

# GCSE English Language

## Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

*This extract comes from the end of a short story called 'She Wasn't Soft' by T Boyle. In the story, Paula is a long distance runner, who is running a triathlon with her boyfriend Jason spectating- she is expected to come second, beaten by her rival Zinny, and Jason has made a plan to sabotage Zinny's race by giving her a cup of spiked juice as she runs past.*

He found a knot of volunteers in their canary-yellow T-shirts and caps and stationed himself a hundred yards up the street from them, the ice rattling as he swirled his little green time bomb around the lip of the cup. The breeze was soft, the sun caught in the crowns of the trees and reaching out to finger the road here and there in long slim swatches.

He'd never tell Paula, of course, no way, but he'd get giddy with her, pop the champagne cork, and let her fill him with all the ecstasy of victory.

A cheer from the crowd brought him out of his reverie. The first of the men was cranking his way around the long bend in the road, a guy with a beard and wraparound sunglasses—the Finn. He was the one favored to win, or was it the Brit? Jason tucked the cup behind his back and faded into the crowd, which was pretty sparse here, and watched the guy propel himself past, his mouth gaping black, the two holes of his nostrils punched deep into his face, his head bobbing on his neck as if it weren't attached right. Another guy appeared around the corner just as the Finn passed by, and then two others came slogging along behind him. Somebody cheered, but it was a pretty feeble affair.

Jason checked his watch. It would be five minutes or so, and then he could start watching for the Amazing Bone Woman, tireless freak that she was. He fingered the cup lightly, reminding himself not to damage or crease it in any way—it had to look pristine, fresh-dipped from the bucket—and he watched the corner at the end of the street till his eyes began to blur from the sheer concentration of it all.

Two more men passed by and nobody cheered, not a murmur, but then suddenly a couple of middle-aged women across the street set up a howl, and the crowd chimed in: the first woman, a woman of string and bone with a puffing heaving puppet like frame, was swinging into the street in distant silhouette. Jason moved forward. He tugged reflexively at the bill of his hat, jammed the rims of the shades back into his eye sockets. And he started to grin, all his teeth on fire, his lips spread wide: Here, take me, drink me, have me!

As the woman drew closer, loping, sweating, elbows flailing and knees pounding, the crowd getting into it now, cheering her, cheering this first of the women in a man's event, the first Ironwoman of the day, he began to realize that this wasn't Zinny Bauer at all. Her hair was too long, and her legs and chest were too full—and then he saw the number clearly, No. 23, and looked into Paula's face. She was fifty yards from him, but he could see the toughness in her eyes and the tight little frozen smile of triumph and superiority. She was winning. She was beating Zinny Bauer and Jill Eisen and all those pathetic jocks laboring up the hills and down the blacktop streets behind her. This was her moment, this was it.

But then, and he didn't stop to think about it, he stepped forward, right out on the street where she could see him, and held out the cup. He heard her feet beating at the pavement with a hard merciless slap, saw the icy twist of a smile and the cold triumphant eyes. And he felt the briefest fleeting touch of her flesh as the cup left his hand.

## Section A: Reading

1. Read the first paragraph again.

List four things we learn about the scene of the spectators.  
(4 marks)

2. Look in detail at the fourth paragraph.

How does the writer use language here to describe the runners? You could include the writer's choice of:

- words and phrases
- language features and techniques
- sentence forms.

(8 marks)

3. You now need to think about the whole of the Source.

This text is from the end of a short story.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader? You could write about:

- what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
- how and why the writer changes this focus as the Source develops
- any other structural features that interest you.

(8 marks)

4. Focus this part of your answer on the second half of the source.

A student said 'Although Jason wants Paula to win, he doesn't seem to like her very much.' To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

- consider your own impressions of Jason
- evaluate how the writer shows that Jason disapproves of the race
- support your response with references to the text

(20 marks)

## Section B: Writing



marks for technical accuracy) [40 marks]

5. A magazine has asked for contributions for their creative writing page.

Either:

Write a description of a field as suggested by this picture (picture of a field).

Or

Write a story that begins with the sentence: 'The wind began to blow through the trees with a ripping intensity that seemed to be growing with every minute.'

(24 marks for content and organisation and 16