Year 10 | English Reading Comprehension

IGCSE-pathway diagnostic assessment • Literary interpretation and close reading

Student name: _____ Date: _____

Suggested time: 60 minutes. Show working and explain your reasoning. This is an independent diagnostic, not an official examination paper.

1. Read the original passage below.

At six each morning, the station clock stopped for exactly one minute. Most commuters never noticed. Mara did. On Tuesday she watched the second hand freeze while the platform lights flickered, then resume as though nothing had happened. Her grandfather had once repaired the clock and told her that a machine could remember what a town preferred to forget. She had laughed then. Now, in the glass of the waiting-room window, she saw a reflection of the platform as it had looked decades earlier: benches painted green, a porter in a blue cap, and a suitcase nobody claimed. When she turned, the platform was empty. Mara wrote down the time instead of telling anyone.

The next morning she returned with a notebook. The clock stopped. The reflection appeared. This time the suitcase was open, revealing a stack of letters tied with red string. Before Mara could read a name, the second hand moved and the image vanished. She understood only one thing: whatever the station concealed, the clock was giving her sixty seconds to find it.

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Identify two details that establish a mysterious atmosphere and explain their effect. [6 marks]

2. What can you infer about Mara’s personality? Support your answer with two details from the passage. [6 marks]

3. Analyse the effect of the phrase “a machine could remember what a town preferred to forget.” [6 marks]

4. How does the writer use the contrast between ordinary commuting and the unusual events to engage the reader? [7 marks]

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5. Explain why the final sentence creates suspense. Refer to language and structure. [7 marks]

6. Write a 90–120-word continuation consistent with the passage’s viewpoint and atmosphere. [10 marks]

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Keep this section separate from the student during the assessment. The marks are diagnostic prompts, not an official IGCSE mark scheme.

Suggested responses and assessment notes

1. (6 marks) Accept two supported details, such as the clock stopping precisely, flickering lights, old-fashioned reflection, unclaimed suitcase; explain unsettling effect.

2. (6 marks) Observant, curious and cautious; she notices what others miss, returns with a notebook, records rather than broadcasts.

3. (6 marks) Personification/metaphor suggests hidden collective history and memory embedded in a place.

4. (7 marks) Everyday routine provides a believable baseline against which the supernatural anomaly is striking.

5. (7 marks) Time limit, unanswered question, forward-looking action and the phrase “sixty seconds” create urgency.

6. (10 marks) Assess coherence, consistency, vivid detail, control of tense and purposeful ending; no single model answer.

What to observe

Look for subject knowledge, accuracy, use of appropriate terminology, clarity of reasoning, interpretation of command words, and ability to justify or evaluate when asked.

Suggested diagnostic approach

Record which questions were attempted independently, which required prompts, and whether difficulties arose from concepts, literacy, calculations or time management. Plan follow-up teaching around recurring misconceptions.

Curriculum note

This is a general Year 10 IGCSE-oriented diagnostic. It is not endorsed by Cambridge, Pearson Edexcel or the IB. Topic order and examination demands differ by board and school; adjust to the student’s actual specification.

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