



# Cambridge O Level

CANDIDATE  
NAME



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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**1123/11**

Paper 1 Reading

**May/June 2026**

**2 hours**

You must answer on the question paper.

You will need: Insert (enclosed)

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Answer **all** questions.
- Use a black or dark blue pen.
- Write your name, centre number and candidate number in the boxes at the top of the page.
- Write your answer to each question in the space provided.
- Do **not** use an erasable pen or correction fluid.
- Do **not** write on any bar codes.
- Dictionaries are **not** allowed.

## INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is 50.
- The number of marks for each question or part question is shown in brackets [ ].
- The insert contains the reading passages.

This document has **8** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

[Turn over

Read Text A and answer Question 1 and Question 2 on the question paper.

Text A: The circus train

*italic* → content

This story is set over 90 years ago. Jacob Jankowski has left his previous life behind and set off in search of a new beginning.

1926 ← 2026

live num

1 I stop because I'm tired, hungry and have no idea where I am. The only sign of civilisation is a railway track which rests on a raised bed of gravel and rattles faintly in the darkness. A warning whistle shrieks and a massive engine explodes around the bend, thumping along the track. It is huge and churns out rolling clouds of billowing smoke, passing so close I'm hit by a wall of wind. The sudden sight, sound and stink are too much. I watch, stunned, as the first carriages whoosh by, loaded with what look oddly like telephone poles.

5

2 I snap out of my stupor. There are people on that train. Wherever it's going, it's travelling towards civilisation and food. I start running in the same direction as the train, scanning desperately for something to grab on to. Spotting an open door, I lunge forwards, reaching for the iron grab-bar and flinging myself upwards. My left foot and elbow hit first, and then my chin smashes onto the metal edging. I cling tightly and after a couple of seconds realise I'm still intact. I open my eyes and consider my options. There's no dismounting without going under the train. I pull myself upwards with everything I've got, scraping my way inside and collapsing on the carriage floor.

10

3 I lie panting, then jerk upright on my elbow – two men are staring at me. 'What have we here?' says one, an old man, holding a lantern in my face. I scramble to my feet and stumble backwards, only to find that there's nowhere to go. The old man squints at me. 'What's your name, boy?' 'Jacob Jankowski,' I reply. 'Who's he running from, Camel?' asks the other man from the darkness.

15

I pause. The old man's face hardens. 'You done something?' 'No,' I say. He squints again and then nods. 'You out of work?' 'Yes, sir.' 'You like circuses?'

20

I must look puzzled because Camel lets loose with a toothless cackle. 'Kid, don't tell me you didn't notice.'

25

'Notice what?' I ask. 'Ah, that's hilarious,' he says, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. 'You landed on a circus train, boy.'

30

I blink at him. 'That there's the circus tent – the big top,' he says, waving the lamp at great faded rolls of canvas. 'And this man here is Uncle Al.'

4 There's no mistaking Uncle Al as he steps forwards theatrically into the pool of lantern light. He has showman written all over him, from his ridiculously curled moustache and huge belly to his booming voice: 'So, just looking for adventure, Mr College Boy?' He's smirking, clearly amused.

35

'No, sir, I ...' 'Is he right?' interrupts Camel. 'Are you a college boy?' I feel like a mouse being bounced between two cats.

40

'I was.' 'Study something useful?' Uncle Al's eyes gleam in mockery.

'I studied veterinary sciences.' His expression changes instantly: 'Vet school? You're a vet?' 'Not exactly. I never wrote my final exams.'

45

'Why not?'

Scared terrified.

make fun of someone.

animal doctor

to shine

laughing.

✓

vet →

Cirrus Train

'I just didn't.'

'And those final exams, those were in your final year?'

'Yes.'

Camel and Uncle Al exchange glances.

Character: Jacob - vet

Motiv: lonely/hungry

50

5 I'm escorted to the giraffe's carriage. There's pus flowing down the giraffe's long nasal passage. She seems sad imprisoned here. She's the most elegant creature I've ever seen. Her legs and neck are delicate; her body is sloped and covered with markings like puzzle pieces to the top of her triangular head. Her eyes are huge, dark and beautiful, and she has velvet-soft lips. She's wearing a rope around her neck which I hold, but she's too weak to move as I swab out her infected nostrils and swaddle her throat in a soft cloth. When I'm finished, they let me sleep.

Cure

55

6 When I finally awake, the train has stopped. Camel leans in through the carriage door. 'Come on, kid,' he says. I get off the train and follow him. It's late but this southern sun is still burning in a flame red sky. The terrain is flatter here too with dry, brown, trampled grass. At the edges, near the track, canvas tents have popped up like mushrooms.

60

7 Camel nods his head at the largest tent – obviously the big top. 'Want to take a peek?' I peer inside through a small hole in the canvas: the tent is massive, supported by long, straight poles jutting at various angles. The canvas is taut and nearly translucent – fading sunlight filters through the material. With the rigging on the poles, it looks like the deck and mast of a pirate sailboat.

65

8 Brilliantly painted red and gold cages, their sides propped open to reveal lions and tigers, hypnotise the captive audience. Llamas and zebras bring wild whoops of delight. The big top is packed solid, glowing and pulsing with the sound of the audience laughing, clapping and whistling. Sometimes there's a collective intake of breath or ripple of nervous squeals as a trapeze flies by. The elephant looms against the far sidewall, an enormous beast the colour of storm clouds. She's gargantuan. Her skin is mottled and cracked like a scorched riverbed. She trots forwards and the crowd erupts with glee.

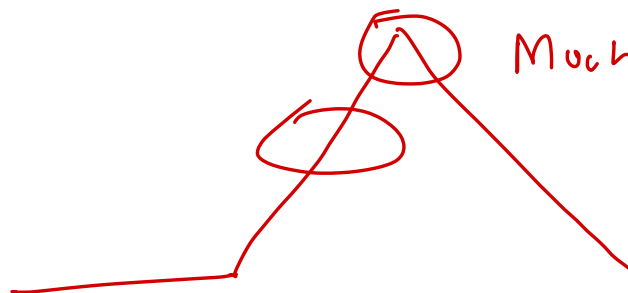
70

75

9 'Listen,' says Camel softly 'If you got a life to go back to, I reckon that's what you should do.' 'Too late,' I say. 'I'm staying.'

think.

Mock.



16 / 16 5 mins.

Read ✓  
- Character main  
- Motive = achieve  
- Ending ✓

Copy / paste

Read Text A, *The circus train*, in the insert and answer Question 1 and Question 2.

Question 1

(a) From paragraph 1, identify one sound that suggests that a train is coming before the engine comes into sight.

Warning whistle shrieks ✓

[1]

(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by 'scanning desperately' (lines 8-9)

.....  
..... [2]

(c) (i) In paragraph 3, Jacob is asked a question that confuses him. What is the question? <sup>explicit</sup>

"You like circuses?"

[1]

(ii) Why is Jacob confused by the question? <sup>= implicit</sup>

The question is unusual //  
Jacob did not realize it was a circus train. <sup>peculiar</sup> [1]

(d) Explain why Jacob says 'I feel like a mouse being bounced between two cats.' (line 40) <sup>imp</sup>

Jacob felt scared because they were making fun of him. [1]

(e) In paragraph 4, what is Uncle Al's impression of Jacob before he finds out that Jacob studied veterinary sciences?

explicit

Give two details from the text to support your answer.

Uncle Al's impression of Jacob Jacob was <sup>feelings</sup> <sup>implicit</sup> <sup>explicit</sup> <sup>vseless</sup> ✓  
details 1 - 'Smirking at him' ✓

2 - Eyes gleam in mockery ✓

[3]

feelings way.

1/3

2 details

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(f) Explain what Camel and Uncle Al are thinking when they 'exchange glances,' (line 50)

They were shocked because he is educated. They would use him to treat the animals.

2 reason  
[2]

(g) From paragraph 5, give two physical signs that indicate that the giraffe is ill.

- Pus flowing down her nasal passage
- Too weak to move.



[2]

(h) Explain using your own words Jacob's different feelings about the circus train and everything and everyone it carries.

imp character's

Give three details from anywhere in the text to support your answer.

- 1 At first, he was hopeful which is shown by "it's travelling towards civilisation and food."
  - 2 Later, he felt uncomfortable which is shown by: "the men are staring at me."
  - 3 He felt mesmerized "the most elegant I've ever seen."
- he felt happy. I am staying.

[3]

[Total: 16]



Question 2

Use of language (2)

(a) Read this extract from the text:

① literal

'It's late but this southern sun is still burning in a flame red sky. The terrain is flatter here too with dry, brown, trampled grass.' (lines 61-62)

What two impressions does the writer want to convey to the reader in this extract?

The sky is like fire, it was very hot.
The plain was straight, not hilly and levelled.
The area was barren, like a desert. [2]

Writer's effect:

(b) Read this sentence from the text:

'At the edges, near the track, canvas tents have popped up like mushrooms.' (lines 62-63)

What effect does the writer suggest about the tents by using the phrase 'popped up like mushrooms' to describe them?

lit: literal meaning: They appeared out of nowhere like magic

Association: magic

Result It was sudden // they were all around // close. [2]

(c) Explain why the writer uses the word 'peer' rather than 'look' in the sentence 'I peer inside through a small hole in the canvas'. (line 65)

Peer means to analyze carefully and closely.

(d) Read this extract from the text:

"Listen," says Camel softly. "If you got a life to go back to, I reckon that's what you should do." (line 76)

What does the writer want to suggest to the reader about Camel's feelings towards Jacob at this point in the story?

It is a turning point in the story. Camel is looking out for him. [1]

7/9

(e) Identify **one example** from the text below of how the writer uses language effectively to convey the reactions of the audience in the big top.

'Brilliantly painted red and gold cages, their sides propped open to reveal lions and tigers, hypnotise the captive audience. Llamas and zebras bring wild whoops of delight. The big top is packed solid, glowing and pulsing with the sound of the audience laughing, clapping and whistling. Sometimes there's a collective intake of breath or ripple of nervous squeals as a trapeze flies by. The elephant looms against the far sidewall, an enormous beast the colour of storm clouds. She's gargantuan. Her skin is mottled and cracked like a scorched firebed. She trots forwards and the crowd erupts with glee.' (lines 69-75)

CL0

Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified.

example ..... The audience laughing, clapping and whistling

explanation ..... The audience was making different noises.

: They were happy, excited

: It was a fun

Situation // loud // joyful.

[3]

[Total: 9]



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