

Cambridge Lower Secondary Checkpoint

ENGLISH

1111/02

Paper 2 Fiction

October 2021

INSERT

1 hour 10 minutes

INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading passage.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.



This document has **4** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

Text for Section A, an extract from 'Little Liar' by Julia Gray

Nora is a young, teenage girl who has been sent to stay with a family friend who runs a special guesthouse in a remote part of Scotland.

At present, I am staying with my Aunt Petra, who is not my aunt at all, but a lifelong friend of mother's. The name 'Petra', means *rock*, but there is nothing rocklike about my non-aunt, who is as curved and soft as candyfloss. She runs a guesthouse here, in the Scottish Highlands, with her husband Bill. People come to relax, and meditate and heal. They walk beside the lochs* that lie on either side of the peninsula; they learn about Thai food and how to build walls. I've been here a fortnight or so. There are six other guests, and mostly we keep ourselves to ourselves. Two people are doing a silent retreat, which makes for minimal interaction. Another guest, with whom I'm now on quite friendly terms, is recuperating after an accident. The rest are yoga devotees.

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It's July, not that you can tell; every day dawns uniformly grey, and the rain cycles from a spatter to a thundery relentlessness. When the sun does come out, it does so apologetically, like a ballerina who is unsure of her entrance on stage. I do not mind the weather. The climate suits me.

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Aunt Petra is keen for me to take part in classes and workshops: T'ai Chi, for example, or Spiritual Healing (this one, she feels, might be especially appropriate). Each morning, over porridge resembling wet sand in colour and texture, she tries to sign me up. Each morning, I decline. I came to Scotland for peace and silence, not to participate in her Organised Wellness. However, I do quite often agree to take her dog, Oscar, for a walk. As long as it isn't raining too hard, Oscar and I wander through fields thick with stubby nettles, beating pathways down to the loch; or else we follow one of the narrow tracks that crisscross through woodland to the top of the peninsula, passing isolated farms and small rivers, until we reach one of the nearby villages. And then it begins to rain harder, and we wait for a bus to take us back.

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This morning, I made an announcement. I don't know who was more surprised, Aunt Petra or me.

'I'm going to write,' I said.

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Aunt Petra paused at the breadboard. 'To . . . to what, love? To light?'

'Write,' I said.

'Poems? Fairy tales?'

'Something like that.'

She couldn't have been more pleased. Before I knew it, Bill was bringing in an old sewing table with a missing foot, like a lame calf, and setting up a computer with a yellowed keyboard and arthritic mouse.

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'What about your wounded arm?' Petra said, looking down at the bandage that hid the savage purple scar on which all her lotions and potions had had little effect. I said I'd go slowly, which was very much my intention, and see how it felt.

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So here I am, with time, as well as potions, on my hands.

I have never tried to write anything before. I'm more of a reader; I don't like to commit myself to the page. I'd rather judge others for what they have chosen to commit. There's a daunting finality to writing. Even though I am working on a computer, and hardly carving quill-ink letters onto leathery parchment, even though I can delete and redo to my heart's content, the words still glower darkly from the screen. *We are finished articles*, they say. *We are evidence. We can be used against you.* In their straight-line sentences, they form a solemn procession, like ants plodding towards a cliff edge.

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Because this is no fairy tale.

It is almost, for want of a better word, a confession. I'd say 'memoir', only that conjures something more grown-up than this, something less messy. I quite like the word *chronicle*. What I mean to set out is a series of events at which I was present.

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I want to explain what I did, and with whom. And where, and when and why. What happened, and what happened next. The Chronicles of Nora, if you like.

And it will be a true story.

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What will become quickly apparent is that I have not always told the truth before. To put it another way: I have told a number of lies. Some of them have been small, and some of them have been significant.

I am growing familiar with these ancient keys, and it is appropriate that they are keys, I keep thinking, because something is being unlocked. And although sometimes I think this will drive me mad – the endless, oppressive silence, the rain, the view of the loch through my window – a small part of me knows that what will really drive me mad is if I let this go unwritten.

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