



GCSE

C700U10-1A



S25-C700U10-1A



FRIDAY, 23 MAY 2025 – MORNING

ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 1
20th Century Literature Reading and Creative Prose Writing

Resource Material for use with Section A

SECTION A: 40 marks

Read carefully the passage below.

The First Wife

1 At his niece's wedding Clive Harper fell in love again with his ex-wife, Mary. At least that was how it felt. There she was, not seen for many a year, and he found himself in a turmoil. She was looking older, greyer but undeniably attractive. A tall woman in a stylish light green suit, an expensive silk scarf knotted at her neck. Elegant shoes. Clive noticed this sort of thing about
5 a woman. A warm smile on her face as she talked to an old aunt. Clive was overcome with a quite desperate sense of loss.

He quite forgot that he had left her, all those years ago, when he suddenly became aware that she had begun to look old. He was forty when he left Mary and moved in with Colette, who was twenty-four and French, an irresistible combination. Of course, Mary had been badly
10 hurt. He could see that now. The arrangement with Colette had not lasted long. Indeed he could barely remember her now. She had had many successors over the years. He had to have that constant thrill of a new interest – the anticipation of a secret meeting, the flattery of a new face turned attentively to his.

He was terrified of ageing. It had begun in his twenties when he realised to his dismay
15 there were people younger than himself. The thought filled him with nausea and self-pity. His thirtieth birthday had smashed into him like a rock in a tranquil sea. He found himself looking in the mirror more often. He watched the faces of people his age to see how he was doing by comparison.

Mary had never understood his fits of terror. She had made light of his panic. 'Look,' she had
20 said, 'you're getting older. So am I, so is everyone.' She had no conception of the cold fear in his stomach. No, this can't be happening, he thought. Not to me. To other people maybe. Not to me.

And now he was fifty-nine. Sometimes, in dark moments, the awful fact reared up and sent him reeling. But he had learned over the years how to cope. Activity was the thing. Fill the
25 days, the evenings. Travel. Go out. Be with others. Talk, laugh. He made sure to surround himself with younger people. When his friends showed a sign of becoming a touch decrepit, he slid away from them. And, of course, his present wife, Susan, was not yet forty.

And now here was Mary, his first wife. He thought with a tingle of pleasure how she would react when she saw him. He was glad he had worn his rather dashing new shirt and that
30 Susan had woken with symptoms of flu and had decided to cry off the wedding. What luck.

He expected that by now Mary would be wondering if he was here, would be casting glances around the room. She did not. She continued with her patient attention to the aunt, laughing with her in a way that had Clive in a sudden fit of jealousy.

He tried to remember what news of her had reached him over the years. She had never
35 remarried. No rings on her hands. She lived alone and worked in hospital administration, a career on which she embarked after their marriage broke up. He had behaved badly – he would be the first to accept that. But now was his chance – not to make amends but to initiate a new, rewarding relationship. That was what he needed. It need not affect his marriage in any way. It could be tactfully concealed from Susan. He was amazed at the excitement the sight of
40 Mary had created in him.

The aunt was distracted by other guests and Mary was alone. Clive arrived at her side. 'Well...it's wonderful to see you, Mary.'

She turned her head at the sound of his voice. There was no surprise on her face. 'Hello,

Clive,' she said in a flat tone.

45 'Well!' he said again. He put everything into the look he gave her. His look told her that he admired her appearance, that he had noticed the pretty brooch on her jacket and her unusual silver earrings, that he had a thousand things to say to her. He knew such looks could be unsettling and he waited for her to look unsettled.

50 She was silent for a moment, apparently studying him. Then she said, 'I gather poor Susan's got flu.'

This was not the direction in which he wanted them to go. He dealt quickly with Susan's flu. He asked where Mary was living, and was told. He asked about her work, and was given a straightforward account of what she did. She seemed more confident than the Mary he remembered. She was quite high-powered, he realised. Like her dress and manner, this
55 authority was undoubtedly part of her appeal. A woman of her time, he thought approvingly. He said something about his present life and gazed at her again with unashamed admiration.

She seemed a touch restless. She glanced over his shoulder and sipped at her drink. She was affected by him, no doubt about that, he thought. Now was the time to make a direct approach.

60 'Could we perhaps...meet?' he said.

She hesitated and now that wretched aunt was heading for them. Mary seemed about to speak, hesitated again. And then the aunt was there, chuntering on. Clive touched Mary's arm and said, 'I'll call soon' as he left them.

65 He could understand her hesitation. She didn't know how to respond. He would wait a couple of days and contact her. The groundwork had been done. The foundations had been laid.

He wrote her a letter and told her how deeply he had been moved by seeing her. He hinted at years of regret. He implied a void in his life. He included one or two references to their life together. He concluded by proposing lunch in three days' time. He named a restaurant. If he
70 did not hear from her he would assume that this was acceptable and would look forward with immense pleasure to seeing her again.

He arrived slightly late at the restaurant and looked around anxiously. No sight of her but then the waiter said, 'A lady came earlier, sir. She left you this note.'

Clive took the envelope, feeling a trickle of fear. He sat down, pulled out a single sheet of paper and began to read.

75 Dear Clive,

No, thank you. Not lunch and not anything else. I wonder what makes you think I would wish to? Well, empathy never was your strong point.

Your letter implied a certain emptiness, a state of mind with which I have been deeply familiar. However, I am not the right person to offer comfort. I'm sure you will find someone
80 more sympathetic, unless you have entirely lost your touch.

Thank you for the compliments – most acceptable to a woman of my age. You haven't changed much yourself, though more I fear than you would like. The signs of a desperate struggle against time are plainly visible. You seem anxious to remind me of the old days, so I'm sure you won't mind if I make a point or two. I wouldn't tint the grey bits in your hair if I were
85 you. It shows in a strong light. Also, the pink shirt is unwise in a man of your age and figure.

I do hope Susan's flu is better. Poor thing.

Yours,
Mary

89 'Would you care for a drink, sir?' the waiter was saying.

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