



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2022

English - Higher Level - Paper 1

Total Marks: 140

Wednesday, 8 June – Morning, 9.30 – 12.20

- This paper is divided into two sections, Section I COMPREHENDING and Section II COMPOSING.
- The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of **POWERFUL VOICES**.
- Candidates should familiarise themselves with each of the texts before beginning their answers.
- Both sections of this paper (COMPREHENDING and COMPOSING) must be attempted.
- Section I, Comprehending, carries 40 marks.
- Section II, Composing, carries 100 marks.

SECTION I – COMPREHENDING

- Two Questions, A and B, follow each text.
- Candidates must answer **ONE** question in Section I:
either one Question A **OR one** Question B on **ONE** text.

SECTION II – COMPOSING

- Candidates must write on **one** of the compositions 1 – 7.

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TEXT 1 – A YOUNG POET’S POWERFUL VOICE

This text is adapted from a feature article by Meadhbh McGrath entitled, *Poet. Fashion icon. Future president?*. It originally appeared in the magazine section of a weekend newspaper.

On that chilly inauguration day in January, audiences tuned in to see Joe Biden being sworn in as US president, but it was Amanda Gorman, the youngest inaugural poet in US history, who really stole the show. Dressed in a sunshine yellow coat and scarlet satin headband, the young poet delivered a mesmerising five-minute reading of *The Hill We Climb*. The poem – parts of which Gorman had written on the night of the US Capitol riots – began with the question: “When day comes we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade?”. It was about national unity and reconciliation, but Gorman’s work also reckoned with the pain of America’s past and present, and looked optimistically towards its future, capturing the mood of a country reeling from a deadly pandemic, stark political divisions and domestic terrorism.

The inauguration was a rare moment where a poem made international headlines, showing how poetry, rather than being a solitary occupation or the tiresome homework suffered through at school, can bring people together by interrogating and articulating our shared feelings, fears and insecurities. It was also a moment that catapulted Gorman to global fame. By the following day, she had gained two million new Instagram followers and pre-sales had pushed her two books to numbers 1 and 2 on Amazon’s bestseller list, despite not being due for publication until later in the year. Less than three weeks later, she became the first poet to perform at the Super Bowl, reciting a poem honouring frontline workers. Gorman also signed a modelling deal and became the first poet to grace the cover of *American Vogue*.

She has promised to run for president in 2036 – the year in which she will be old enough to run – earning unofficial endorsements from



Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama. She is already working on her second children’s book, part of a four-book publishing deal. To top it all off, she co-chaired the Met Gala Ball, the fashion world’s biggest night out, alongside Billie Eilish and Timothée Chalamet, an experience Gorman likened to “Cinderella going to the ball”.

2021 was an astonishing year for Gorman, who described her background in *The Hill We Climb* as “a skinny Black girl, descended from slaves and raised by a single mother”. Born in 1998 in Los Angeles, Gorman was diagnosed with auditory processing disorder as a child which resulted in a speech impediment. She has credited this with enhancing her sensitivity to the sounds of language – she began writing at a young age, she has said, “as a form of self-expression, to get my voice on the page”.

Gorman’s talent was evident early on, as was her dedication to activism: she and her sister staged a demonstration in school to highlight the lack of diversity in their English class’s syllabus and at 16 years of age Gorman founded a non-profit organisation called One Pen One Page, which runs youth literacy programmes. In the same year, she was named youth poet laureate of Los Angeles, and three years later, while studying sociology at Harvard, she became the first national

youth poet laureate. Gorman has said she saw her task on inauguration day as “a cleansing by way of words”. While acknowledging the “harsh truths” of the country’s problems, she has said she wanted “to use my words to envision a way in which our country can still come together and can still heal”, offering hope and possibility to those watching. Gorman keenly understands the emotional power of poetry, and how moments of intense feeling call for a heightened form of expression. She also understands that poetry doesn’t need to be oblique or formally difficult to make an impact: her writing is clear-eyed and direct, tightly crafted and accessible.

Gorman’s vivid recital captivated viewers by drawing on the tradition of spoken-word poetry, which treats poems as performances. The style can be traced back through a long history of Black art forms, including rap, church oratory, religious spirituals and oral folk tales. The activist side of spoken word poetry is rooted in the Black Arts and Black Power movements of the 1960s. Though Gorman’s work may be less radical, it relies on the same spontaneity of live

performance, using the rhythm and melody of her delivery to temper the uncomfortable message of her words. It turned her poem into an event, a collective experience for the audience and a powerful showcase for what poetry can do. That moment also opened up the world of poetry to people who may have hitherto felt excluded from it. As a young Black woman with a speech impediment, Gorman showed that poetry is a space for everyone.

Gorman’s thoughtfulness extends to her styling. She recognises that fashion is itself a storytelling device. The Met Gala confirmed her status as a new kind of style icon. During 2021, she turned down \$17 million in brand deals and she is wary of being seen as a model or fashion influencer. She said she won’t be posting party photos or pool selfies on her social media, conscious of how they might impact on a future political career. With several decades in public life ahead of her, Gorman’s star – already high – will only continue to rise.

N.B. Answer only ONE question in Section I, either one Question A OR one Question B on one text.

QUESTION A – 40 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 1, explain three insights you gain into the power of poetry. Support your answer with reference to the text. (10)
- (ii) Amanda Gorman’s status as a powerful young voice was bolstered by her performance at the US presidential inauguration. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree that a diversity of youthful voices should be represented in public debate on all important issues in Irish society. (10)
- (iii) Identify four elements of the writer’s style, evident in the edited article above, and discuss how these stylistic elements helped to shape your impression of Amanda Gorman both as a poet and as a person. Support your answer with reference to TEXT 1. (20)

QUESTION B – 40 Marks

Some students believe that the study of poetry should be an optional rather than a compulsory element of the Leaving Certificate English course. Write **an open letter**, to be published on a popular social media platform, to encourage discussion on this topic. In your open letter you should: explain what, if any, value you found in the study of poetry as part of your Leaving Certificate English course, explore the reasons why you think the study of poetry should be an optional or a compulsory element of Leaving Certificate English in the future and seek to anticipate and refute views that might potentially be offered in opposition to your chosen stance.

TEXT 2 – THE POWERFUL VOICE OF MUSIC

This text is based on edited extracts from a book compiled by Tom Gatti entitled, *Long Players*. The book is a collection of personal essays in which writers share their thoughts on the albums that helped to shape them. Extract Two features Man Booker prize winner, Nigerian, Ben Okri.

Extract 1: Tom Gatti from the introduction to his book, *Long Players*.

Albums can alter the architecture of our minds. The ones that speak to us, we listen to hundreds of times over decades; we know them far better than any novel or film. They are faithful companions, with us from the first time we lower the needle to the last time we hover a thumb over the screen. They are, truly, long players.

Extract 2: Ben Okri – The Miles Davis album, *Kind of Blue*.

There are some rare albums that seem to lift from their physical condition and become part of the decor and mood of a life. They seem not to be music anymore but one of the things that shape you, like the home you grew up in or your earliest toys. Though music eminently has this capacity, it is often the case that even the greatest music draws attention to itself as music. Very rarely does it become an invisible fact of a life, woven into it like clouds in the sky, or trees along a road.

Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue* first made itself real in my life on a rainy morning in Lagos, in the seventies, when for the first time I was alone in the house. I was around seventeen and the emptiness of the house brought me to something resembling an existential decision: I had to decide what I wanted to do with my life.

All that morning while it rained, I had been thinking. And while I had been thinking, *Kind of Blue* had been playing on the turntable. The music passed into thought, then into the sonic space in which my decision played out in ways unknown to me. That is to say, the music passed into the silence of the mind.



My decision has led, through the turns and revelations of life, to where I am now, and where I will be tomorrow. That day there was Miles and Mozart and the rain and the smells and muted sounds of the ghetto where we had temporarily found ourselves.

Kind of Blue has gone on playing a similar role in my life. Now it is so imprinted on my being that I don't need to listen to it to hear it. In some way it is always playing somewhere inside me, in a constant spirit loop, which is the result of such a saturation of listening. If such a thing as reincarnation exists, I would probably come back in a future life and be convinced of the certainty that I had composed that music. But then I have always been an obsessive listener of music, and would inscribe a piece into my being if it spoke to me that deeply.

Rather than being an urban song of praise, a wild choral hymn for the lost souls that need soothing, rather than being this tender lament, this heartfelt cool breeze on the hot skins of those who walked the narrow paths of the cities, this album was really a moment of memory – a moment of recollection by Miles Davis of a time when he was back in the South and heard music floating over the houses late

in the night. That's the story at the plaintive heart of the music. The album was recorded in New York and every track is redolent of the mood of that city, alchemised by a seemingly magical process so that it has in it the essence of cities and their solitudes, their wistful air of stoicism and coiled repose.

What was unique about the recording is that it brought out the best of the classical tradition and the improvisation at the heart of jazz itself. The album, released in my birth year, was created on little rehearsal and with the band having only the sketchiest notion of what they were to play. They had just hints of melodic lines on which to improvise. The result was what is considered one of the greatest albums ever recorded. Its influence transcends music.

It begins with what seems like low-key uncertainty and slides into a call and response

that's like limpid poetry, clear and melodious, wreathed with an impressionistic silvery melancholy and muted joy. Something indefinable haunts the music, some sorrow, some calm in the trumpet glissandos – that slide in pitch between the notes – something quiet that pierces the bones. It is that rare thing in all art: the perfect distillation of a spirit, a time and a genius.

I listened to it at the beginning of my writing life and it was one of the pieces of music I listened to all through writing my novel, *The Famished Road*. It helped keep me sane through the long, lonely nights and wild flights of imagination, always bringing me back home.

Now I listen to the silence while I write, because all the music I need is playing in me, in a spiritual, kind of blue way.

N.B. Answer only ONE question in Section I, either one Question A OR one Question B on one text.

QUESTION A – 40 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of both Extracts 1 and 2 of TEXT 2, explain three insights you gain into the power of music. Support your answer with reference to the text. (10)
- (ii) In Extract 1, Tom Gatti observes that the music we listen to has a greater and a longer lasting impact on us than the books that we read and the films that we watch. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with this observation. (10)
- (iii) Identify four elements of Ben Okri's writing style, evident in Extract 2, and discuss how effectively these stylistic elements are employed to craft a lyrically beautiful and engaging piece of personal writing. Support your answer with reference to Extract 2 of TEXT 2. (20)

QUESTION B – 40 Marks

You have been invited to contribute to a podcast series entitled, *The Music Playing in Me*. The series will explore the importance of music in the lives of individuals. Write **the text for the podcast** in which you: reflect on the importance of music in your life, discuss some of the particular pieces of music (songs, albums, etc.) that make up the soundtrack to your own life and share the thoughts and feelings this music evokes in you.

TEXT 3 – THE POWERFUL VOICE OF BOOKS

TEXT 3 is based on edited extracts from Hugo Hamilton's novel, *The Pages*. Hamilton uses a book – the novel, *Rebellion*, by Jewish writer Joseph Roth – as the narrator. In these extracts, we witness the book telling its own story, including its rescue from the Nazi book burning in 1933.

Here I am, stored inside a piece of hand luggage, being carried through the departure lounge at JFK Airport. The owner of the bag is a young woman by the name of Lena Knecht. She is getting on a flight to Europe. Bringing me home, so to speak. Back to Berlin, the city in which I was written. Where I was first printed by a small publishing house almost a hundred years ago, in 1924. Where I was rescued from the fire on the night of the book-burning. The city from which my author fled on the day Hitler came to power.

It was raining on the night of the fire in May 1933. A last-minute downpour threatened to ruin the event. It was too late to postpone plans that had been underway for weeks. A specialist pyrotechnic company had been hired to oversee the spectacle. On the opera house square, they had set up a dovetailed structure of wooden logs doused with fuel. Underneath, a layer of sand to protect the surface from scorch marks.

At the State Library, next to the site of the proposed fire, students were heard entering with their slogans echoing around corridors, carrying with them a list of unwanted books. My author, Joseph Roth, was on the list. He had already fled to France by then.

A sense of fear ran around the shelves as the titles were called out. Books saying quick goodbyes to each other as they were being tied up in bundles, ready to be carried outside. The students worked diligently, using their considerable learning skills to search the catalogue for titles to be torn from the canon like bad teeth, passing them along in a human chain to the site of the fire outside.



BOOKS ARE WEAPONS IN THE WAR OF IDEAS

The students had an air of triumph. This was their moment. Their revenge on learning. This was their chance to step outside received wisdom and take part in a glorious act of self-vandalism. Returning to a time before knowledge. The right not to know. Unlearning everything but the spirit of the nation.

As it happened, I was not in the library myself that evening. My author's books were part of the catalogue of the State Library, but I belonged to a professor of German literature by the name of David Glückstein. He had brought me with him in his briefcase to the Humboldt University on the other side of the square because he was unsure how far this cleansing action would go. In his office, the professor had arranged a meeting with one of his trusted students, where I was quietly handed over for safekeeping.

The student's name was Dieter Knecht, Lena's grandfather. He took me in his hands and they spoke about my author for a little while with some fondness. By rescuing this single volume from the fire, he set in motion a quiet wave of resistance. It was a small but significant event taking place behind closed doors, away from the catastrophe outside. It changed the course of people's lives.

Outside on the opera house square, the fire was going strong. Students railed against filth in literature, against sexual freedom, capitalism, Jewish dominance, as they called it. The human chain leading from the library to the site of the fire continued delivering the hated books. Each author was denounced in a summary trial, the name called out, giving a reason why they no longer fitted into the national vision, before their books were committed to the fire. All of this was being broadcast by radio around the nation.

More and more books were being added to the flames. Dieter stood watching the fire with me tucked inside his coat. The faces of the onlookers were lit up in the warm glow of the flames. Their eyes turned jet black. Their lips were green. Their nostrils inhaled the pungent paper-smoke that came from those books, like the smell of burning hair.

It was a bonfire of life stories. The pages were curling and flying over the rooftops. These imagined lives, these human thought roads, were being turned into worthless heat. The words were no longer bound together in sentences. They had been discharged of all meaning. From inside the flames came the sound of voices rising in a collective stream of consciousness, extracted like free prose from the text, a ghostly recital of absurd phrases and detached bits of dialogue dissolving into vapours in one long silent scream of pity that could be heard right around the city.

Just before midnight, Joseph Goebbels [chief propagandist for the Nazi party] came to make a speech. Speaking in a voice that overestimated his stature, he praised the students for their cleansing action. He said it was the end of Jewish supremacy in literature. He spoke about the will of the people.

N.B. Answer only ONE question in Section I, either one Question A OR one Question B on one text.

QUESTION A – 40 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 3, explain three insights you gain into the power of books. Support your answer with reference to the text. (10)
- (ii) In TEXT 3, we witness an exercise in censorship through the destruction of books. Discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree that censorship, including contemporary cancel culture, should not be used to silence voices of protest or disagreement in society. (10)
- (iii) Identify four features of the language of narration, evident in TEXT 3, and discuss how effectively these features are employed to craft a dramatic and disturbing account of the book burning that occurred in Berlin in 1933. Support your answer with reference to TEXT 3. (20)

QUESTION B – 40 Marks

It is 2033 and you are the editor of an internationally distributed newspaper. A book burning event, similar to that described in TEXT 3, has occurred in a major American city. You believe that respect for books of all kinds is vital to democracy and are horrified by this assault on them. Write **an editorial** in which you: give your response to this incident, warn your readers of the dangers inherent in attacking books in this way and urge them to engage in peaceful protest against this and any other form of censorship.

SECTION II

COMPOSING

(100 marks)

Write a composition on **any one** of the assignments that appear in **bold print** below.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. In TEXT 2, Tom Gatti suggests that albums can become “faithful companions” in our lives.

Write a personal essay in which you identify some of the items or objects that have become “faithful companions” in your life and reflect on the importance of these items or objects to you.

2. In TEXT 1, we learn that Amanda Gorman may be a candidate in the American presidential election in 2036.

You are a candidate in the next election for the presidency of Ireland. Write a speech to be delivered during the election campaign, in which you outline the social and cultural values you would promote if elected and explain the perception of Ireland you would cultivate abroad, given the opportunity to do so.

3. In TEXT 3, a student, Dieter Knecht, undertakes the perilous rescue of Joseph Roth’s novel, *Rebellion*, from destruction in the Nazi book burning in Berlin in 1933.

Write a short story in which the student featured in TEXT 3, Dieter Knecht, has a life changing experience as he attempts to rescue Joseph Roth’s denounced novel, *Rebellion*, from the Nazi supporters who wish to see it destroyed.

4. In TEXT 1, we learn that Amanda Gorman recognises that fashion is itself a storytelling device.

Write a feature article, for the magazine section of a weekend newspaper, in which you reflect on our fascination with all things fashionable and explore the stories we tell about ourselves, intentionally or unintentionally, through our fashion choices.

5. The theme of this examination paper is “Powerful Voices”.

Write a discursive essay in which you identify some of the powerful voices in modern life and discuss their influence on society.

6. In TEXT 3, the students in the story are described as “unlearning everything but the spirit of the nation”.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on the value of engaging in all kinds of learning and the pleasure, satisfaction and personal growth that can be derived from doing so.

7. In TEXT 2, Ben Okri talks about, “the story at the plaintive heart of the music.”

Write a short story in which a piece of music or the lyrics of a song (or songs) play(s) an important part in the narrative.

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Acknowledgements

Images and texts that appear on this examination paper were sourced as follows:

Text 1: M. McGrath, *Poet. Fashion icon. Future president?* Sunday Independent Life magazine, 19/09/2021

Image: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/21/amanda-gorman-star-rises-inaugural-poem>

Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

Text 2: T. Gatti (Ed.), *Long Players – Writers on the Albums That Shaped Them*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021

Image: <https://www.vinylvinyl.nl/miles-davis-kind-of-blue-blue-180g-vinyl.html>

Text 3: H. Hamilton, *The Pages*, London, 4th Estate (An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers), 2021.

Image: <https://lithub.com/during-world-war-ii-literature-reigned-supreme/>

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English

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