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Sample assessment 2020

Stimulus book

English & Literature Extension

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Stimulus 1

Survivor

Junior stepped out of the event horizon and took a moment to adjust to his surroundings, reciting the Department of History's First Protocol — *You are only here to observe*. The air carried humidity and the smell of organic matter — the smell of the earth after rainfall — so different from the industrial atmosphere of his own time. Nothing could prepare him for the way his senses were heightened by his 'shell', the almost indestructible cyborg body housing his consciousness. His human body would be pulled apart by the forces of the wormhole.

He began to walk through the long grass, reciting the Second Protocol — *Do not change the past*.

Approaching his destination, Junior ensured his audiovisual input was being recorded. The grass, still wet from recent rain, parted to reveal a curved bitumen road, slick with moisture. The driver of a yellow sedan, on its side a hundred metres along the road, had lost control as he came around the curve, well above the posted speed limit. Fresh skid marks on the road testified to it.

Junior used his shell's advanced sensors to collect data. Leaking fuel had spread across the road. In a few short decades, the accident's lone survivor would use her absolute authority to outlaw internal combustion engines.

Historical texts were unclear on what happened next. That was why Junior was there. The girl never spoke of the accident and, after she seized power, brutally punished those who investigated her past. Junior would return home with evidence of the event some said was the seed of the girl's madness.

Over the ambient sounds of nature, Junior discerned two distinct voices. A girl's steady voice offered reassuring words, while a male infant screamed in terror. Fascinated, Junior approached the sedan. The police report indicated a single survivor, the girl sitting behind the driver. Her younger brother was supposed to have died. Walking around the car so he could see through the windows, Junior saw the boy, with his curly black hair, struggling against the child restraint. His side of the car was closest to the ground. His flame-haired sister, also restrained by a seatbelt, offered a calmer demeanour.

Noticing Junior, she called out for help. Why was he just standing there? she screamed. Disbelief and anger poisoned her voice.

The sound of sparks from the engine told Junior the car would soon explode, correlating with the police report. But there was only supposed to be one survivor. *Do not change the past*, he reminded himself, but he could not see how the girl could escape the coming inferno. She was determined to save her brother.

Assessing his options, Junior realised he would have to break one Protocol to follow another. He reached through the broken rear window, using his great strength to snap the girl's belt. Her initial smile at her rescuer became a scream as he carried her across the road to safety. What about my brother? she cried.

Don't change the past, he reminded himself. The car exploded behind them. There was only one survivor, and thanks to Junior she would grow up to become history's bloodiest villain.

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Stimulus 2

The Battlefield

Fall in. Today we begin the first part of your training. I encourage you to listen well, consider carefully, and action appropriately. Clearly, a code is required for navigating public transport, and today, we will explore the cyphers that enable you to unlock that code. The well-prepared traveller needs a carefully crafted strategy for engagement, tactics for negotiating the battle, and the requisite amount of self-faith and resilience. Fortunately, as a skilled code breaker, I have emerged as a capable public transport warrior of some repute, and today, for your benefit and development, I will share The Secrets of Successful Engagement.

Background information. Courtesy underpins all, and as such, greeting the driver is a must. This simple act of public courtesy allows other travellers to relax, and thereby recognise that you, the new arrival, are socially aware and non-threatening. Whether to smile or not is more challenging. Too much cheerfulness can suggest to other travellers a chaos, a possible derangement, and even a lack of social propriety. You can see it in their responses — a way-too-bright *good morning* in the direction of the driver results in an awkward shift in a narrow seat, a firm fixing of the eyes on the portable screen, or a deliberate turning of the shoulders away from the aisle. Travellers are less sure of the meaning of no greeting at all. Does it indicate a busyness, or is it a warning sign of self-centred rudeness? There is a collective holding of breath as the non-greeter navigates the aisle. At this point, travellers look discreetly for other signs to influence their responses — tell-tale movements that will require a forward defence or a fallback. So much decision-making is needed in such a short time!

Step one. Greet the driver pleasantly but not exuberantly, and make your way down the aisle deliberately but not aggressively. If the driver relaunches the vehicle quickly back into the flow of traffic, you must carefully choose a position.

Step two. Elect to sit or stand. Options can be somewhat limited by the time of your arrival into the shared space, as strategic middle-aged travellers will generally take positions in the forward seats, while the young and significantly less socially conditioned will take the high ground at the back of the field. On one flank there will be a gaggle of older school students — I doubt they will welcome a battle-weary warrior or a rookie into their ranks. They are armoured with an air of practised indifference, and their strength lies in their solidarity.

Step three. Be aware of landmine events and their ramifications. The arrival of travellers who require special access or privileges unsettles the troops. Imagine a young family with a pram. Their late arrival on the field and request for a forward, well-defended position will cause rumblings in the ranks. Here, you must decide if you are a well-disciplined witness, or an agitator for positive change, standing up for the rights of others. There is a cost to each choice, as an army requires both obedience and courage within its divisions. For you, the paradox will be alarming.

Step four. Feign nonchalance for the whole journey. Regardless of what happens, or what sounds or smells are emitted from any region, your mission is to pretend you did not notice. This is the greatest skill needed for survival, and every traveller will recognise when you have it. There is a secret code, a smug smile carried up the line, reinforcing that in this setting you have earned your stripes.

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Step five. Stand down, soldier. The vehicle has arrived, the journey has ended, the battlefield will soon be cleared. A polite *thank you*, seemingly directed at the driver, ends the engagement. Wise fellow warriors will warm to your farewell, whether mumbled or shouted, as they know it is intended for all. Your *thank you* is really the soldier's blessing, the benefaction that will sustain until the next call to arms is heard.

And you, dear traveller, can rest your pack and your spirit. Until next time ...

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Stimulus 3

The Girl in the Tree

I'm not sure I ever forgave my father. As I wander around the now dilapidated house that was once my childhood home, I am reminded of his betrayal and my heartbreak. Standing on the verandah, gazing out across the desolate plains, I can see the place where my tree once stood. Being the only child of farmers meant that my youth was often spent wishing for playmates and inventing them for both companionship and my amusement. The tree housed every world that was conjured up in the under-stimulated mind of an isolated child. Later it was a place to escape to, as the pressure of the drought saw not just cracks on the red earth around us but fissures in a marriage that had been built on hard work but was now being destroyed by Mother Nature's indiscriminate punishment.

The tree. My tree. My place.

Back then, I would lie across the branches and gaze up through the canopy, dreaming of the city. The city had then felt like an alien planet; a place of sophisticated men and women who lunched at cafes and drank cocktails by the open windows of bars on balmy summer nights. All those years ago I had longed to be a city woman. I had yearned to look down at my hands and see the beautiful manicure of a lady, rather than the lines of dirt that used to gather under my uneven nails. Resting in the fork, I had read *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and practised my best Holly Golightly accent ...

'Why don't you get down from up there and help your mother?' My father's voice carried up through the branches and landed heavily in my ears. 'There are dishes to clean and clothes to fold, you know. Your mother has enough to worry about without needing to take care of every bit of housework; pull your weight.'

Nothing was ever good enough for my father. The land had worn him and his patience down; the fields around our house no longer provided for the family. There had been talk of diversification but that would mean repurposing some of the land and that meant money, of which we had none.

One day, my father's voice pulled me away from the sinister attic of Brontë's Thornfield Hall. 'Why don't you go into town? Take some money. See a movie.' I gazed down at him, surprised by his uncharacteristic charity. Eager to capitalise on this offering, I scampered down the trunk and held out my hand. 'Off you go now. Enjoy yourself.'

I took my bike and peddled with enthusiasm, past the barren fields and onto the road that led directly into town. I pondered my father's generosity. Just the previous night, I had heard my parents fighting about money. My mother cried. My father assured her.

'It'll be okay, Karen,' he said. 'The anger will pass.'

My legs began to slow on the peddles. Whose anger? I slowly pieced together fragments of conversations held in hushed tones after I had gone to bed. No choice. Diversification. More land. More money. She's old enough now. I braked hard, the truth slowly dawning on me. Turing the bike around, I rode hard, rounding the corner of the driveway to the sound of the chainsaw struggling. It wailed as it cut its way through my childhood, only quietening to make room for the sound of a tree falling. Falling its way into silence.

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