



Key Stage 3

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Year 7 Pack 2

Insert

The Source that follows is:

Source A: 21st Century prose-fiction

It is an extract from the novel *The Fire Eaters* by David Almond published in 2003.

It tells the story of a boy, Bobby Burns who grows up in a small coal mining town in Northumberland in the 1960s.

**Please turn the page over
to see the Source**

Source A

Bobby and his mother meet a man known only as McNulty as he performs circus and conjuring tricks in their market square.

- 1 McNulty was a small, wild-eyed, bare-chested man. His skin was covered in scars and bruises. There were rough and faded tattoos of beasts and dragons. He had a little canvas sack on a long stick. His hair was black. He had pointed gold teeth at the front
4 of his mouth and he wore tiny golden earrings. There were deep creases in his cheeks.
- 5 Mum held me against her.
'Reach into my pocket,' she said. 'Find him a coin.'
I reached down and took out some silver. When I looked up again his little sack was right before my eyes.
'Into the sack with it, bonny¹ lad,' he said.
- 10 I dropped the coin in. He held my eye with his. He grinned.
'Good lad,' he snarled.
Mum pushed my shoulders, helping me forward. I squirmed through, right to the front of the crowd.
'Bonny lad!' he muttered when he saw me there. He flexed his muscles. A cartwheel
15 lay on the cobbles² beside him. He stood it on end, in front of him. It had heavy wooden spokes, a thick steel rim. It was as high as his chest.
'Could McNulty lift this?' he hissed.
- 18 He took it in his hands, spread his legs, bent his knees and lifted it to his thighs and let it rest there. 'Could he?' he said through gritted teeth. There were tears of strain in his
20 eyes. He groaned, lifted again, a sudden jerk that took the cartwheel high. We gasped. We backed away. He leaned his head back and rested the wheel on his brow so that it stood above him, with the sun and the bridge caught in its ring. He shuffled on the cobbles, balancing himself with his elbows wide and his hands gripping the rim of steel. He grunted and hissed. Then he lifted the cartwheel free and let it fall with a crash and
25 the whole earth seemed to shake.
He glared at us. He blinked, wiped his tears away.
- 27 'See? See what a man can do?'
- 28 I reached behind me but Mam's hand wasn't there. I looked back through the crowd and saw her and she smiled and held up her hand, telling me to stay there.
- 30 'What next?' said McNulty.
He fell silent as his eye met mine again. He leaned close.
'Help me, bonny,' he whispered.
He reached for my hand. I turned to Mam. She waved again and smiled, as if to tell me everything was fine, she was still there, there was nothing to fear. He cupped my
35 shoulder and drew me to him.
'This is my assistant,' he said. 'His name is'
I couldn't speak. He leaned close. He cupped his hand across his mouth, whispered into my ear.
'R-Robert,' I stammered.
- 40 'R-Robert!' he announced.
He crouched in front of me. His skin glistened. I caught the smoky sweaty scent of him. I looked into the black centre of his eyes.
'There is a box here, bonny,' he told me. He slid a casket to my feet.

- 'Open it,' he said.
- 45 I did nothing.
- 'Open it, Bobby,' he whispered.
- With trembling fingers, I opened it. Inside were needles and pins and fish hooks and skewers³ and knives and scissors, some of them all rusted, some of them all bright.
- 'Take out the thing that you think should make the most pain', he said.
- 50 I stared into his eyes, so deep and dark.
- 'Do it, Bobby,' he said.
- I took out a silver skewer, as long as my forearm. The point was needle-sharp.
- He shuddered.
- 'Well chosen, Bobby.'
- 55 He stood up. He held the skewer between his index fingers for the crowd to see.
- 'Who would dare?' he said.
- I looked up at him.
- I just wanted to escape, but the bodies were packed before me. The faces were all smiles. Mam had her hand across her mouth. She widened her eyes, she raised her
- 60 shoulders, she tried to go on smiling.
- I turned to him. He drew me to his side. He spoke to me as if no one else existed, as if there were just the two of us there beside the river on that brightening autumn day.
- 'Help me, son,' he said.

Glossary:

bonny¹ - a term of affection

cobbles² - rounded paving stones

skewers³ - long thin metal pins or spikes

END OF SOURCES

There are no Sources printed on this page

Acknowledgement of copyright holders and publishers

Permission to reproduce all copyright material has been applied for. In some cases, efforts to contact copyright holders have been unsuccessful and AQA will be happy to rectify any omissions of acknowledgements in future papers if notified.

Source A: From *The Fire Eaters* by David Almond, first published in the UK by Hodder Children's books, an imprint of Hachette Children's Books, Carmelite House, 50 Victoria Embankment, London, EC4Y 0DZ.

Copyright © 2016 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.