

Revision Guide

AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAPER 1

SECTION B:

Descriptive Writing

A*/L9 Answer (Hot Air Balloon)



Scrbblly.

Trying to get full marks on your creative writing question? This document will help you get there! If you're not fully confident with what you need to do for the creative writing, have a look at some of our lower level example answers first, before moving on to this one.

This is a descriptive writing piece that was written in response to a question for GCSE English Language - the question was 'Write a description suggested by this photograph' (photo below). It's written by a teacher as an example of how to achieve high grades in the exam - the main focus is on deep themes and ideas, as well as very clear and varied structural and language choices. The plan and piece were written in timed conditions, but further notes were added at a later date to help show the planning process in more detail (e.g. writing out the anecdotes and literary references).

THE QUESTION

Write a description suggested
by this photograph:



PERSONAL IDEAS:

- **Themes: Man + Nature, The Sublime, Beauty, Spirituality**
- **Personal experience - visiting an old church in Italy, listening to chants**
- **Personal experience - Buddhist meditation**
- **Personal experience - hiking up mountains in Snowdonia and the Peak District**

***Note:** Think of the themes that personally interest you. For the themes, try to have your own opinions and specific thoughts on them, that you try to communicate in the creative writing - it makes your writing deeper and more focused.*

Also, use anecdotes (personal stories and experiences from your own life) that help you to expand on the image that you've been given.

LITERARY REFERENCES:

- **Icarus**
- **Isabella Bird / Travel Writing**
- **Moby Dick / Herman Melville**
- **Northern Lights / Philip Pullman**
- **Kingdom of The Golden Dragon / Isabelle Allende**

***Note:** It's good to consider a range of literary references when writing your own piece. Think of books you've read, stories you know about and also think of films or TV shows that have interesting and relevant stories.*

PLAN:

1. **Weightlessness, sensation**
2. **Everything looks beautiful from far away - nature**
3. **Mountain**
4. **Temple**
5. **Ceremony**

***Note:** this plan is structured using a "Funnel shape": which is one of the best ways to organise a descriptive piece (starting from a tiny detail and zooming out to a whole picture, or starting from a whole scene and zooming into a tiny detail).*

THE ANSWER

There's something so perfect about air. It's invisible, yet it's everywhere. A great gust of wind in your face can blow away cobwebs from even the darkest of days, while a gentle breeze reminds you of beach holidays, placid lakes, or summer evenings spent reading in dimly lit parks with tufts of grass rippling softly all around.

That's why I've always been drawn to balloons. Not the rubbery, garish monstrosities you find lurking ominously in the corners of children's birthday parties... nor the floaty red orbs full of helium that you inhale to make your voice squeak. No, I like hot air balloons.

It's the lofty weightlessness that gets me every time: looking up and seeing nothing between yourself and the perfect, shimmering azure edge of the atmosphere - there's nothing quite like it in the world. I marvel at the feats of mankind: give us an oversized wicker basket, a rough cut square of canvas, a few sturdy ropes, a gas burner and lo - defying gravity, we float, we soar, we fly.

My balloon even has a name. We call her 'Zephyr'. She's named after the West Wind, the one that's always blowing me eastward and often off course when I ascend to high altitudes. Gentle, but temperamental; just like the balloon herself.

Today, our destination is a mountain in the Himalayas. All mountains are breathtakingly beautiful, especially when viewed at a parallel; when you face them from the correct height, as an equal, they pop up like giant, jagged chunks of turkish delight dusted with the finest quality icing powder, disrupting the infinite flat blue of the skyline with their erratic irregularity.

But it's not just any old mountain that we're headed for; this one is special. It's one of the most ancient (and concurrently one of the most mystical) mountains in the world. A few puffs of flame from the gas burner, a fortuitous shift in the winds, we turn an invisible corner and we're there. The mountain looms majestically before us: ancient, nameless, eternal. Surrounded by wisps of translucent grey clouds that float passively on the breeze, it sits there brooding as if in a state of deep meditation. Topped with a dusting of snow, the rock beneath gives the impression of being paler than the surrounding peaks, making it seem a little wan at times, a little melancholy. We approach cautiously, turning the gas burner as low as possible, with the deepest respect for its meditative state, as if the slightest noise could disrupt its slumber.

At the foot of the mountain is our true port of call: a buddhist temple. For six months a year, this monastery is isolated from the rest of the world by a thick blanket of snow that shrouds it in peace and frosted silence. From time to time, they run low on supplies. That's where Zephyr and I come in. Carved out of the rock, it looks itself like a forgotten outcrop, speckled with holes for windows and sporting golden peaks of its own which serve as roofs. As the sun mellows and sinks behind the mountain, dusk descends upon the temple, the last rays of light catching the parapets and making them shine. Rich glows emanate from inside - flickers of candlelight - and we get close enough at last to hear the dim hum of evening prayers.

The shape and elevation of the temple windows makes them resemble tiny little megaphones, ergonomically designed to amplify the sounds emanating from within. Bells and voices blend into a single, pure tone that shimmers as it ricochets off the mountains in the valley, until the whole world seems to shimmer along with it... perfectly in tune to the same singular vibration, if only for a moment. The sound is so sacred and rarefied that we daren't move forward: instead, we find ourselves hovering in silence, listening, waiting for it to end.

MARK SCHEME:

24/24 Content • Communication is convincing and compelling • Tone, style and register are assuredly matched to purpose and audience • Extensive and ambitious vocabulary with sustained crafting of linguistic devices Organisation • Varied and inventive use of structural features • Writing is compelling, incorporating a range of convincing and complex ideas • Fluently linked paragraphs with seamlessly integrated discourse markers

16/16 technical accuracy • Sentence demarcation is consistently secure and consistently accurate • Wide range of punctuation is used with a high level of accuracy • Uses a full range of appropriate sentence forms for effect • Uses Standard English consistently and appropriately with secure control of complex grammatical structures • High level of accuracy in spelling, including ambitious vocabulary • Extensive and ambitious use of vocabulary

TASK: Plan your own response to this question, using the advice given in the planning section above. Try to use a range of literary and personal references.

Then, write your answer - if you are new to descriptive writing, take your time and write slowly. If you have tried a few creative writing responses before, then try writing the piece in timed conditions (aim for around 50 minutes in total, including planning, writing and editing).



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