



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2024

English - Higher Level - Paper 1

Total Marks: 200

Wednesday, 5 June – Morning, 9.30 – 12.20

- This paper is divided into two sections, Section I COMPREHENDING and Section II COMPOSING.
- The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of **CONNECTIONS**.
- Candidates should familiarise themselves with each of the texts before beginning their answers.
- Both sections of this paper (COMPREHENDING and COMPOSING) must be attempted.
- Each section carries 100 marks.

SECTION I – COMPREHENDING

- Two Questions, A and B, follow each text.
- Candidates must answer a Question A on one text and a Question B on a different text. Candidates must answer only one Question A and only one Question B.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer a Question A and a Question B on the same text.

SECTION II – COMPOSING

- Candidates must write on **one** of the compositions 1 – 7.

TEXT 1 – FAMILY CONNECTIONS AND THE NATURAL WORLD

This text is an edited article from *The Irish Times*, by Fintan O'Toole entitled, 'We have taken flight from our deep link with birds.' It was published in January 2023.

Parents – at least those of my age – don't like the idea of their children getting tattoos. Perhaps it's an ego thing: the flesh of our flesh should remain spotless.

My youngest son swerved elegantly around these foolish objections by getting a large image of a handsome bird inked onto his forearm.

It's a waxwing, a gorgeous winter visitor to Ireland that looks like a dressed-up finch, with a backwards quiff for a crest and two vivid red blobs on its wings like sealing wax applied to an ancient missive from on high. My son knew that this image would disarm my prejudices because the bird connects him to his father and his grandfather. It is a genetic memory with wings.

The first conscious piece of writing I ever did was a school essay on the topic of birds. I called it 'Waxwings'.

I wrote about how my father took me and my brother on the bus out to Ballsbridge where the rowan trees near the American embassy were alive with dozens of waxwings. I was interested, of course, less in the birds than in my dad's excitement at seeing them, and the way the sharing of this pleasure with us was a gift of time and love.

After my father died, something of his spirit migrated into that tattoo. It found a new fleshy perch. It also has an older abode. One of the reasons I was so glad to see the Dead Zoo reopened, that strange treasure house of taxidermy that is the Natural History Museum in Dublin, is that there's another bird in it that connects me to my father.

In the corner of a top shelf of a case of stuffed birds, there is one you would miss if you were not looking for it. It is a pallid swift, a Mediterranean bird first recorded in Ireland in



1953. The person who spotted it, on Howth Head, was my father. In those days before mobile phones, he ran down to the village to find a phone box to call his fellow bird watchers. As he was making his way back up the Head he found it dead on the path, apparently hit by a hawk.

He did what any normal obsessive would do, which was to lift its body gently and place it tenderly in his bag. He took it home and, over my mother's appalled objections, put it beside the garden peas in the freezer until the Dead Zoo opened after the weekend. The curators there did not tell him to get stuffed, but had the bird stuffed and mounted, albeit in an obscure cranny. His name is on the label.

I hadn't seen it for a long time, while the museum was closed for an extensive refurbishment. But, last week, I called in to see if it was still there. I went with my waxwing-stamped son and his own four-year-old son. The boy was not impressed - the sharks and giant elks are far more interesting. But that was not the point. Maybe, if we do this every year, he will lay down a little seam of memory: a trace of his great-grandfather in a hidden corner of a slightly fantastical hall of animal curiosities in Dublin.

Between the waxwing tattoo on the arm and the pallid swift on the shelf, I couldn't help thinking about birds as our living clocks and calendars. They mark time, calling the sun up and lulling it down, announcing the seasons with their comings and goings. But they also deepen our sense of time itself. Because they are unbounded, they connect everything to everything else. They animate the physical world – the trees, the skies, the seashore, the hedges – but also the intangible worlds of memory and belonging.

But we are breaking this connection, cruelly and carelessly. Much as I loved being back in the Dead Zoo last week, I could not avoid the melancholy realisation that birds that were common in Ireland can now be seen only through the glass of display cases. In the museum of natural history, nature is consigned to history.

I grew up on a housing estate three miles from the centre of Dublin. The sound that punctuated our football games in the local park was the loud kerrx-kerrx of the corncrake calling for a mate. There are fewer than 200 calling males left in Ireland now. Almost no



one in any built-up area ever hears that fabulously comic song of urgency and yearning.

We are systematically de-animating the landscape, sucking the life out of it, making it flat and dull and bleakly lifeless. The texture of sound that every previous generation experienced is being frayed into dead air.

We are not creatures that can live by bread alone. We live on memory and wonder, on the sense of connection to each other and to the natural world. If we allow those things to depart, we are taking flight from ourselves.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) What, in your opinion, does the writer reveal about the nature of family relationships in TEXT 1? Make three points, supporting your response with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) The writer in TEXT 1 tells us that some parents don't like the idea of their children getting tattoos. Why do you think that some parents don't like the idea of their children getting tattoos? Develop three points in your response. (15)
- (iii) Identify four elements of the writer's style, evident in TEXT 1, and discuss how they contribute to making this an informative and engaging newspaper article. Support your response with reference to TEXT 1. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

In TEXT 1 Fintan O'Toole refers to how different generations can have differing views on issues. Write the text of a **dialogue** between an adult and a young person who have opposing viewpoints about a contentious issue of your choice. In the dialogue you should: develop the arguments of both sides, and conclude the dialogue in a convincing manner, with one side conceding to the other in some way.

TEXT 2 – FRIENDSHIP, THE HUMAN CONNECTION

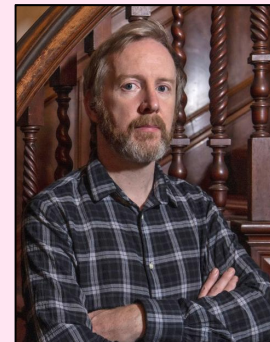
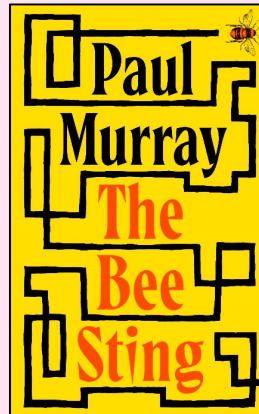
TEXT 2 is an edited extract from the opening of Paul Murray's novel, *The Bee Sting*, shortlisted for the 2023 Booker Prize. The novel tells the tragi-comic story of the Barnes family, set in contemporary Ireland. In this extract we meet the teenage daughter, Cass, and her best friend, Elaine.

Cass and Elaine first met in Chemistry class, when Elaine poured iodine on Cass's eczema during an experiment. It was an accident; she'd cried more than Cass did, and insisted on going with her to the nurse. They'd been friends ever since. Every morning Cass called to Elaine's house and they walked to school together. At lunchtime, they rolled up their long skirts and wandered around the supermarket, listening to music from Elaine's phone, eating croissants from the bakery section that were gone by the time they got to the checkout.

Cass felt she'd known Elaine for ever. Their lives were so similar it was almost eerie. Both girls came from well-known families in the town: Cass's father, Dickie, owned the local Volkswagen dealership, while Elaine's dad, Big Mike, was a businessman and cattle farmer. Both girls were bright, in fact they were consistently at the top of their class. Both intended to leave here some day and never come back.

Elaine hated their town. Everyone knew everyone, everybody knew your business; when you walked down the street people would slow down their cars to see who you were so they could wave at you. There were no proper shops; instead of McDonald's and Starbucks, they had Binchy Burgers and Mangan's Café, where the owners worked behind the counter and asked after your parents. You can't even buy a sausage roll without having to tell someone your life story, she complained.

The smallness wouldn't have been so bad if the townsfolk had had a little more sophistication. But their only interest, besides farming and the well-being of the microchip factory, was Gaelic games. Football, hurling, camogie, the county, the Cup, the under-21s - that was all anyone ever talked about.



Elaine hated GAA. She was bad at sports. She was always the last up the rope in gym class; in games, she confined herself to the side-lines, where she scowled, flicked her hair, and wafted reluctantly back and forth with the general direction of play, like a lovely frond at the bottom of a noisy, grunting ocean.

The Tidy Towns Committee, of which Cass's mother was a member, was always waffling on about the natural beauty of the area, but Elaine did not accept this. Nature in her eyes was almost as bad as sports. The way it kept *growing*? The way things, like crops or whatever, would die and then next year they *came back*? Did no one else get how creepy that was?

I'm not being negative, she said. I just want to live somewhere I can get good coffee and not have to see nature and everyone doesn't look like they were made out of mashed potato.

Cass didn't care for GAA either, and she agreed about the lack of sophistication. For her, though, the presence of Elaine was enough to cancel out the town's faults. She had never felt so connected to someone. When they messaged each other at night, they got so in sync it was almost like they were the same person. In some ways, that was the best time of all – better even than being together. As she lay in bed,

messages flying back and forth between them, Cass would feel like she was flying too, far above the town, in a pure space that belonged completely to her and her best friend. Most days they went to Elaine's after school, but sometimes, for a change of scene, Elaine would want to come to Cass's instead. She liked to hang out in the kitchen talking to Imelda – that's what she called Cass's mother, 'Imelda', so casually and naturally that after a while Cass started doing it too. Cass's mother was a famous beauty. The fact remained that Elaine got on better with her mother than she did. Imelda liked to give Elaine face creams to try out; they traded beauty secrets and product advice. Cass was a bystander in these conversations. Nothing works on her skin, Imelda said, because of the eczema.

Once, Imelda had taken the girls with her to Dublin for the pre-sales. The discounts hadn't been put on the price tags yet; only platinum customers knew about them. This secret elevation over the other shoppers had made

Elaine visibly giddy; she watched Imelda stalk the clothes-rails, whipping pitilessly through the garments like an empress at the slave market, as if she could see the difference, like an aura around her, a platinum glow. Cass did not get the Imelda-worship. Imelda had an electrifying effect on people. Cass's own effect was not electrifying, and when she told people that Imelda was her mother, they would stare at her a moment as if trying to solve a puzzle, then pat her hand sympathetically, and say, it's after your father you take, so. Elaine said it wasn't just about looks. Imelda had mystique, magnetism.

I can't believe she married your dad, she said candidly. Cass too sometimes had trouble believing it – that her dad, who was so thoughtful, so sensitive, had fallen for Imelda's 100 per cent superficial allure like every other chump. She didn't want to devalue her mother in Elaine's eyes. At the same time, she didn't know how Elaine could think Imelda had mystique.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) What, in your opinion, does the writer reveal about the nature of friendship in TEXT 2? Make three points, supporting your response with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) Cass and Elaine both intend to leave their home town and never come back. Why do you think some young people have a dismissive attitude towards their homeplace? Develop three points in your response. (15)
- (iii) Identify four elements of the writer's style, evident in TEXT 2, and discuss how they contribute to making this an entertaining and intriguing opening to a novel. Support your response with reference to TEXT 2. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

Certain aspects of the area where you live have become run down and neglected. Write a **proposal** to your local Tidy Towns Committee in which you: outline your key concerns in relation to the problems you have identified, propose a project that you believe would improve the situation, and suggest how the committee could encourage more members of the local community to become active in improving the local area.

TEXT 3 – CONNECTING THROUGH TRAVEL

TEXT 3 is an edited article from the travel section of the *Financial Times* by Monisha Rajesh, journalist and travel writer, entitled *To Istanbul by Train*. It was published in March 2023.

I'd arrived in Strasbourg on the Eurostar from London, the first leg of my voyage by train to Istanbul. No stranger to epic railway journeys, I was keen to retrace the route of the Orient Express 140 years after its inaugural run, at a time when Europe's sleeper trains are seeing a renaissance owing to the rise of the slow-travel movement, climate change and private companies proposing grand plans to revive old routes in style.

It was now Sunday night and if all went to plan I'd be in Istanbul on Friday morning – not the fastest route possible but a leisurely one with time to dine, unwind and wander around each city. On board the Nightjet at Strasbourg, I pressed in earplugs and dozed off as the train followed the bends of the Rhine.

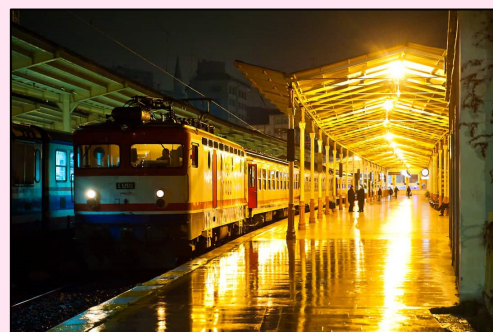
The next morning, as we tumbled over the Salzach river, lampposts casting pools of light along its banks, I felt a familiar thrill. This was the kind of moment that makes a journey: the moment when most passengers were still asleep and the outside world yawned and stretched awake, the skies cracking open, first light glowing peach.

Austria's lower Alps looked magnificent, their scalps turning pink in the sun. Farms flitted past the window along with families of deer, then snow-heavy forests packed with pencil-thin trees. I watched curtains draw open and lights flick on, catching the eye of commuters clearing snow from their cars. Within 20 minutes of stepping on to the platform in Vienna I was in front of Klimt's *The Kiss*, gasping at the sight of my favourite painting in all its gold-leafed glory. I resisted the urge to rush around the city's every highlight, instead treating myself to strudel and spending the rainy afternoon reading in Demel, a classic Viennese coffee-house. For the third leg, the 19-hour night train to Bucharest, I'd reserved a couchette, far more convivial and comfortable than the Nightjet, with velvety berths,

new carpets and crisp sheets. I was sharing with two Romanian women, Elena and Inga, who struck up an instant friendship, chatting to me in a mix of German and English that functioned well enough for us to share crisps and nod in approval at photos of each other's kids as the train thumped quietly south.

For hours we clanked past fields and villages populated with spirited geese, dogs barking at the train. On we pushed, through fortified towns with views of the Carpathian Mountains, blizzards blurring their peaks. I touched my head to the glass, meditating on the green Prahova river bubbling its way through the snow, icicles trimming cliffs.

On the approach to Bucharest I found Charles, a researcher on sustainability, wearing a T-shirt saying *Green Against the Machine*. He was taking the train to Bucharest to demonstrate that it was possible to avoid flying. By the time I'd reached my hotel he had tagged me into a post about his journey. In one respect I was sorry that social media was stripping the anonymity of long-haul rail travel, but in another I thrived on starting strange little friendships based on nothing more than a love of trains.



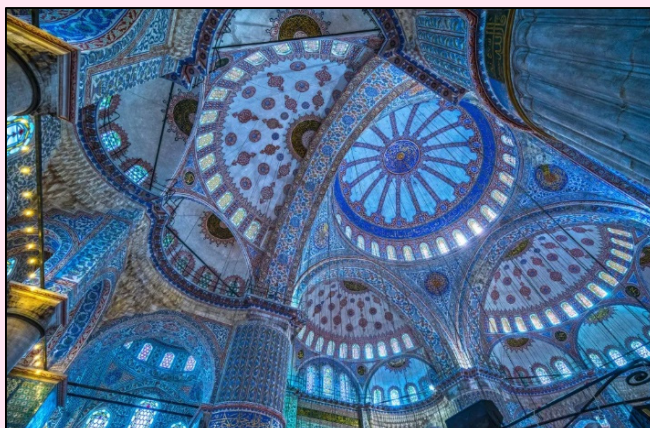
No sleepers travelled to Sofia, so I boarded the slowest train I've ever known, one with windows shattered like a jigsaw puzzle, inching in a straight line through mud flats and marshes sparkling with snow.

I found myself among other passengers all heading for Sofia – a Turkish construction worker, a self-confessed “drifter” from the US, a French drummer and a Ukrainian student among the mix – and as we joined the connection at Ruse our group gravitated naturally towards one another, squeezing into two compartments in comfortable silence, guarding each other’s luggage, swapping books and drifting into a harmony unique to trains. Outside, green meadows rolled in the sun, unchanging for hours until the evening drew in and the Iskar river flashed alongside like a silver belt winding in the darkness to Sofia.

I boarded the seven-hour Sofya-Istanbul Ekspresi at 11 p.m. in the middle of a snow storm, huge flakes swooping at the windows. From time to time I’d peek round the blind as towns flashed by, cupping my hands to the glass to take in the glow of TVs in darkened apartments, kitchens hung with pans, balconies lined with plants and laundry. It was undeniably romantic, thundering through the night, watching curtains being drawn, late dinners being eaten, and holding the gaze of smokers in the dark. Something stirred me awake at dawn and I scrambled to

the window in time to see an indigo sky splintered into shards over the lake. As though on fire, the lagoon was holding a reflection of the sunrise and I stilled my breath... as Istanbul emerged, the outlines of domes and minarets silhouetted against softening skies.

With a creak and a jolt we stopped. Five nights and 3,930 km after leaving London, I’d finally reached my destination. The train tickets cost a total of £584 and although I could have taken a direct flight and arrived in four hours for a fifth of the price, I wouldn’t have done it any other way. Jubilant, I pulled on my bag and wandered up the platform at Halkali station.



N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) What, in your opinion, does the writer reveal about the unique experience of “slow travel” in TEXT 3? Make three points, supporting your response with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) One of Monisha Rajesh’s fellow travellers, Charles, was wearing a T-shirt saying *Green against the Machine*. What are your views on the different ways open to young people to protest, or demonstrate their views, on important issues? Develop three points in your response. (15)
- (iii) Identify four elements of the writer’s style, evident in TEXT 3, and discuss how they contribute to making this an informative and appealing piece of travel writing. Support your response with reference to TEXT 3. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

Write a series of reflective **diary entries** of a person returning to their homeplace after travelling for a whole year in different countries. In your diary you should: consider your feelings on returning home, recall and analyse some significant moments and events that stand out for you from your travels, and reflect on how the experience of travel has influenced your overall worldview now.

SECTION II

COMPOSING

(100 marks)

Write a composition on **any one** of the assignments that appear in **bold print** below.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. In TEXT 2, we see a complicated relationship between friends and family.

Write a short story focusing on tensions either in a family or in a group of friends in which a connection between the past and the present is important.

2. The theme of this examination is “Connections”.

Write an article for a popular magazine in which you explore some of the connections that you believe enrich teenagers’ lives.

3. In TEXT 1, the writer is appreciative of the “gift of time and love”.

Write a speech for or against the motion that: “The accelerated pace of modern life detracts from our enjoyment of it.”

4. In TEXT 2 Cass describes people who, “would stare at her a moment as if trying to solve a puzzle.”

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on some of the aspects of life you find puzzling.

5. The writer in TEXT 3 regrets losing her anonymity by engaging with social media.

Write a discursive essay in which you consider whether or not it is possible, or even desirable, to maintain privacy in today’s world.

6. TEXT 3, describes the writer’s experience of a train journey to Istanbul.

Write a short story set among strangers on an eventful train journey.

7. In TEXT 1 the writer reveals his interest in nature to us.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on your relationship with the natural world.

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Acknowledgements

Images and texts that appear on this examination paper were sourced as follows:

Texts

O'Toole, Fintan. "We have taken flight from our deep link with birds." *The Irish Times*. Jan. 2023.

Murray, Paul. *The Bee Sting*. London. Penguin, Random House, 2023.

Rajesh, Monisha. "To Istanbul by train." *Financial Times*. Mar. 2023.

Images

Image on page 2: <https://ebird.org/species/palswi3>

Image on page 3: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-style/people/2023/01/07/fintan-otoole-we-have-taken-flight-from-deep-link-with-birds/>

Images on page 4: <https://www.easons.com/the-bee-sting-paul-murray-9780241353967>; <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/reading-guide-the-bee-sting-by-paul-murray>

Image on page 6: https://rail.cc/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/DSC0062_1090.jpg

Image on page 7: <https://touristjourney.com/istanbul-travel-guide/>

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Leaving Certificate – Higher Level

English

Wednesday 5 June

Morning 9.30 – 12.20