



GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 20th Century prose fiction

Reunion by Fred Uhlman

An extract from the beginning of a novel written in 1971

Please turn the page over to see the source

Source A

This extract is taken from the beginning of a novel set in Germany in the 1930s. The narrator, Hans, is a 16-year-old boy studying at a grammar school in Stuttgart.

1 He came into my life in February 1932 and never left it again. I can remember the day and
the hour when I first set eyes on this boy who was to be the source of my greatest
happiness and of my greatest despair. I remember every detail: the classroom with its
heavy benches and tables, the sour, musty odour of forty damp winter overcoats, the
5 puddles of melted snow, the brownish-yellow lines on the grey walls. If I shut my eyes I
6 can still see the backs of my schoolmates.

7 I can still hear the tired, disillusioned voice of Herr Zimmermann, who was condemned to
teaching for life and had accepted his fate with sad resignation. He was a yellow-faced
man, whose hair, moustache and sharply pointed beard were all tinged with grey. He
10 looked out at the world through glasses on the tip of his nose with the expression of a
mongrel dog in search of food. Though he was probably not more than fifty years old, to
us he seemed to be eighty. We despised him because he was kind and gentle and
because he had a poor man's smell – his two-roomed flat probably had no bath – and he
was dressed in a much patched, shiny, greenish suit which he wore during the autumn and
15 the long, winter months (he had a second suit for spring and summer).

I was half asleep and half awake, doodling, dreaming, occasionally pulling a hair out of my
head to keep myself awake, when there was a knock at the door, and in came Professor
Klett, the Headmaster. But nobody looked at the dapper little man, for all eyes were turned
towards the stranger who followed him.

20 We stared at him as if we had seen a ghost. What struck me and probably all of us more
than anything else, more than his self-assured bearing, his aristocratic air and slight, faintly
superior smile, was his elegance. We were all, so far as our style and dress was
concerned, a dreary lot. Most of our mothers felt that anything was good enough for us to
go to school in, so long as it was made of a tough, durable fabric. We weren't as yet very
25 interested in girls, so we didn't mind being dressed in the functional hard-wearing
assortment of jackets and short trousers bought for us in the hope that they would last till
we grew out of them.

30 But with this boy it was different. He wore *long* trousers, beautifully cut and creased,
obviously not off the peg like ours. His suit looked expensive: it was light grey with a
herringbone pattern. He wore a pale blue shirt and a dark blue tie with small white
polka-dots; in contrast our neckwear was dirty, greasy and rope-like. We couldn't help
looking enviously at this picture of ease and distinction.

35 Professor Klett went straight to Herr Zimmermann, whispered something in his ear, and
disappeared without being noticed by us because our eyes were concentrated on the
Newcomer. He stood motionless and composed, without any signs of nervousness or
shyness. Somehow he looked older than us and more mature, and it was difficult to
believe he was just another new boy. It wouldn't have surprised us if he had disappeared
as silently and mysteriously as he had come in.

40 Herr Zimmermann moved his glasses higher up his nose, searched the classroom with
tired eyes, discovered an empty seat just in front of me, stepped down from his desk, and
– to the amazement of the class – accompanied the Newcomer to his appointed place.

45 Then, slightly inclining his head, as if he had half a mind to bow but didn't quite dare, walked slowly backwards, facing the stranger all the time. Climbing back on to his seat, he addressed him: 'Would you please give me your name and the date and place of your birth?'

The young man stood up. 'Count von Hohenfels,' he announced, 'born on the 19th January 1916, Württemberg.' Then he sat down.

I stared at this strange boy, who was exactly my own age, as if he had come from another world.

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