



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS  
General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**1115/02, 1120/02  
1123/02**

Paper 2 Comprehension

**May/June 2009**

INSERT

**1 hour 30 minutes**

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This insert contains the passage for comprehension.

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This document consists of **3** printed pages and **1** blank page.



## A Frightening Experience

- 1 'Would you believe that giant snakes live underground, and that it is their movements which create earthquakes? Maybe you wouldn't, but your ancestors did. Ancient peoples had many fanciful explanations for earthquakes, usually involving something large living beneath the earth's surface.' The geography teacher's voice droned on as Reena, distracted, looked longingly out of the classroom window, thinking of the long holiday stretching before her and the luxury of no school for several weeks. 'By the seventeenth century, descriptions of the effects of earthquakes were being published around the world, although these early accounts often exaggerated or distorted the damage done by earthquakes.' The teacher pursued the topic relentlessly, while Reena impatiently watched the second hand on the clock tick-tock its way towards the final bell of the school day. 5 10
- 2 She dawdled home from school. 'What kept you, Reena?' her mother asked angrily. 'I have to go shopping and need you to keep an eye on your brothers. I'll take the baby with me.' Then, to Reena's annoyance, her mother left without a word of gratitude. Reena surprised herself by managing to complete her homework, a short worksheet on earthquakes. Her brothers had a tendency to bicker and argue, particularly when their mother was out; it would have been too much to expect this day to be any different. That night Reena went to bed and fell asleep in a state of extreme irritability. 15
- 3 She drifted into consciousness with the gradual realisation that the house seemed to be swaying from side to side. Dismissing this as the last remnant of a dream she had been having, she lay for a few seconds in the half-light of dawn. But the sound of the dishes rattling loudly in the kitchen made her sit bolt upright in bed. What was her mother doing in the kitchen so early in the morning? And why was she making so much noise? Suddenly, the framed photograph of her family, taken at a cousin's wedding, tumbled from its hook on the bedroom wall; her mother's smiling expression, captured in a moment that day by the photographer, seemed somewhat inappropriate at this time. The house started to shake violently, so that Reena had to hold onto the sides of the bed to prevent herself from falling out. She was so scared she could not summon the energy even to yell for her parents. 20 25
- 4 Now the sound of broken crockery was reverberating through the house, as cups, plates and glasses crashed to the kitchen floor, shattering into hundreds of miniscule fragments. Reena looked on in horror as the chest of drawers in her bedroom started to move inch by inch across the floor, as if the furniture had been willed into life, or as if she were witnessing some bizarre magic trick. She put her head under the pillow, willing these strange events to be really no more than a nightmare. But no, now her bed was shifting a foot across the floor, as if anxious to catch up with the chest of drawers. This was no dream – this was terrifying reality. 30
- 5 At this point, her mother appeared in the doorway, clutching her baby sister. Reena realised that her mother was leaning on the door frame to steady herself against the movement of the floor. 'Quickly, Reena!' she said. 'Get downstairs into the yard!' Her feigned calmness did little to disguise her obvious sense of impending danger. Reena followed her mother, not a moment too soon. The house began to rock even more violently, and the wall near which Reena's mother had so recently stood collapsed, burying the bedroom's runaway furniture under a mountain of broken concrete. Reena had been trying to delude herself that what was happening was a series of strange coincidences but, as she choked under a huge volume of dust, she realised that this was the earthquake of her geography lessons. 35 40

- 6 Reena's father had already brought her two brothers out into the yard, and the re-united family members embraced each other gratefully. But there was work to be done, and Reena's father was already turning his attention to looking after his family. He organised a makeshift fireplace in the yard by digging a hole in the dirt and placing bricks around it, putting a piece of tin over the bricks to act as a stove top. He broke what branches he could from the tree in the yard; soon a pile of firewood had accumulated. Meanwhile, Reena's mother, concerned particularly about keeping the baby warm, was gathering sacks that were lying around the yard, in order to make a kind of tent; some shelter, however primitive, would be needed if the family had to spend the following night outside, which seemed increasingly likely. By now, every door of every house as far as the eye could see was spewing out a stream of human beings. 45
- 7 Reena's father risked making several trips back into the stricken house, emerging triumphantly each time with foodstuffs and utensils from the kitchen, while Reena and her brothers held their breath in anxiety, lest another tremor might cause their father to become trapped inside. Only the baby was unconcerned; she crawled around the yard, gurgling with happiness, delighted at the novelty of having all her family in such proximity. By now a long queue of neighbours was starting to wind around the block to fetch water from the pump at the end of their street. Reena and her brothers were sent with small containers to join the queue and bring back enough water to fill the large barrel in the yard. When this time-consuming task had been completed, the scorching sun was already shimmering blood-red through the shroud of dust enveloping the village, and the baby slept in the shade their mother had created for her by propping a sheet of cardboard on piles of concrete. What stamina her mother was demonstrating throughout this ordeal, thought Reena. But when, in the afternoon, Reena's grandparents arrived on foot carrying a supply of blankets from their own damaged home, her mother finally broke down in tears as she hugged her parents. 'Your clever grandfather even remembered to salvage a box of candles and matches before we left,' laughed Reena's grandmother. 'But I'm sure we'll all be back home in a day or two.' 50 55 60 65
- 8 However, her optimism was misplaced. No sooner had Reena's grandmother's words been uttered than a loud explosion could be heard as a gas pipe, fractured by one of the earthquake's tremors, ignited. A thick cloud of smoke rose above Reena's street, further proof of this new danger. Throughout that night, the roaring of leaping flames could be heard for miles around. Reena spent a sleepless night, frantic with worry, in the family's makeshift accommodation in the yard. Would there be further tremors? The wailing of ambulance and fire-engine sirens would at other times have sent shivers of apprehension down her spine; tonight, however, there was a kind of comfort in them. 70 75
- 9 The next morning, when Reena and her father went out to collect more water, they had their first sight of the structural damage caused by the fire. A three-storey building was ablaze; some residents sat on the pavement nearby, dazed at the displacement of all that was familiar in their lives, as flames continued to creep up the staircase. A few paltry bags of rescued possessions by their side gave pathetic witness to the fact that many of them had risked their lives by returning to their burning homes. Others were being urged by relatives to evacuate the area; the building was clearly unstable and they were in grave danger. But rumours of potential looting were circulating and they refused to move. 80 85
- 10 It was to be over a week before Reena's family returned to their home, and much, much longer before they recovered from the havoc created by the earthquake. Reena went back to school more willing to listen to her teachers, particularly in geography lessons showing the contrast between the power of nature and the frailty of Man.

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