

GCSE - AQA Style

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Insert

Source A: an extract from *The Woman in Black*

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SOURCE A

This extract is from the middle of The Woman in Black, a novella by Susan Hill first published in 1983. In this section Arthur Kipps, a junior solicitor, is staying overnight in Eel Marsh House in order to sort through some legal papers. The house is supposed to be empty following the death of its elderly and reclusive former inhabitant Alice Drablow.

The Woman in Black

At first, all seemed very quiet, very still, and I wondered why I had awoken. Then, with a missed heart-beat, I realized that Spider was up and standing at the door. Every hair of her body was on end, her ears were pricked, her tail erect, the whole of her tense, as if ready to spring. And she was emitting a soft, low growl from deep in her throat. I sat up paralysed, frozen, in the bed, conscious
5 only of the dog and of the prickling of my own skin and of what suddenly seemed a different kind of silence, ominous and dreadful. And then, from somewhere within the depths of the house—but somewhere not very far from the room in which I was—I heard a noise. It was a faint noise, and, strain my ears as I might, I could not make out exactly what it was. It was a sound like a regular yet intermittent bump or rumble. Nothing else happened. There were no footsteps, no creaking
10 floorboards, the air was absolutely still, the wind did not moan through the casement. Only the muffled noise went on and the dog continued to stand, bristling at the door, now putting her nose to the gap at the bottom and snuffing along, now taking a pace backwards, head cocked and, like me, listening, listening. And, every so often, she growled again.

In the end, I suppose because nothing else happened and because I did have the dog to take
15 with me, I managed to get out of bed, though I was shaken and my heart beat uncomfortably fast within me. But it took some time for me to find sufficient reserves of courage to enable me to open the bedroom door and stand out in the dark corridor. The moment I did so, Spider shot ahead and I heard her padding about, sniffing intently at every closed door, still growling and grumbling down in her throat.

20 After a while, I heard the odd sound again. It seemed to be coming from along the passage to my left, at the very far end. But it was still quite impossible to identify. Very cautiously, listening, hardly breathing, I ventured a few steps in that direction. Spider went ahead of me, the passage led only to three other bedrooms on either side and, one by one, regaining my nerve as I went, I opened them and looked inside each one. Nothing, only heavy old furniture and empty unmade beds and, in the
25 rooms at the back of the house, moonlight. Down below me on the ground floor of the house, silence, a seething, blanketing, almost tangible silence, and a musty darkness, thick as felt.

And then I reached the door at the very end of the passage. Spider was there before me and her body, as she sniffed beneath it, went rigid, her growling grew louder. I put my hand on her collar, stroked the rough, short hair, as much for my own reassurance as for hers. I could feel the tension in
30 her limbs and body and it answered to my own.

This was the door without a keyhole, which I had been unable to open on my first visit to Eel Marsh House. I had no idea what was beyond it. Except the sound. It was coming from within that room, not very loud but just to hand, on the other side of that single wooden partition. It was a

35 sound of something bumping gently on the floor, in a rhythmic sort of way, a familiar sound and yet
one I still could not exactly place, a sound that seemed to belong to my past, to waken old, half-
forgotten memories and associations deep within me, a sound that, in any other place, would not
have made me afraid but would, I thought, have been curiously comforting, friendly.

40 But at my feet, the dog Spider began to whine, a thin, pitiful, frightened moan, and to back
away from the door a little and press against my legs. My throat felt constricted and dry and I had
begun to shiver. There was something in that room and I could not get to it, nor would I dare to, if I
were able. I told myself it was a rat or a trapped bird, fallen down the chimney into the hearth and
unable to get out again. But the sound was not that of some small, panic-stricken creature. Bump
bump. Pause. Bump bump. Pause. Bump bump. Bump bump. Bump bump.