

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER 1**

### **PART B2**

#### **Reading Passages**

1.5 hours (for both Parts A and B)

#### **GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

- (1) Refer to the General Instructions on Page 1 of the Reading Passages booklet for Part A.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR PART B2**

- (1) The Question-Answer Book for Part B2 is inserted in this Reading Passages booklet.
- (2) Candidates who choose Part B2 should attempt all questions in the part. Each question carries ONE mark unless otherwise stated.
- (3) Hand in only ONE Question-Answer Book for Part B, either B1 or B2, and fasten it with the Question-Answer Book for Part A using the green tag provided.

Read Text 4 and answer questions 45–60 on pages 1–4 of the Question-Answer Book for Part B2.

## Text 4

## Growing up with characters

**1** The *bildungsroman* is a genre that centres on the psychological and moral growth of the main character in a literary novel. The character, also known as the protagonist, usually matures from youth into adulthood. Whereas the story of each novel varies, change is an extremely important element and common in the plot. The term ‘coming-of-age novel’ is sometimes used interchangeably with the German word.

**2** The birth of this literary genre dates to late eighteenth century Germany, but it has since had extensive influence first in Europe, and later in other parts of the world. In the twentieth century, in particular, a number of ethnically marginalized and female writers became famous for their coming-of-age novels. Examples, to name a few, include Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple* and Haruki Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood*. In her autobiographical novel, Alice Walker creates a sympathetic voice for a lonely black girl named Celie who writes letters to God regularly. From her letters, readers learn about her hardship caused by racial discrimination and her stepfather’s sexual abuse. Despite this, she keeps her faith in God and eventually, with the help of a few good friends and her sister, becomes a confident woman who finds her own voice.

**3** Although it is written by a Japanese author, *Norwegian Wood* has received applause around the globe. The novel, which came out in 1987, has been translated into many other languages, making Haruki Murakami one of the most embraced living fiction writers today. Set in the 1960s, the novel tells the story of Toru Watanabe, who looks back on his days as a college student living in Tokyo. Through Toru’s reminiscences, readers discover his romantic relationships with two different female characters, the beautiful yet emotionally disturbed Naoko, and the outgoing, mischievous Midori. Critics have suggested that the novel speaks to readers from different cultures through more than its romantic plot. ‘The novel is set in a time when Japanese students, like those of many other nations, were protesting against the established order. Or more simply, the government,’ says a literature professor. ‘The novel is about Toru’s maturing. More importantly, it is also about the profound sense of loss he experiences when he matures. Toru is very nostalgic, always trapped in the good old days. And aren’t we the same?’

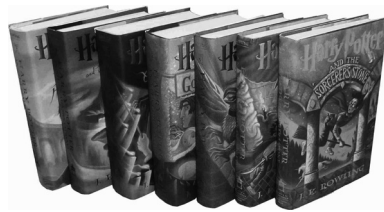
**4** Even though the *bildungsroman* thematically touches upon overcoming hardship while growing up, not all of these novels may be suitable for readers in their early teens. ‘There are inevitably contents, such as sex scenes, that teachers and parents are wary of,’ an experienced educator warns. ‘I am not trying to sanitize the classroom. Let’s face it, young readers will become adults one day. Very likely, this subject matter will be a part of their lives. All I think is, compared to contemporary coming-of-age novels, there are plenty of classics that provide young readers with pleasure and educational values. Schools have to be aware of this. I personally recommend Charles Dickens’s 1861 novel *Great Expectations*.’

**5** An appropriate word to discuss the themes of the *bildungsroman* is perhaps ‘apprenticeship’. Very often, the protagonist is tested in the novel. In other words, reading the entire novel is similar to reading the protagonist’s learning process. Though he or she may experience some unpleasant encounters, there are always older role models in the story that the character either emulates or rejects.

**6** The didactic value of the genre also explains why it is embraced by teachers. By reading didactic novels, readers can learn moral values and how the culture of a particular time encodes social behaviours. For instance, female characters in Jane Austen’s novels serve as models for readers to discover how women were supposed to talk and act during the Regency period. While most characters may fit the social norm, there are always a few who reject it and strive to be individualistic. This leads to another major theme of the *bildungsroman*: searching for a self-identity. “I admire Elizabeth in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. She is such a brave character. She insists on being herself and decides her own fate,” a student reader comments.

**7** It is useful to dig into the social context of a novel to learn more about its literary value. *Pride and Prejudice* is set at a time when the pursuit of uniqueness in character and personality was discouraged. Women endured a lot of pressure and overwhelmingly strict rules imposed by men and the tradition defined by men. Women of the time most importantly should marry, and marry well to obtain significant wealth and reputation from the husband’s family. Elizabeth, being a very outspoken young

woman in the novel, challenges this unfairness and conveys a powerful sense of independence. She also encourages other women to do exactly this.



- 100 **8** The *bildungsroman* genre is still alive today. J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and the recent wave of vampire fiction also adopt a similar formula. Many aspiring writers would therefore love to publish their first coming-of-age novel and hope  
105 it will become the next international bestseller. A literary agent gives several tips to these wannabes.

- 'It requires good character development, and a strong protagonist that is memorable to readers. In addition, a strong antagonist that has a conflict of interest with the hero (or heroine) is a must. Design the plot carefully. Consider this: a teenage character is trapped in an undesirable situation, must learn to make decisions he or she is not used to making, and through this ordeal becomes a better person.'
- 115 **9** 'Also do not dismiss the power of the imagination, the key to all literary success. The plot is very much a cliché now. It's been overworked for hundreds of years. However, you can overlap your *bildungsroman* with other genres. Set your story in deep space or in the future to make it a sci-fi. Give your characters supernatural powers to make it a fantasy. There are just so many ways to start. Each of us has a story about growing up to tell, but remember  
120 this: write what you want to read.'

#### END OF READING PASSAGE