

External assessment 2021

Stimulus book

English & Literature Extension

General instruction

- Work in this book will not be marked.



Queensland
Government



Queensland Curriculum
& Assessment Authority

Stimulus 1

Fulfilment

My tracking device buzzed. ‘You have earned 12 Credit Points for today’s shift,’ declared Elena’s tinny voice. A smiley emoji appeared on the small screen. I’d never managed to reach 12 CP so early in the night. But there was no time to linger. I clicked *Next task*. Row 71A. Estimated walking time 180 seconds. 1 CP earned for getting there in 130 seconds. Can do. Ignoring the drone following me overhead, I picked up my pace, bucket in tow. The tracking device counted my steps and tracked my progress to the next CP. I was making good time. My legs burnt. *Ignore them*.

The warehouse was dimly lit — a cost-saving measure night workers agreed on for an extra CP every shift. I followed the trail of lights towards Row 71, zigzagging columns for the most efficient path to A. Several driverless Fulfilment Units whirred past me, their buckets overflowing with merch, linen and homeware items ready for packaging and distribution. It was our responsibility to look out for Fulfilment Units, ever since Quantum removed the safety sensors when we negotiated for an extra fifty cents per hour. As individual contractors, we were responsible for our own safety and had signed several waivers to that effect.

The crushing blow came as I turned the corner into 71A. The mechanical sound of wheels spinning in the air mixed with the crack of my bones. Boxes hit me, each with their own peculiar thud based on what the customer had purchased. Some gave mercy, filled with stuffed toys and bedsheets. Others punished me with heavy boxsets and appliances. I’m sure I screamed, but I can’t remember hearing my voice.

‘Collision detected. Collision detected. Remove yourself from the path of the Fulfilment Unit immediately.’ The message was prerecorded. I pushed the unit enough for its six wheels to find contact with the floor once more. As though it was confused, it shuffled back and forth sensing hazards and decided it was just easier to leave the way it came. Faster to redeploy the orders than fix up the mess around me, I figured. It’s amazing how much you can contemplate in the midst of an accident.

Something wet and warm was pooling around me.

Blood. I cried out for help. I heard nothing but the usual humming of machines. A drone hovered above, scanning the incident.

Though I couldn’t see it, at least one leg was broken, maybe more. But I was only worried about my CP. I stared at my tracking device, which was just out of my reach. The screen flickered slightly, as though it had a slight concussion from the fall. The counter said 11 CP.

‘You’re taking a long time. Are you having an unnecessary break?’ Elena asked. A puzzled emoji flashed on the screen. ‘Consider how this break might affect your Credit Points and pay.’

I was so close. The warmth of the blood and my tears made me realise the weight of what had happened. I would not get the CP record tonight. This hurt more than any physical pain, and I heard myself wail in agony. The drone had captured all of this, assessing every part of what had happened. It seemed satisfied at some point, turning off its lights. An announcement tune played, followed by Elena’s voice.

‘Attention, workers: Row 71A is temporarily closed.’ Dim lights turned to black.

I looked at the tracking device screen. 10 CP. My eyes burnt. Each CP was so hard to gain and so easy to lose. I had to do something. Clawing at the floor, I pulled myself towards the nearest box. Bone pressed against skin with each move. I couldn’t look at my legs, only at the tracking device, now in my hand, and the items around me. I had a job to do. I scanned a few items and placed them in the box.

‘Item already scanned. Please continue to the next item on the list.’ A frustrated red emoji filled the screen. 9 CP.

My skin grew cold and damp. I needed to reach the other side of the aisle, which seemed almost impossible. My heart pounded and I could hear each thud echo in my ears.

'You have stopped for longer than five minutes. This break is now unauthorised. Five Credit Points are being deducted from your ShiftScore.' The emoji was blue and disappointed.

Blurred vision joined my pounding heart. This warehouse was mostly automated and spanned one kilometre. I wondered if another person would ever see me. For the first time, I considered that perhaps I couldn't fix this.

'You have lost all Credit Points for today's shift.' I knew what that meant. No pay for the last ten hours. My record tarnished. Dismissal. I could hear myself whimpering, looking down the aisle for the first time. I focused on the light in the distance and yelled for help in what must have sounded like a parched and broken stutter.

Drones and Fulfilment Units whirred in the distance, and I willed myself to see a human silhouette between them. Nothing.

'You will be required to pay a processing fee for the orders you could not fulfil in today's shift. This has been automatically deducted from your account,' Elena told me. That meant an overdrawn account, a looming bank fee. I was spiralling. One mistake would end everything. The tapping of shoes broke my fixation. A worker. I cried out, though I struggled to form words. I could see a silhouette in the distance. It gained pace, almost running. I was saved.

The dim lights of 73A revealed a thin, tired-looking man. He glanced at his tracking device screen as he rushed in my direction. I could hear Elena speaking to him.

'You are now the leading worker on today's shift. You have 10 Credit Points. You will receive a bonus payment if you end this shift on 14 Credit Points.' He seemed surprised by Elena's announcement and the sight of me. He stopped and our eyes locked.

'Please,' I cried.

I could see the choice in his eyes, and he could see the pain in mine. His tracking device screen flashed, interrupting our gaze. He didn't look at me again.

'I'm sorry,' he said.

He grabbed a carton of Bluetooth speakers next to him and hurried into the darkness.

Stimulus 2

Speak to us

Attempt number 5

Ramon de Talavera stands beaten, broken but freshly revived. The tomb groans ominously and the torches lighting the darkness spit flames in response. This time will be different. Precision is key. Ramon edges forward, careful not to trigger the tripwire and fall to his doom. Next, a well-timed jump to dodge the falling debris. His stamina waning, the conquistador fills his lungs with enough of the stale underground air to scale the near-vertical stairs. Jade-green light pours over him, and through the long corridor he sees the ancient artefact, luminescent from the reflective pool beneath it. The Head of Atabey. The Karaya people call these statues *zemis*, and Atabey represents the moon. Ramon pushes on. He has done this before. He has learnt. Each corridor platform drops away as his foot touches it, and he hurls himself from one to the next in a seeming synchronicity with the tribal drumbeat. The pits below would not take him this time. He stands at the base of the zemi. Its smooth onyx-black stone reflects a myriad of greens, almost like the polar lights he once saw on a very different adventure far from this small Caribbean atoll. Is there a connection? The smooth elongated head faces the ceiling, where a tiny void above gives way to the sky. Atabey must have only fleeting glimpses of the moon each season, Ramon thinks. Until now. He grins and lifts the zemi from its pulpit. Water cascades from the walls, and the shallow reflective pool becomes a torrent of white water. Ramon is trapped. Nowhere to go. He doesn't understand what he did wrong. He thought this time would be different. In a way, it is, he thinks darkly ... drowning was certainly unexpected. *Failed attempt. Reload.*

Attempt number 9

Beaten, broken, freshly revived. The tomb groans once more. This time will be different. Ramon has learnt. Over the tripwire; running jump to miss the debris. Stop for a breath and climb the cliff-like stairs. The jade-green light hits his face. Atabey stares towards the ceiling, praying for the moon. The tricky god will not outwit Ramon. He thinks of what the villagers told him earlier. The people of Ahiyawoka are proud but generous, and they have shared many stories with Ramon since he landed on the tiny island. He listened enough to glean the details and location of the Atabey temple, but now his memory is straining to remember much more. He thinks of the elder — each of her wrinkles must be accompanied by its own story. What did she say? He can't form the memory. There must be another way. A nimble dance across the falling platforms proves easier this time, almost muscle memory. Atabey looms before him. This time he focuses on the reflective pool encircling the zemi. The carved stones have been smoothed by the years of water lapping at their edges. A dark green stone, diamond in shape, seems out of place among the others. He has found it. His hand breaches the surface of the water, ripples disturbing the peace of the pool. Ramon pushes the dark green stone and, as anticipated, it gives way. It is a trigger. The tomb rumbles. Water begins to fall away through the cracks between each stone. Finally. He reaches for Atabey once more, lifting the heavy statue. The temple shakes violently, a delayed echo of the tomb's groan. Stones from the ceiling give way, falling around Ramon. And then, a large boulder turns everything black. *Loading screen.*

Attempt number 23

Ramon groans at the same time the tomb does. Will this time be any different? His weariness competes with his frustration. To leave empty-handed would be sacrilege. *Load, run, jump, stop, breathe, climb, jade-green light. Sigh.* The great conquistador Ramon de Talavera seems smaller now, beaten by a spiteful and punishing underground cavern. His legacy will be in tatters if he does not solve this puzzle. He opens his journal, considering that perhaps his notes from conversations with the villagers may hold a hidden message. He ponders the scrawled notes. Information about Atabey. A sketch of the elder, a map.

A longer entry from the day he arrived:

To the Karaya people, the moon is the most important totem. Atabey watches the moon from the temple. The small recess allows the zemi a view of the moon only sparingly. The elder tells me that the villagers only enter the temple to see Atabey a few times each year, when the weather changes. She says they do not own the moon, they do not own Atabey. They are merely thankful to live alongside it and see it from time to time. That is enough, she says. After all, the moon cannot always be seen, but it is always there. I suppose this means they will not be too heartbroken when the zemi of Atabey is put in its proper place ... Queen Isabella's court, where it can be appreciated every day of the year.

In his haste to seize the beautiful statue, Ramon realises he has missed something. He considers the words of the elder. 'Thankful to live alongside it ... cannot always be seen, but it is always there.' There is beauty in this. Beauty he had not considered before. He looks towards the temple's entrance. This time will be different. He knows what to do.

The moon pulses white in the purple sky. Villagers make small fires near their homes and the faint sound of children's laughter floats with the ocean breeze. Ramon finds the elder sitting peacefully, soaking in the full moon. He asks for permission to sit: a mix of hand signals, broken phrases and gesturing. She nods. He will ask the right questions this time, not for a prize, but for knowledge. She will tell him about Ahiyawoka, its history. He will learn that the name of the island roughly translates to *Speak to us*. And, though he doesn't know it yet, in the next level he will defend Ahiyawoka from invaders, fighting side by side with the Karaya people to protect what is sacred.

Next level loading in 5 seconds.

Stimulus 3

A letter of protest

Mr MB Warburton
Editor
Gaswell Byron Publishing
30–35 Shoreditch Road
LONDON SW1

C/- Elmsworth House
via Frimley Green
Farnborough
HAMPSHIRE

12 September 1859

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter, dated Thursday last, with respect to the submission of my novel manuscript, *Collier's Last Stand*. Whilst I acknowledge your comment at the end of the final paragraph that 'no further correspondence will be entered into', I find such a directive to be closed-minded. How else may we learn the errors of our ways if not through further correspondence, the open and robust exchange of ideas? You should also know that, as with all authors, my work represents a substantial investment of my time, effort and inspiration, so it seems only fair that a right of reply, at the very least, be offered, especially when the reasons for rejecting my manuscript, as outlined in your letter, are at best spurious, more likely vacuous.

You preface your comments with the observation that the editorial team — I am envisaging you only, an august team of one — felt my manuscript to be 'steeped in dullness' and ascribed this to a 'common fault in military-style' narratives developed by 'those who are inexperienced in such matters'. Had you bothered to scrutinise the biographical information that accompanied my manuscript, you would have seen that I am a former nurse who spent over two years in the Balkans during that terrible war. I was fortunate enough to spend a portion of that time serving alongside Miss Florence Nightingale herself, the redoubtable Lady with the Lamp. I witnessed firsthand the results of atrocities and spoke extensively with men and women who had been involved in a level of human malice and degradation that is clearly beyond the stilted imagination of a London bureaucrat such as yourself. Sir, understand this: I dressed the wounds of people from whom life was ebbing, slowly but surely. I sat with the dying and heard them tell of their hopes and lamentations. Inside those blood-soaked tents, as we witnessed the deep, unrelenting drag of Death, we sang and we prayed because music is a comfort and prayer is a salvation. I am no novice, Sir, and whatever its faults, real or imagined, *Collier's Last Stand* is not the work of an ingénue.¹

I must also take exception to your more specific accusation that my writing style has an 'obvious femaleness' due to 'an unhealthy reliance on florid adjectives and adverbs' and 'a propensity to write overly long sentences with too many redundant clauses'. How these attributes qualify as female, I cannot imagine! Do male writers not use descriptive language? Does the length of a sentence and the number and distribution of its clauses necessarily provide a clue as to the gender of the writer? Is there a formula for effective writing that only males may access? Perhaps this is secretly passed on by fathers during a creative initiation rite that I, as an unfortunate female, am unaware?

¹ ingénue: an innocent or unsophisticated young woman, especially in a play or film

You also suggest that readers prefer their stories of war to concentrate on the ‘cut and thrust’ of the battlefield and that, as such, there will be limited interest in ‘war seen from a passive point of view’. Leaving aside your presumptuousness in suggesting that you can legitimately speak for all readers, I have to ask: Sir, did you not understand the tenor of my manuscript? Collier, the protagonist of my novel, is a quietly contented man of the land who is unwittingly caught up in a conflict over which he has no control. He has no wish to impart his unique engineering skills on the British military and he certainly does not wish for his invention to be seconded and redeployed as the key part of a new weapon used for the systematic butchering of Russian soldiers. The purpose of his defiant but inevitably doomed last stand — did you even read that section? — is to demonstrate to readers that the grim effects of war are never isolated to those who participate. As the humble man whose invention is used for the purposes of mass murder, Collier is as much a victim of war as the young men on the fronts, the civilians who fall beneath bombs and the countries that, through the egotistical actions of their male politicians, are devastated by wholesale destruction.

As you will hopefully have realised, if indeed you are open to the prospect of new realisations, I see your criticisms of my work as invalid and, to be frank, thoughtless. In closing, I am obliged to make full and condemnatory reference to your snide comment that ‘the commercial imperative’ means that, as an aspiring female author, I should not expect success in my quest to have my work published because ‘female authors do not sell’. Sir, it seems to me a fundamental principle of economics that the product is for sale, not the producer; that readers purchase books, not authors. If there is any barrier to the sale of novels by female authors, then that is clearly an artificial impediment created by blinkered publishers such as yourself, those who are secure in themselves with their coterie of male authors fixated on the ‘cut and thrust’ and are, accordingly, threatened by the thought of having to deal with a woman!

Thank you for your time in reading my reply, if indeed you have done so. I am happy to enter into further correspondence should you so desire; in fact, I would welcome the opportunity.

Yours respectfully,

Mrs Georgette Riley



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