

External assessment 2023

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Stimulus book

# English & Literature Extension

## General instruction

- Work in this book will not be marked.

# Stimulus 1

## *Ticket to Anywhere*

It was the fifth night in a row that Padma had woken in a cold sweat. Her dreams had become increasingly disturbing as she approached the door to ‘the experience of a lifetime’. Of course, she knew her soccer scholarship at Southern Arizona University was an achievement she should be proud of. It was something she had worked towards her entire life, wasn’t it? Pushed by her father from the time she could walk, this path was her destiny. Her father, who had wanted sons but been saddled with three daughters, had chosen this destiny for her.

Padma checked her phone — 4:30 am. She knew sleep was no longer an option. In two hours, she would be leaving for the airport with two suitcases and a small leather-look backpack in tow. Her entire life packed into three pieces of knock-off luggage — her mother’s proud purchase on their last trip to Bali.

Padma’s recent nightmares were all strikingly similar. Each was set in an airport. Each involved running late. Each ended with Padma missing her flight. However, as her date of departure loomed, the complexity of the dreams intensified. Automatic doors wouldn’t open, or the line she was in wouldn’t move. The queues around her progressed, so she would dart from line to line, only to find that once she joined, the line quickly came to a halt, plunging her into purgatory again. In these airport nightmares, her efforts went unrewarded; she was always the loser in the race to the gate.

Slowly peeling back the curtains that had adorned the window above her bed since childhood, Padma stroked the now threadbare material between her fingers. This cotton had never been intended to be curtains. It would have suited a library bag, such was its scratchy, translucent quality, but Padma’s father had insisted on the bright green background with soccer ball polka dots when her bedroom was given its last upgrade. *She will go to sleep thinking of soccer and wake up ready to go!*

When Padma watched TV shows and movies, she would see loving fathers tenderly lift their daughter onto their lap when tears appeared. The girls would be reassured that *Daddy can set the world right* and their tears would turn to smiles. Sometimes, Padma would see toddlers wearing T-shirts that proclaimed their centrality in their father’s life, like *Daddy’s little helper*. Juxtaposed against Padma’s experience of a father–daughter relationship, these examples left her feeling as though her bond with her father was missing a key ingredient: protection.

Padma’s father did not shield her from the world; he threw her into it. *You have to be tough. Success only comes to those who can endure the rough patch. Hardship will make you stronger.* He seemed to have an expression for every occasion, and they all delivered the same message: weakness is a sin.

Padma sat on the edge of her bed, feet firmly on the ground, as she took three long, deep breaths. Her coach had taught her this routine. She called it grounding. Padma called it, ‘getting ready to face the day’.

As she sat there on the last morning for at least a year, she wondered what it would feel like to get up and not have her father’s expectations weigh so heavily on her. Soon enough, she would know.

Her luggage was stacked by the door — a three-tier exit ticket. When her father revealed she had been offered an international scholarship, she was shocked. The plan had always been the A-League. He had lined up scouts, engaged sports’ agents, listened to every team’s pitch. Padma’s father wrote the plan when she was born and had stuck to it ever since. So the offer of a scholarship came from nowhere. And it was one she enthusiastically accepted.

Padma leaned over and lifted her backpack from the top of the luggage pile. She ran through her packing list in her mind: phone, wallet, itinerary, passport, book, phone charger, headphones. She pulled out her itinerary and double-checked the flight times. She would land in America before she took off from Brisbane, such was the nature of international travel. Padma liked to think it offered her a chance to start the day again.

Scanning through her itinerary again, Padma fixed her eyes on her final destination. Arizona. Padma pondered what her new life would offer. It was a ticket away from the pressures of home but it was still a life built on the dreams of her father. If he could not have a football-playing son, he'd make do with a soccer-playing daughter.

Folded safely and tucked into a small and almost hidden pocket inside her bag was a piece of paper Padma had thought about constantly but not discussed with anyone. Shielded from scrutiny, this was a different itinerary. This piece of paper had the flight details for a ticket she had purchased on her own. A ticket from Arizona to New York. Scribbled at the bottom of the page was the address of a backpacker hostel in Brooklyn. Padma knew a new life was waiting for her but it was not in Arizona.

A soccer-free Padma started today — her 18th birthday.

## Stimulus 2

### *The Next Loop*

The monorail continued its loop around the Outer Edge. It stopped precisely every minute. Each stop was a number: Stop 4, Outer Edge; Stop 5, Outer Edge; Stop 6 ... the robotic voice called each stop over the loudspeaker, which hardly felt necessary. If you could count to 10, you knew which stop was next. This loop continued all day, all night. There was no driver. The automated system worked without fail. No other monorail was on the track. No more than 10 minutes wait. Fast. Efficient. Reliable.

Bobby 792's stop was Stop 8 — the textiles stop. Fanning out from the station were rows of identical streets, lined with identical buildings. Each building housed the machinery to produce one particular textile. Bobby's building made hessian. The hessian was made into sacks on the top two floors of the building and the sacks were transported to Stop 10 — the farming stop. Stop 10 was the only restricted stop on the loop. Bobby understood that this was because Stop 10 had direct access to the Inner Edge.

Bobby only heard things about the Inner Edge that the Inner Edge wanted him to hear. The Inner Edge was a sanctuary, set up nearly four centuries ago. The Inner Edge did not have a monorail that circled it 24/7. The Inner Edge was an open-plan paradise. Inside the Inner Edge lived a cooperative of women. They were not the government; they rejected the term. Governance is something that had been done to them for centuries, they said. Cooperative living was the alternative they had decided on after the revolution.

The revolution was widely taught in the schools of the Outer Edge. Children were shown images of pre-revolution Edge. It was to be remembered as an unsafe time for all. So much progress had been made. The female cooperative of the Inner Edge ensures the protection of all. The separation of the Inner Edge was for the safety of the whole community. Separated We Stand. Together We Fall. These words emblazoned the wall of each monorail stop, each classroom, each building. Bobby was not entirely sure what he was being protected from, but textbooks implied that before the revolution, people could not be trusted to make their own decisions.

'Who are the people standing in a small group in that photo?' Bobby had once asked his teacher, Mr Weeldon, as the slideshow of historical images rolled on.

It had been a history lesson like any other. Photographs were shown of swarms of protesters, holding placards, demanding more rights, begging for their safety. In the middle of the familiar images, there had been a new picture — one Bobby had never seen before.

'What group?' Mr Weeldon asked.

'Three pictures back,' Bobby replied. Mr Weeldon scrolled back and Bobby watched as a look of complete bewilderment transformed his face.

'That is a family from pre-revolutionary times,' Mr Weeldon said. He tugged nervously at his tie and quickly moved the pictures forward again.

'What's a family?' Bobby asked.

It was clear that the question made Mr Weeldon uncomfortable.

Struggling with his word choice, he landed on the dismissive. 'Something from the past that will stay in the past.'

Bobby was curious about this. The 'family' had looked happy and, in some way, unified. He wondered why that would be something that the Inner Edge no longer wanted.

The image of the family stayed with Bobby long after his education was complete — long into his life at Stop 8. Occasionally, on the monorail, he would see men exit at Stop 10. Bobby was not sure what happened at the farming stop, but he did know that the men whose journey ended there were never seen again. And never spoken of again in the Outer Edge. His perception of Stop 10 was a mix of curiosity and fear, although

he never stopped silently wondering about it, even on the worst of days. It was his hope that Stop 10 was a path to a new beginning that perhaps included family.

Work in the hessian factory was monotonous. He was a seam checker and his day involved inspecting the individual seams of every bag produced. He did not stop until the pile of bags was no more. This often had him working into the night. One night, over the loudspeaker, he heard another Bobby called away. Bobby 491, report to Stop 10. Again, he contemplated what that might mean, and he hoped.

Bobby went home every evening to his dimly lit pod. Silently, he microwaved his regulation meal and sat on the one chair that had been supplied to him when he was approved for cooperative pod living. The grey walls had slowly been covered over the years with hand-drawn pictures of Bobby and the family he imagined he might have. It was identical to the one he saw in the photo that day at school, because he could not visualise a different version of something he had never actually encountered.

He sat and ate, looking at the pictures ... waiting ... wanting ...

## Stimulus 3

### *Fire in the Blood*

FADE IN:

#### 4. INT. STRASBOURG CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS. 1518. AFTERNOON

Council chambers – a quiet space with Greek-style columns and stained-glass windows surrounding wooden pews and ornate, cushioned chairs on a raised dais. A group of noblemen sit quietly in the chairs, looking down on the centre of the room, where a plain, empty chair sits. The imposing wooden doors open and two large men push a struggling woman into the empty chair. She is squirming and dancing awkwardly beneath the ropes tying her arms to her sides. Her feet are bloody and leave red footprints in their wake.

COUNCILLOR GINDT

Stop this heresy at once!

CLERIC HERMOLT

My lord, I do not believe Frau Troffea is of sound mind to hear you.

*(Frau Troffea hums and squirms. Her arms are cut and blood trickles onto her peasant clothes.)*

COUNCILLOR GINDT

If she has no mind to listen, she must be afflicted by spirits. Do you hear this, Frau Troffea? This council orders you to stop dancing at once. Cease this pestilent possession of the spirit. End this affliction before it costs you your life.

PHYSICIAN FRANCK

Sir, if I may ... I do not believe we should go to that so idly. Frau Troffea is known to be a woman of good faith. Such punishment may be premature.

COUNCILLOR GINDT

Premature? One hundred dance in the square outside. It has been five days of this dissent. One is dead already. This must end.

CLERIC HERMOLT

Frau Troffea, I appeal to your sound judgment. Five days ago, without reason or prompt, you began dancing in the square and have rested only twice. What demon has ailed you, dear woman? God grants absolution to those who seek it.

PHYSICIAN FRANCK

It is a fire in the blood. I have seen this in my younger years when I was studying in Hamburg. Only a controlled bloodletting will cure it.

COUNCILLOR GINDT

How shall we withdraw her blood if she cannot be still? We will kill her even if we mean to help her.

CLERIC HERMOLT

Perhaps we look again to prayer to solve this. Frau Troffea, why do you and your followers dance?

FRAU TROFFEA

*(Wincing and struggling in her chair)*

Enough!

When every woman and child starves, the sick and weak look the same. Dancing is our only freedom.

PHYSICIAN FRANCK

It is a problem of science, gentlemen, and we need only give her bread. I had thought this was the case.

*(He clicks his fingers and one of the large men brings a small piece of bread to Frau Troffea's mouth. She begins chewing, still struggling in her seat, until she spits it towards the noblemen.)*

FRAU TROFFEA

I have not eaten in weeks; what good will any more scraps of mouldy rye do me? I am not hungry when I dance.

COUNCILLOR GINDT

Yes, it appears that is so. Even now you dance, your feet bloody with sin. If you stop, will the crowd outside follow your actions? Have you bewitched them?

FRAU TROFFEA

I cannot speak for others; I only know this: when I move, my hunger is suspended for a time, and worries about today and tomorrow drift away. I have only my body, the air and movement. I cannot bear much else. Let me return!

*(She fights violently against the ropes, but they are too tight.)*

CLERIC HERMOLT

And what of your husband? What say he to this? Does he not provide for you?

FRAU TROFFEA

How can a baker provide when he has no bread to sell? No flour to bake? Your questions tire me in a way the dancing cannot. Enough!

CLERIC HERMOLT

The church gives bread to the poor. You know this well.

FRAU TROFFEA

Black crumbs. Crumbs, dirt and mould. You do not even see these people and their suffering.

CLERIC HERMOLT

Frau, we have no more to give than that. We are surely tested with this drought.

FRAU TROFFEA

Bread will keep us alive for tomorrow, which is just as dark as today. We have lost hope. Let us dance.

COUNCILLOR GINDT

If bread is not enough, an example must be made. Your blasphemy must end, woman. We will send for flour from Stuttgart.

CLERIC HERMOLT

Far better, Councillor, to forgive a soul than condemn it.



PHYSICIAN FRANCK

My lord, they will tire of it. We let them dance; it will reach its conclusion without intervention. No need for Strasbourg to incur such debt for flour.

COUNCILLOR GINDT

As the presiding councillor, I have heard your advice, but will decide myself what is best for our city.

*(The large doors open again. The cries, screams and laughter of the dancing crowd can be heard. COUNCILLOR SWARTZ enters in a flurry. He approaches Councillor Gindt, interrupting the interrogation. He whispers to Gindt, but it is inaudible to the rest of the chamber.)*

COUNCILLOR GINDT

Lena? She has no reason. She is neither hungry nor ill! What desperation has she?

CLERIC HERMOLT

Your wife? She dances?

COUNCILLOR GINDT

Herr Franck, how best do we help this run its course, as you say?

PHYSICIAN FRANCK

Hire musicians. Let them dance to the faster beat of a drum and they will surely tire by Sunday.

*(Councillor Gindt slams his gavel.)*

COUNCILLOR GINDT

Very well. Release Frau Troffea back into the fray. Let them dance.

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