

You are likely to be asked to summarise the differences between two texts (question 2) and to explain how the writers convey their attitudes (question 4). The extracts here are shorter than those set in the exam, but are useful for practice at reading to find differences then summarising them concisely and fairly quickly.

Read both texts before answering the comparative questions below.

Question 2

Using details from **both** sources, write a summary of the different descriptions of the natural world, and the birds within it. (8 marks)

Question 4

Compare **how** the two writers convey their different attitudes to the natural world and the birds within it; support your answer with quotations from both texts. (16 marks)

Source A

This extract is taken from *The Living Mountain* (1977) by Nan Shepherd. This is from the opening of Chapter 8, in which Shepherd records her journeys into the Cairngorm mountains of Scotland.

The first time I found summer on the plateau - for although my earliest expeditions were all made in June or July, I experienced cloud, mist, howling wind, hailstones, rain and even a blizzard - the first time the sun blazed and the air was balmy, we were standing on the edge of an outward facing precipice, when I was startled by a whizzing sound behind me. Something dark swished past the side of my head at a speed that made me giddy. Hardly had I got back my balance when it came again, whistling through the windless air, which eddied round me with the motion. This time my eyes were ready, and I realised that a swift was sweeping in mighty curves over the edge of the plateau, plunging down the face of the rock and rising again like a jet of water. No one had told me I should find swifts on the mountain. Eagles and ptarmigan, yes: but that first sight of the mad, joyous abandon of the swift over and over the very edge of the precipice shocked me with a thrill of elation. All that volley of speed, those convolutions of delight, to catch a few flies! The discrepancy between purpose and performance made me laugh aloud - a laugh that gave the same feeling of release as though I had been dancing for a long time.

Source B

This extract is taken from *The Grasmere Journals* by Dorothy Wordsworth, her diary of life in the Lake District with her brother, the poet William Wordsworth.

Wednesday 16th June, 1802

I spoke of the little Birds keeping us company - & William told me that that very morning a Bird had perched upon his leg - he had been lying very still & had watched this little creature, it had come under the Bench where he was sitting & then flew up to his leg, he thoughtlessly stirred himself to look further at it & it flew onto the apple tree above him. It was a little young creature, that had just left its nest, equally unacquainted with man & unaccustomed to struggle against storms & winds. While it was upon the apple tree the wind blew about the stiff boughs & the Bird seemed bemazed & not strong enough to strive with it. The swallows come to the sitting-room window as if wishing to build but I am afraid they will not have courage for it, but I believe they will build at my room window. They twitter & make a bustle & a little cheerful song hanging against the panes of glass, with their soft white bellies close to the glass, & their forked fish-like tails. They swim round & round & again they come. - It was a sweet evening we first walked to the top of the hill to look at Rydale & then to Butterlip How - I do not see the brownness that was in the coppices. The lower hawthorn blossoms passed away, those on the hills are a faint white.

Suggested answers

First, discuss which approach gives the best answer, for questions 2 and 4:

- **Vertical**
Summarise one text and then point out differences to it as you summarise the next.
- **Horizontal**
Point out differences by moving between the texts as you summarise each point.

If you can, look at sample questions, answers and mark schemes provided by the exam board to help you decide which approach is best.

Question 2

The question tests AO1, how well you:

- identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas
- select and synthesise evidence from different texts.

Using details from **both** sources, write a summary of the different descriptions of the natural world, and the birds within it. **(8 marks)**

Remember you are being asked to summarise the differences in content, both explicit and in the inferences you can draw. You will be asked to analyse language and techniques in the longer question (question 4), so don't do that here.

You should be able to identify some of the following differences in your summary of each text:

Source A	Source B
<i>The Living Mountain</i> by Nan Shepherd	<i>The Grasmere Journals</i> by Dorothy Wordsworth
Remote and wild setting e.g. 'on the edge of ... a precipice' on the Cairngorm mountains.	More domestic setting in a garden with an 'apple tree' and in the local countryside, 'Butterlip How'.
Writer compares the mountain's extremes of weather, from this hot day, 'the sun blazed', to worse summers in the past, 'even a blizzard'.	A setting with harsh weather, 'Storms & winds' but less extreme, 'the wind blew the stiff boughs' and later it's a 'sweet evening'.
Describes the swift's skill and speed in searching for food, 'sweeping in mighty curves', 'plunging down'.	Presents these birds as weak against the wind, ' bemazed and not strong enough to strive with it', and looking for a safe place to build a nest.
Describes how the swift's actions, 'mad, joyous abandon', far exceed and overshadow the practical aim of catching flies in the wild.	These birds are less bold, 'twitter and make a bustle & a little cheerful song' and seem rather tame.

How well did you do? What could you do to improve? What answers did you find in addition to those above?

- 7-8 marks: perceptive and detailed answer
- 5-6 marks: clear and relevant answer
- 3-4 marks: some attempts at summary
- 1-2 marks: simple limited summary
- 0 marks: no differences noted

Question 4

The final reading question is worth 16 marks, more than any of the other reading questions and so you should spend the most time on it, answering the question in detail and supporting with relevant quotations from both texts.

The question tests AO3: how well you compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.

Compare **how** the two writers convey their different attitudes to the natural world and the birds within it; support with quotations from both texts. **(16 marks)**

Remember to

- compare their different attitudes
- compare the methods they use to convey their different attitudes
- support your ideas with quotations from both texts.

You should be able to identify some of the following differences in the writers' attitudes:

Source A	Source B
<i>The Living Mountain</i> by Nan Shepherd	<i>The Grasmere Journals</i> by Dorothy Wordsworth
Respect for the mountain, wildlife and potential dangers, 'outward facing precipice', 'speed that made me giddy'.	Affection for the garden and birds, with repetition in 'this little creature' and 'a little young creature'.
Shepherd is impressed by the power of nature, with a list of weather experienced there in summer, 'cloud, mist, howling wind ...'	Wordsworth notes how the changing landscape and colours mark the change of seasons, 'I do not see the brownness', 'the hills are faint white'.
The speed of the swift passing close by shocks the writer; she uses onomatopoeia to convey the sound and feeling produced, 'whizzing ... swished ... whistling'.	The writer feels sorry for the swallows, which appear too timid to build a nest near people. 'I am afraid they will not have courage' suggests personification of the swallows.
She uses a strong verb 'plunging' and a simile 'rising again like a jet of water' to convey the bird's control and speed so near to a rock face.	The metaphors 'their forked, fish-like tails' and 'they swim round & round & again they come' make the birds sound like goldfish in a bowl.

Preparing for comparative reading tasks

AQA English Language Paper 2

Shepherd admires how the swift's bold and carefree actions, 'mad, joyous abandon', far exceed their practical use of catching food.	The writer interprets the swallows' lives as limited and the birds as vulnerable, 'with their soft white bellies'.
The writer identifies with the swift's sense of exhilaration and freedom in the wild, 'made me laugh out loud', 'same feeling of release' perhaps comparing human pleasure at dancing with the bird's enjoyment of flying.	The writer appreciates watching the birds, as if they are tame and provide entertainment rather than wild and part of nature, 'little Birds keeping us company' again suggests personification of them.
Memoir with first person voice, 'no one had told me I ...'; personal response 'made me laugh out loud' and detailed nature references, 'Eagles and ptarmigan' are what she expected to see rather than a swift.	Diary form with first person voice, interaction with others, 'William told me', informal style 'round & round & again', reference to specific places 'Rydale', personal thoughts, 'I believe they will build at my room window'.

How well did you do? What could you improve? What other answers did you find?

- 13-16 marks: detailed, perceptive comments and analysis of writers' perspectives
- 9-12 marks: clear, relevant comments and explanations of writers' perspectives
- 5-8 marks: some attempts to compare and comment on writers' perspectives
- 1-4 marks: simple, basic comments on writers' perspectives
- 0 marks: no ideas about the differences

