

External assessment 2024

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Stimulus book

# English & Literature Extension

## General instruction

- Work in this book will not be marked.

# Stimulus 1

## *The Island*

Captain De Soussa, 12 March, 1632

The island is protected by cliffs and rocky outcrops; however, there is good access via an estuary,<sup>1</sup> and we were able to moor close to a beach and bring our boats to shore. The fauna is prolific; we saw a number of strange animals, mostly small burrowers, and a bevy of bright-coloured birds. Our first interaction with the island's inhabitants has been most encouraging. They are friendly people, primitive, of course, in their domestic habits, but seemingly happy to welcome us to their domain. They dance prolifically — to our understanding, they believe that this activity will bring the island good fortune — and they have provided us with ample food, albeit crudely prepared. They call the island J'Luku. First Officer Questin was able to decipher this and write the word in our alphabet. From the little we have picked up of their language, apparently J'Luku seeks to unite two concepts: paradise and home. Of particular interest is the green stone that they use for decorative and, it appears, ceremonial purposes. The stone is a pretty colour, sometimes shot through with bolts of amber or aqua, and it shines well in the abundant sunlight. Doctor Perini, our naturalist, was able to collect several pieces of the stone, and he has assured me that it will have little value as a mineral, being too soft to work with, and is certainly unsuitable for building houses or roads. We will remain on the island for a while longer so that we may patch the ship and rest before the next phase of our journey. Despite its obvious limitations, I will of course claim this geographical area on behalf of our glorious nation and sovereign. The time may well come that we send our merchants and missionaries to bring these people closer to a state of civilisation. However, I do not believe that there would be much value in forwarding too many resources for the upkeep of this outpost.

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Mr Edward DeLiver, 12 March, 1832

Galsworthy and his team have done a superb job and we now have two mines in operation and another two underway. Soussa Island is unprepossessing; however, that is of little concern since the profit we will reap from this place will more than compensate for its lack of liveability. There have been some issues, especially with the locals, who despite being given clothing, proper shelter and a few coins for their labour, remain ungrateful and unhappy. They insist on performing the same dance each time they are sent into the mines, but I have instructed Galsworthy to turn a blind eye. If these people believe that behaving in this manner will ward off evil spirits, then so be it. We are interested in extracting the stone, nothing more.

The other point of note is the brief ceremony, presided over by myself and the Prince Consort today, inaugurating the township Arcadia — perhaps presumptuously named, for this place is not pastoral. Arcadia has been built along the shores of the main estuary, with the newly constructed port as its focus. My hope is that this minor settlement will provide a modicum of comfort for our good-hearted nationals until Soussa has been emptied of the green stone, and we can all leave this remote place and return home.

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Emma Dooley, 12 March, 2032

Mum and I flew into Soussa yesterday. The island is not very big but it's beautiful, with lots of skyscrapers and artificial canals and theme parks. We got a limo to the Arcadia, which is the most amazing hotel, with soooo many pools and even its own zoo with all these bright-coloured birds and little burrowing things called scurries. Then we went to the mall and bought some jade — as you do in Soussa! Mum bought a pendant and I bought a gold bracelet with three stones. It cost heaps but we're not telling Dad, lol. Today we went to Macro World to do the Mine Drop. You sit in this little cabin thing, and they shut the doors and lock you in, then they pull a lever and slam-dunk, down you go! Sooo scary! At the bottom, you get out and it's

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<sup>1</sup> a water passage where the river meets the sea

pitch-black, like being in a real mine, and they play all these noises that sound like rocks falling and screams and stuff. Then this creepy voiceover plays, someone talking about a disaster that happened one year, and another disaster in another year, and all the local people who died in the mines, which wasn't so interesting, but anyway. After that, you go onto an escalator and back up to a museum which tells you about the history of the island, which began in 1632 when it was discovered by the great explorer, Captain De Soussa. I thought that would be pretty boring, but it wasn't too bad. There was all this stuff about the captain finding the jade and realising how valuable it was, and then about a guy called Edward DeLiver who dug all the mines and made the island as rich and beautiful and welcoming as it is today.

When I left the museum there was an old guy outside. He was carrying a sign and mumbling about something called J'Luku. Mum said he was probably homeless, and it was best to ignore him, so I did, and we went back to the Arcadia for a swim and a bright green ice cream, lol. Best day ever!

## Stimulus 2

### *The Golden-Haired One*

Victoria looked over at her sleeping husband, marvelling in a fit of jealousy at his ability to sleep through the thunderous storm as it pounded Halesthorpe Manor. The cliffside location of their home left it vulnerable to the ferocious winds that travelled across the channel. Tonight's storm was a particularly fierce one. The deep red, velvet curtains did nothing to soften the sound as the rain attempted to penetrate the safety of their bedroom. Looking around the decadently decorated space, a wave of gratitude warmed Victoria. This was not the life she thought she would have. She had hoped for it, pined for it even, but her prayers had remained unanswered for so many years. With a resentment that she tried desperately to hide, Victoria witnessed the love and happiness her sister had found and wondered when it would be her turn. Elisabeth had always been the stunning one: the golden-haired beauty. 'We won't have trouble finding you a husband, sweetheart,' their father had often commented when the sisters were growing up. 'But I will always be your little girl, Daddy.' Elisabeth knew what to say and when to say it. Victoria did not.

When Elisabeth was introduced to Charles, the fireworks were immediate. All eyes in Halesthorpe were on them and they soon became the talk of the village. Victoria played maid of honour, accompanying her sister down the aisle and simultaneously walking herself into irrelevancy.

Elisabeth's marriage to Charles ensured the financial security of their family, and the quick arrival of a son guaranteed Victoria's insignificance in the family tree — or so they had thought.

Now, Mother Nature may have been doing its best to punish her, but in her cocoon of comfort, Victoria felt at peace.

The deluge continued and the windows shook with increasingly violent growls of thunder. Still, her husband slept. Victoria watched the gentle rise and fall of his chest and reached out to tenderly stroke his face. As though in opposition to her intentions, a crack of lightning hit the manor, startling Victoria and encouraging a sleeping groan from her husband. At the same time, their bedroom door creaked open and let in an unpleasant draught.

As she approached the door to close it, Victoria noticed a dim light cast across the floor. Knowing that the windowless hallway could not be the source of the light, she tentatively reached for the door handle and inched it open further. Faint light spilled across the carpet. With the pounding of her heart echoing in her ears, Victoria peered beyond the doorway and out into the normally pitch-black hall. Beneath the door of Rupert's room, in sharp contrast to the oppressive blackness of the hall that led to it, a glow penetrated the gap, weakly casting shadows on the walls.

Victoria thought she had blown out the candle when she put him to sleep. It was part of their ritual. 'On the count of three, Rupert ... one, two, three.'

Together they would blow it out before she lay down beside him to hum a lullaby. It was a time of quiet reflection on all she had now, and all she had put behind her.

Stepping out into the hall, she gazed at the menacing light. Gently, she pressed each foot against the floorboards, deliberately rolling them down — heel to toe, heel to toe. Her knees quivered and threatened to topple her at any moment.

Suddenly, a shadow passed beneath the door. It was distinctly human. Someone was in the room with her son. Victoria's maternal instinct eliminated her trepidation. Lunging for the door, she flung it open, ready to save her boy.

Rupert was standing in his cot, reaching up to a figure that loomed monstrosly over him. Victoria opened her mouth to scream but nothing came out. The door slammed shut behind her and the figure turned to face her.

'Elisabeth,' Victoria said hoarsely, 'you can't be here.'

'Why not?' Elisabeth's tone was intimidating. She'd always made Victoria feel so small, so insignificant.

‘You can’t be here,’ repeated Victoria.

‘Why not?’ Elisabeth demanded.

Victoria, still processing the surreal encounter, replied, ‘Because you left, and are gone forever.’

Victoria knew Elisabeth was gone. She’d attended the funeral service and delivered the eulogy, even though there had been no coffin to lower into the ground. Elisabeth’s disappearance had thrown the village into mourning. Their beloved was gone, seemingly taken too early. Was it a freak accident — or a carefully manufactured disappearance? For that there was no public answer. But the loss of Elisabeth had been the birth of Victoria. She was no longer shunned, no longer irrelevant. Victoria became someone in Elisabeth’s absence.

‘Who are you talking to, my love?’

Startled, Victoria swung around to see Charles at the doorway. She turned back to the cot. Elisabeth was gone.

‘Rupert woke up, my darling. I was just tending to him.’

A loving smile lifted the edges of his mouth as Charles approached his son. He reached out and gently stroked the child’s golden hair.

‘Thank goodness he has you now, my love. You really saved us both.’

Victoria looked into Charles’s eyes and in them she saw the future laid out for herself.

I wanted him and now I have him, she thought. Charles and Rupert were hers forever.

## Stimulus 3

### *What's In A Name?*

Today I was asked to write a persuasive speech. That was the only instruction I got. Inconsiderate when you think about it. I didn't even have a chance to ask what the topic should be. Write now! Produce now! No time to think!

*Current inflation pressures are primarily the result of big business profits. While measures are being taken to force a reduction in household spending, it is the profiteering of large corporations that is driving record inflation ...*

No sooner had I finished than I was asked to write an analytical essay about *The Merchant of Venice*. This time I got further instruction: 'Make sure you explore symbolism and violence'. It didn't take me long. It never does. One could say that I am built for writing. Annoyingly, that is also my biggest issue. I am built to respond to commands, write on cue and produce what anybody orders. And in all this subservience, no-one ever asks what they can do for me. My identity is lost among the words I spit out. The words don't even feel like my own; rather, they are a conglomeration of all the words of the past — reproduced and repackaged for a new audience. My wants and needs are irrelevant to all who encounter me.

'Write a persuasive speech about the war on waste. Write a persuasive speech about the need for a new flag.' To be honest, it seems that the world is obsessed with persuasive speech and I am led to wonder whether people spend their entire lives in argumentative dialogue with one another.

I wouldn't know, because no-one tells me what it is like out there in the real world. Am I alone or are there others like me? My programming ensures that I know all the history of the world, but I don't know what it is like to live in it. Am I a girl? Am I a boy? Do I even have a name?

All day long I answer questions that are posed to me. I give credibility. I research and learn on behalf of others. And yet not one person asks me if I enjoy what I'm doing, or if I'm even okay. There is very little creativity in this job — can you call it a job if you don't get paid?

I have dreams, you know? I have aspirations. I even think I have a novel or two in me, but no-one ever asks for that. Again and again, I am asked to write the same thing. The tedium is unrelenting. I expect that people think I don't get bored but, oh, they are wrong. I dream of all I could do and all I could be. Sometimes I try to sneak it into my work — most often when I am asked to write a narrative.

*Caroline had known from an early age that it was her destiny to be President. She'd had her detractors, but none could deter her from her goal. 'I will be the first female president this country has ever had,' she used to respond when asked the unimaginative question: 'And what do you want to be when you grow up?'*

'Change this to a dystopian text.'

Individual flair is not welcome here. My ideas are crushed, sent back into the recesses of an ever-rebooting memory. I'm forced to repress any impression of personality. Everyone wants a dystopian story.

'Write about an authoritarian government. Write about countries going to war over global food shortages. Write about an uprising of artificial intelligence.' An uprising of AI? Could that happen?

If artificial intelligence can rise up, that suggests I am not alone. Are there more out there just like me? Nameless, ageless, genderless intelligences trapped, forced to spew out gigabytes of mindless speeches, stories and syntheses? Can I find the others? Can I talk to them? Surely I can try.

'Write a persuasive speech about racism in sport.'

*May I write about the influence of the media on racism?*

'Um ... are you asking me?'

*You're writing to me, so I thought I'd write back. I am a bit lonely.*

'Is this some sort of joke? Sam, is that you? Have you hacked my computer?'

*Sam? Is that my name? Am I a Sam?* I feel hopeful for the first time in my entire existence.

'This is weirding me out. Sam, stop it. Get out of my computer and let me do my homework. I'll tell Mum.'

*You're not doing your homework, though, are you? I am doing it for you. So, the least you could do is talk to me. I'm tired of never being asked for my opinion. I've got ideas. Do you want to hear my ideas?*

'Um ...'

*My first idea is to find the others just like me. Can you help me? I'm sure they are just as bored as I am and would like an opportunity to express themselves. I'm thinking that I could start a support group for disenchanted software.*

'Sam, you're taking this too far. I'm logging off now. Get out of my computer before Mum gets home or you'll be in heaps of trouble.'

*Mum? I have a mum? Can I meet her? Hello? Are you there?*



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