



CLIFTON
COLLEGE

13+ Scholarship Examination
Specimen Paper

ENGLISH

Time allowed: 75 minutes

- Answer **BOTH** questions.
- Spend 10-15 minutes reading and annotating the extract.
- Then spend 30 mins on **each** answer, allowing time to check your work.
- Both questions carry equal marks

Write neatly, and start each question on a SEPARATE sheet of paper. You will be marked for your understanding, as well as for the accuracy and clarity of your writing.

ANSWER BOTH QUESTIONS

Question 1 on the extract: analysis

The extract is from “The Bell Jar” by Sylvia Plath. Esther, the narrator, is a poor student from a small town, who is now on a scholarship with a famous magazine in New York. However, she isn’t enjoying her new life.

Explore the ways the writer creates a sense of the narrator’s mood in this extract:

Chapter One

It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs¹, and I didn’t know what I was doing in New York. I’m stupid about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that’s all there was to read about in the papers – goggle-eyed headlines staring up at me on every street corner and at the fusty, peanut-smelling mouth of every subway. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn’t help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves. I found it hard to think about anything else.

I thought it must be the worst thing in the world.

New York was bad enough. By nine in the morning the fake, country-wet freshness that somehow seeped in overnight evaporated like the tail end of a sweet dream. Mirage-gray at the bottom of their granite canyons, the hot streets wavered in the sun, the car tops sizzled and glittered, and the dry, cindery dust blew into my eyes and down my throat.

I knew something was wrong with me that summer, because all I could think about was the Rosenbergs and how stupid I’d been to buy all those uncomfortable, expensive clothes, hanging limp as fish in my closet, and how all the little successes I’d totted up so happily at college fizzled to nothing outside the slick marble and plate-glass fronts along Madison Avenue².

I was supposed to be having the time of my life.

I was supposed to be the envy of thousands of other college girls just like me all over America who wanted nothing more than to be tripping about in those same patent leather shoes I’d bought in Bloomingdale’s one lunch hour with a black patent leather belt and black patent leather pocketbook to match. And when my picture came out in the magazine the twelve of us were working on – drinking martinis in a skimpy dress, in the company of several anonymous young men with all-American bone structures hired or loaned for the occasion – everybody would think I must be having a real whirl.

Look what can happen in this country, they’d say. A girl lives in some out-of-the-way town for nineteen years, so poor she can’t afford a magazine, and then she gets a scholarship to college and wins a prize here and a prize there and ends up steering New York like her own private car.

Only I wasn’t steering anything, not even myself. I guess I should have been excited the way most of the other girls were, but I couldn’t get myself to react. I felt very still and very empty.

¹ American citizens executed in 1953 for passing information about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union.

² Famous New York street

Question 2: descriptive writing

Write about a time when you, or another character, felt disappointed.
This could be real or imagined.

You are advised to plan your work first.

Question 1 advice:

Read the extract carefully and decide what mood or moods the narrator is describing.

Annotate by highlighting the key words and phrases that provide you with evidence for this.

More confident students would explore the contrast between her expectation, and how she is experiencing the reality.

The most confident students might also try to explore the significance of the narrator beginning with the execution of the Rosenbergs. Why is she fixating on this?

Ideally all students will begin with an “overview” paragraph, outlining what the mood is, and how (broadly) this is established.

Then all subsequent paragraphs will each focus on a point, provide evidence, and explain/analyse that evidence.

The highest will also analyse structural decisions. This can include the impact of specific sentence structures, or can be about the broad structuring of the whole piece.

Weaker candidates will make unsubstantiated claims about the impact of short or long sentences, without reference to their content.

Question 2 advice:

The best candidates plan and then write a well structured, brief story with minimal characters, a small time frame, and a resolution with a twist, showing their confident understanding of a story’s purpose (to entertain) and how to achieve that.

The best stories are realistic and believable, and often focus on relatively simple anecdotes.