

GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 2 Writers' viewpoints and perspectives

Insert

The two sources that follow are:

Source A: 20th Century literary non-fiction

Touching the Void

An extract from an autobiographical account by Joe Simpson published in 1988

Source B: 19th Century non-fiction

Climbing the Meije

An extract from a letter written by explorer Gertrude Bell in 1899

Please turn the page over to see the sources

Source A

Source A is an extract from *Touching the Void*, in which experienced climber Joe Simpson describes how he and fellow climber Simon Yates scaled a 21 000 foot mountain in Peru. On the way down, Joe fell and broke his leg. In this extract, Joe explains how, because of his broken leg, Simon had to lower him down the mountain using a rope.

1 The col was exposed and windy. Directly beneath us the glacier we had walked up five
days ago curved away towards the crevasses which led to base camp, nearly 3 000 feet
4 below us. It would take many long lowerings, but it was all downhill, and we had lost the
sense of hopelessness that had invaded us at the ice cliff.

5 'What time is it?' Simon asked.

'Just gone four. We don't have much time, do we?'

I could see him weighing up the possibilities. I wanted to carry on down, but it was Simon's
decision. I waited for him to make up his mind.

'I think we should keep going,' he said at last.

10 Simon let me slide faster than I had expected and, despite my cries of alarm and pain, he
had kept the pace of descent going. I stopped shouting to him after fifty feet. The rising
wind and continuous avalanches drowned out all communications. Instead I concentrated
on keeping my leg clear of the snow. It was an impossible task. Despite lying on my good
leg, the right boot snagged in the snow as the weight of my body pushed down. Each
15 abrupt jerk caused searing pain in my knee. I sobbed and gasped, swore at the snow and
the cold, and most of all at Simon. At the change-over point, I hopped on to my left leg,
trying to think the pain away. It ebbed slowly, leaving a dreadful throbbing ache and a
leadened tiredness.

20 The tugs came again far too soon, and carelessly I slumped against the rope and let myself
go. The drop went on until I could bear it no longer, yet there was nothing that I could do to
bring the agony to an end. Howling and screaming for Simon to stop achieved nothing; the
blame had to lie somewhere, so I swore Simon's character to the devil.

23 The terrible sliding stopped, and I hung silently against the slope. Three faint tugs trembled
the taut rope, and I hopped up on to my leg. A wave of nausea and pain swept over me. I
25 was glad of the freezing blasts of snow biting into my face. My head cleared as I waited for
the burning to subside from my knee. Several times I had felt it twist sideways when my
boot snagged. There would be a flare of agony as the knee kinked back, and parts within
the joint seemed to shear past each other with a sickening gristly crunch. I had barely
ceased sobbing before my boot snagged again. At the end my leg shook uncontrollably. I
30 tried to stop it shaking, but the harder I tried, the more it shook. I pressed my face into the
31 snow, gritted my teeth, and waited. At last it eased.

Simon had already started to climb down. I looked up but failed to make out where he was.
I began digging Simon's belay* seat. It was warming work and distracted attention from my
knee. When I looked up again Simon could be seen descending quickly.

35 'At this rate we should be down by nine o'clock,' he said cheerfully.

'I hope so.' I said no more. It wouldn't help to harp on about how I felt.

'Right, let's do it again.' He had seated himself in the hole and had the ropes ready for another lowering.

'You're not hanging around, are you?'

40 'Nothing to wait for. Come on.'

He was still grinning, and his confidence was infectious. Who said one man can't rescue another, I thought. We had changed from climbing to rescue, and the partnership had worked just as effectively. We hadn't dwelt on the accident. There had been an element of uncertainty at first, but as soon as we had started to act positively everything had come

45 together.

'Okay, ready when you are,' I said, lying down on my side again. 'Slow down a bit this time. You'll have my leg off otherwise.'

He didn't seem to hear me for I went down at an even faster pace than before, and the hammering torture began again with a vengeance. My optimism evaporated.

Glossary

* belay – a secure point to fix a rope

Turn over for Source B

Source B

In 1899, British explorer Gertrude Bell set out to climb one of the most dangerous mountains in the Alps, the Meije. Source B is an extract from the letter she sent home describing the climb.

Monday 28th August, 1899

I thought you would gather from my last letter that I meant to have a shot at climbing the Meije and would be glad to hear that I had descended safely. Well, I'll tell you – it's awful! I think if I
 5 had known exactly what was before me I should not have faced it, but fortunately I did not, and I look back on it with complete satisfaction — and I look forward to other things with no further apprehension. . .



10 I left here on Friday, having hired a local guide, Marius, and we walked up to the Refuge. I went out to watch the beautiful red sunlight fading from the snow and rocks. The Meije looked dreadfully forbidding in the dusk. When I came in I found that Marius had kindly put my rug in a corner of the floor, and what with the straw and my cloak for a pillow, I made myself very comfortable.

15 The night lasted from 8 till 12, but I didn't sleep at all. We got up soon after 12 and I went down to the river and washed a little. It was a perfect night, clear stars and the moon not yet over the hills. We left just as the moon shone into the valley. Marius always went ahead and carried a lantern till we got on to the snow when it was light enough with only the moon.

At 1.30 we reached the glacier and put on our ropes. It wasn't really cold, though there was an
 20 icy little breath of wind. We had about three hours up very nice rock. I had been in high spirits for it was so easy, but before long my hopes were dashed! We had about two hours and a half of awfully difficult rock. There were two places where Marius literally pulled me up like a parcel. He has the strength of a bear. And it was absolutely sheer down. The first half-hour I gave myself up for lost. It didn't seem possible that I could get up all that wall without ever making a
 25 slip. You see, I had practically never been on a rock before. However, I didn't let on to Marius and presently it began to seem quite natural to be hanging by my eyelids over an abyss. . .

We stayed on the summit until 11. It was gorgeous, quite cloudless. I went to sleep for half-an-hour. It's a very long way up but it's a longer way down – unless you take the way Marius's
 30 axe took. The cord by which it was carefully tied to his wrist broke and it disappeared forever into space.

Here comes the worst place on the whole Meije. Marius vanished, carrying a very long rope, and I waited. Presently I felt a little tug on the rope. "Mademoiselle," called Marius calmly, and obediently off I went. There were two little humps to hold on to on an overhanging rock and there was me in mid-air and Marius round the corner steadfastly holding the rope tight. . .
 35 perfectly fearful. I thought at the time how very well I was climbing and how odd it was that I should not be afraid.

The worst was over then, and the most tedious part was to come. There was no difficulty, but there was also no moment when you had not to pay the strictest attention. There was an hour of ice and rock till at last Marius and I found ourselves, with thankfulness, back on the glacier.

- 40 When I got in, I found everyone in the hotel on the doorstep waiting for me and the hotel owner let off crackers, to my great surprise.

I went to bed and knew no more till 6 this morning, when I had five cups of tea and read your letters and then went to sleep again until ten. I'm really not tired but my shoulders and neck and arms feel rather sore and stiff and my knees are awfully bruised.

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