broken windows that cannot keep the beckoning melodies from the street; the stone balcony on which I have stood, and smoked, and caught my breath so many times. I delay. Buy mints. Drag out the seconds until I will mount the stairs and allow the music to drown out the background chatter of my life. It's my ritual: a calming; a buffer zone between the chaotic and bliss. 10

The steps to the first floor are worn to shallow smiles. Who has climbed them across the decades? Pugliese on the way to his piano keys; Pablo Veron en route to stardom; Sally Potter³ blazing the trail, the likes of me in her wake; and the strangers who now, this minute, wait to take me in their arms. A gust of hot wind blows the balcony curtain towards me as I pass, a caress of wine red velvet on my hand. I push my money across the smooth counter of wood and exchange kisses with the hostess, *You're late, I thought you weren't coming. How was your week? Are you alone today?* I am. She guides me to my table, although I know it as a home: the layered cream and red coloured cloths scarred by cigarette burns and flung into unruly folds by the draughts from the huge wall fans; the two crimson leather chairs with their buttock-dented seats; the marble column around which I will have to peer with determination, to catch the farthest male eyes. 15 20 25

I do not look up as I prepare. Instead, I keep my gaze on my Cinderella shoes as they slide out of their silk bag. I focus only on my transformation, slip my naked feet into silver metallic snake-skin, adjust tiny buckles and thin straps, flex my ankles awake: unseen below the cloak of the table cloth. The waiter appears, all bow tie and apron, and I order my *agua con gas* and a *cortado*⁴: coffee will heighten my senses and the water will cool me. I place my fan on the table. My mints. Adjust the clip in my hair. Finally I'm ready. I raise my eyes. 30

On the smooth polished stone, pairs of bodies weave their unique and silent songs. Each close embrace carries two hearts and two souls in its arms. Music transports the soul. The soul directs the feet. The feet dance. 35

I see my regular dance partners: I already know where we will walk together today. I linger over the men who I've never touched: how will it be to lean into their chests, their heartbeats, the voices of their dance? The clues undulate before me and I search them out: a body shape, a height, a hand touching a back, the smoothness of a step, an expression on a partner's face, even the way he escorts her from the floor when the tango ends with the cheek of rock and roll. I hold each 40

man in my gaze, one after the other, and I smile because I find him quite easy today: the stranger I will accept if the music insists that I take a risk, and his eyes find mine.

The first notes of another tango surge into five o'clock and I decide. My eyes do not leave him as he sips his glass of champagne. He looks up, and straight at me. I glance away. I put down my fan. I glance back. His stare is constant. Me. He wants me too. He inclines his head. Slowly and deliberately, I nod my acceptance. He stands and begins his walk towards me. I take off my glasses: I know that for the next four tangos he is mine. I am about to discover the story of an unknown soul.

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¹*Obelisco*: a large monument

²*taxista's*: taxi driver's

³*Pugliese ... Pablo Veron ... Sally Potter*: famous tango musician/dancers

⁴*agua con gas and a cortado*: sparkling water and strong coffee

2 The following passage describes the writer's relationship with his stepfather.

- (a) Comment on the style and language of the passage.
- (b) Mrs Grant, the housekeeper, writes a letter to a friend in which she describes the boy's relationship with his stepfather. Write the opening of the letter (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the material of the original extract. [10]

My love of food began long ago. As far as I can remember, in fact. And it started with an Aga¹ and rice pudding. The Aga was a vast cream and black monster, glowering on the stone floor of the farm kitchen. It had doors, drawers, dials and apertures enough to fascinate the curiosity of a six-year-old boy with an undiluted imagination. From the moment I saw it, I was beguiled and drawn into every part of its system. 5

Agas are astounding creatures. Domesticated dinosaurs. They offer warmth and solace, and you can learn everything you ever need to know about cooking on their plates and in their furnaces. But strangely, for me, of all the roasts, stews and tarts, the most remarkable dish cooked in that Aga was rice pudding. It was firm and creamy, with a lemony zest and crisp blackened skin. 10

My first memory of rice pudding is etched with force. It symbolises an act of compassion in the midst of despair. For the Aga also represented a dangerous nemesis.² When my mother and I moved to a farm to live with Graham, my stepfather, I was five. In the first days of this strange new parent, I was confused and detached. For security, I found the bewitching warmth of this huge cast-iron beast in the kitchen. At any opportunity, I hid beside its hot water boiler. 15

I unscrewed one of the knobs from the controls of this contraption. Its spark went out. It was no more than a childish misdeed. But not for Graham. He was master of his home. Such disorder was intolerable. 20

At that age, a little boy will do anything to avoid trouble, so I lied. But to him my fibs were a sign of creeping moral ambiguity. I was banished in disgrace to my room, a terrible punishment for a lively and gregarious child.

The following day, in exile, as I lay shivering and hungry in my bedroom, a quiet knock came and the door opened gingerly. A bowl of steaming rice pudding was set down on the floor. Mrs Grant, the housekeeper, one of my first saviours. 25

Though this punishment, and others, happened many times subsequently, no one else ever admitted to me that they knew about what was going on.

None of my stepfather's brutal strategies really worked. And despite my suffering, instead of submitting, my will grew stronger. And he became more enraged by me. War was declared, and even at that young age, I knew how to exact revenge. 30

He loved food. He was greedy, even. So was I. And we were a fair match. He had lived on that farm for almost 30 years and had full-time gardeners to oversee the kitchen garden, orchards and greenhouses. He had apricots and pears, white muscatel grapes and figs under glass, nectarine houses and asparagus beds, heated with lead wires in the ground. From redcurrants to his sacred Royal Sovereign strawberries, the gardens were a cornucopia³ that became my plundering ground. 35

In the evenings, my stepfather would wander through the greenhouses or past the apple trees, checking for the perfect ripeness of his latest progeny. He would never touch the fruit, for as any gardener will know, they carry a 'bloom', a sort of musty blush, that must be untouched for the perfect fruit. Soon he began to notice an early predator had been at his prizes. Little finger marks on the bloom betrayed a thief among the nettings and glass. Just before he was ready to pluck a succulent nectarine from the tree, it vanished. 40

He loved chocolate, too, and hid boxes of expensive truffles and dark chocolate bars around his private spaces in the house. I knew them all, and feasted on the 45

This war of attrition carried on for years but in the end he knew he couldn't win. Eventually an uneasy truce settled. We learned to get along.

¹*Aga*: a large metal oven

²*nemesis*: source of retribution and vengeance

³*cornucopia*: a rich variety

3 The following passage is an account of the writer's fascination with trees.

- (a) Comment on the style and language of the passage.
- (b) The same writer produces another account in which he reflects on his relationship with another aspect of the natural world. Write the opening of the section (between 120–150 words). Base your answer closely on the style and language of the original extract. [10]

I come out solemnly with a pencil and an exercise book, and take my seat in all gravity at the foot of a large fir-tree, and wait for thoughts to come, gnawing like a squirrel on a nut. But the nut's hollow.

I think there are too many trees. They seem to crowd round and stare at me, and I feel as if they nudged one another when I'm not looking. I can feel them standing there. And they won't let me get on. Just their cussedness¹. I felt they encouraged me like a harem of wonderful silent wives. 5

It is half rainy too—the wood so damp and still and so secret, in the remote morning air. Morning, with rain in the sky, and the forest subtly brooding, and me feeling no bigger than a bug between the roots of my fir. The trees seem so much bigger than me, so much stronger in life, prowling silent around. I seem to feel them moving and thinking and prowling, and they overwhelm me. Ah, well, the only thing is to give way to them. 10

This is the edge of the Black Forest in Germany – sometimes I can see the Rhine river far off, like a bit of magnesium ribbon. But not today. Today only trees, and leaves, and vegetable presences. Huge straight fir-trees, and big beech-trees sending rivers of roots into the ground. And cuckoos, like noise falling in drops off the leaves. And me, a fool, sitting by a grassy wood-road with a pencil and a book, hoping to write. 15

Never mind. I listen again for noises, and I smell the damp moss. The looming trees, so straight. And I listen for their silence. Big, tall-bodied trees, with a certain magnificent cruelty about them. Or barbarity. I don't know why I should say cruelty. Their magnificent, strong, round bodies! It almost seems I can hear the slow, powerful sap drumming in their trunks. Great full-blooded trees, with strange tree-blood in them, soundlessly drumming. 20 25

Trees that have no hands and faces, no eyes. Yet the powerful sap-scented blood roaring up the great columns. A vast individual life, and an overshadowing will. The will of a tree. Something that frightens you.

Suppose you want to look a tree in the face? You can't. It hasn't got a face. You look at the strong body of a trunk: you look above you into the matted body-hair of twigs and boughs: you see the soft green tips. But there are no eyes to look into, you can't meet its gaze. 30

It's no good looking at a tree, to know it. The only thing is to sit among the roots and nestle against its strong trunk, and not bother. That's how I write, between the toes of a tree, forgetting myself against the great ankle of the trunk. And then, as a rule, as a squirrel is stroked into its wickedness by the faceless magic of a tree, so am I usually stroked into forgetfulness, and into scribbling this book. My tree-book, really. 35

This marvellous vast individual without a face, without lips or eyes or heart. This towering creature that never had a face. Here am I between his toes like a bug, and him noiselessly over-reaching me. And I feel his great blood-jet surging. And he has no eyes. But he turns two ways. He thrusts himself tremendously down to the middle earth, where dead men sink in darkness, in the damp, dense under-soil, and he turns himself about in high air. Whereas we have eyes on one side of our head only, and only grow upwards. 40 45

Plunging himself down into the black humus, with a root's gushing zest, where we can only rest dead; and his tip is high air, where we can only look up to. So vast

and powerful and exultant in his two directions. And all the time, he has no faith, no thought: only a huge, savage, thoughtless soul. Where does he even keep his soul?—Where does anybody?

But now they are my only shelter and strength. I lose myself among the trees. I am so glad to be with them in their silent, intent passion.

¹*cussedness*: obstinacy

Copyright Acknowledgements:

Question 1 © Sally Blake; *T Time in Buenos Aires*; Bradt Travel Guides; <http://www.bradttravelguides.com/infopage.aspPageID=108>.

Question 2 © Pip Dundas-Jones; *How an Aga became my best friend*; The Guardian; Saturday 19 June 2010;
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/jun/19/aga-stepfather-cooking.guardian.co.uk>.

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