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*Pymble Ladies' College*

**2024 TRIAL HIGHER  
SCHOOL CERTIFICATE**

# English Standard

## Paper 1 – Texts and Human Experiences

Stimulus Booklet

	Page
<b>Section I</b>	
• Text 1 – Visual Image .....	3
• Text 2 – Poem .....	4
• Text 3 – Discursive Essay .....	5-6
• Text 4 – Fiction Extract .....	7-8

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Text 1 – Visual image



— MATTHIEU PALEY, 2023

## **Text 2 – Poem**

### **The House of Dreams**

I built a little House of Dreams,  
And fenced it all about,  
But still I heard the Wind of Truth  
That roared without.  
I laid a fire of Memories  
And sat before the glow,  
But through the chinks and round the door  
The wind would blow.  
I left the House, for all the night  
I heard the Wind of Truth; —  
I followed where it seemed to lead  
Through all my youth.  
But when I sought the House of Dreams,  
To creep within and die,  
The Wind of Truth had levelled it,  
And passed it by.

— ADAPTED FROM SARAH TEASDALE, 1917

### **Text 3 – Discursive Essay**

“Are they... aliens?” I squeak, much to the delight of my daughter whose eyes are fixed on a slow-moving string of lights marching across the sky above us. Only moments earlier, we’d been caught in the usual bedtime toddler tango, when she suggested we say “goodnight to the moon”.

I sheepishly Google “alien lights over Australia”, only to discover that the confounding Unidentified Blinking Gems are, in fact, just the handy work of Elon Musk. His starlink satellites are making an unexpected appearance over our small Victorian coastal town.

It’s then I hear my partner whisper: “Is that... an aurora?”

It is a question more absurd than our fleeting belief that we were being invaded by an army of extraterrestrials in electric vehicles. But as all three of us shift our attention to the horizon, there it is, stretching wildly across the otherwise ink-black skyline—the undeniable pink and greenish flares of Aurora Australis\*. It takes us some time to fully compute what is happening, until quite suddenly the penny drops. “Oh my god! Oh my god!” we each start yelling into the silence of the night.

I’m not sure how long the three of us stand, eyes bulging, watching cosmic columns of colour dance atop the tree line. It’s like we’ve entered a wondrous vortex where Dr Who’s Tardis\* might just materialize in the backyard at any moment.

With our daughter finally tucked into bed, my partner and I forgo our usual ritual of slumping on the couch, wine and phone in hand, and instead rug up and spend the evening staring into space. The sky stays ablaze, stars swooshing and constellations sparkling, and it’s not long until we are treated to another explosion of activity. When the aurora reignites, the jangling clouds of purple and green are so vivid that I find myself physically reaching out to the sky around us trying to grab a handful of the colour.

I can’t stop thinking about how easily we may have missed this. That, heads down, in the routine of toddler bedtimes and Saturday evening exhaustion, had our daughter not dragged us outside to look up, this beauty may have passed us by.

I consider my partner and I curious beings. With a deep drive to be immersed in nature, we have travelled the world and been lost in the stars many times over. But sometimes, life has a way of distracting us from the wonder right there in front of us.

During the early stages of parenthood, your world shrinks. During those wild early months of sleep deprivation and self-doubt, phones feel like a fantasy portal to the outside; social media algorithms cruelly feeding through an absurd see-saw of mum-fluencers rhapsodizing about organic baby food and old acquaintances sipping wine on the Amalfi Coast. Adventure can begin to feel like an absurdist construct. Completely ungraspable.

**Text 3 continues on the next page**

### Text 3 – continued

But then life recalibrates, and a few years into it, your toddler forces you outside on a cold evening and there in the backyard of your tiny hometown you experience the kind of wonder that recalls your wildest and most mesmerizing overseas adventures. And for all the heaviness of the world right now, you stop and feel a connection to this mysterious ball of rock. The kind of stupefying awe that can only come from such a surprising encounter with natural beauty.

Of course, you don't need a 20-year geomagnetic storm to feel this. You don't have to be in a far-flung place. You just have to be present, to slow down, and to look up (easier said than done, I know). But even just by stepping outside for a few minutes on a clear night, there is all kinds of strange beauty to be soaked up. And who knows, you might just spot an alien or two.

— SARAH SMITH, 2024

*\*Aurora Australis – 'southern lights', a natural light display in the Earth's sky. Auroras are a geomagnetic phenomenon that display dynamic patterns of brilliant lights that cover the entire sky.*

*\*Dr Who's Tardis – a time machine and spacecraft that appears in the British science fiction television series 'Doctor Who'*

## **Text 4 – Fiction Extract**

### **From ‘Lola in the Mirror’**

Eleven stops back to the city on the Cleveland line. I push the bike off the train at Central. Wheel it down the ramp that flows to the corner of Edward and Ann streets. People gathered at the traffic lights, waiting for the little green traffic man to make his appearance. Red and white Australia Post box. Smokers on the garden edging. Telstra phone box. This is where I used to stand and announce to the world that I was invisible. Screwy I must be. Cracked I must be.

I look across the road to where Danny sat with his sketchbook. I didn’t see him that day, but somehow he saw me. The traffic lights buzz and the little green man guides pedestrians across the road. Maybe I’m wrong, but I could swear I see people looking at me when I walk. Just little glances. The occasional stare. Think it might be the dress. Or maybe it’s the hair. Just keep walking.

I take Adelaide Street, where I pass the portable writing desk of a man in a brown hat who spends his days recording the real-life love stories of Brisbane strangers on an old sky-blue Olivetti typewriter. I want to stop and tell him my story, but it isn’t finished yet.

Onwards, into Queen Street Mall. A busker in a straitjacket is balancing on a board and a rolling red can. ‘I didn’t think this through,’ he says into a microphone taped to his ear. Busy workers snack on sushi and sip green smoothies on the mall’s public benches next to the bike racks where I chain-lock Danny’s mountain bike to a cross pole.

Nerves. Butterflies in my belly. I stop in front of Hungry Jack’s and assess my reflection in the glass. I know this person. I’ve met her before. Her limbs are not bony and awkward and alien. Her limbs are strong and elegant and beautiful. The curls in her brown hair. That’s Golden Age Hollywood stuff. The way she smiles and nods at me is thrilling. I know this woman so well. Because we have been through so much together. She got me through the saddest days of my life. She stopped me from jumping in the drink. She’s the only reason I’m standing here today. She’s so confident, this woman in the red dress. So international. So wanted. Not unwanted. She is so very valuable, this woman in the red dress.

Fingers through my hair. Adjust the straps on my dress. Time to walk. Down Albert Street in the direction of the botanic gardens Past the Nike shoe shop and House of Hoops store and the OPSM spectacles store and then I stop outside the Starbucks coffees hop at the bottom of Myer Centre. Put my forehead against the thick shopfront glass. And now I can see my sister, Phoebe, sitting at a table with two chairs. She drinks from a tall iced tea through a straw, places it back on a coaster on the table. Checks the time on her watch and turns her head towards the door and I can tell she’s done that more than a few times today.

**Text 4 continues on the next page**

#### **Text 4 – continued**

Then, maybe because of instinct and maybe because of blood, she looks over at the shopfront. She's surprised to see me staring at her. And then she's delighted. She smiles like I smile. And she cries like I cry. Tears running immediately down her face. And I shake my head and run to the door and rush inside and step between a couple talking by the coffee pick up area then sidestep around a cluster of people blocking access to the dining section of the cafe. Take two steps up to the raised dining area and march to her table. She's already standing when I reach her. I stop an arm's length away. And then I step forward and hug my sister.

— TRENT DALTON, 2023

**End of Text 4 – Fiction Extract**

**End of Booklet**