



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2026

English - Ordinary Level - Paper 1

Total Marks: 200

Wednesday, June 3 – Morning, 9.30 – 12.20

- This paper is divided into two sections, Section I COMPREHENDING and Section II COMPOSING.
- The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of **CHILDHOOD**.
- Candidates should familiarise themselves with each of the texts before beginning their answers.
- Both sections of this paper (COMPREHENDING and COMPOSING) must be attempted.
- Each section carries 100 marks.

SECTION I – COMPREHENDING

- Two Questions, A and B, follow each text.
- Candidates must answer a Question A on one text and a Question B on a different text. Candidates must answer only one Question A and only one Question B.
- **N.B.** Candidates may NOT answer a Question A and a Question B on the same text.

SECTION II – COMPOSING

- Candidates must write on **one** of the compositions 1 – 7.

Do not hand this up.

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TEXT 1 – SCHOOL DAYS

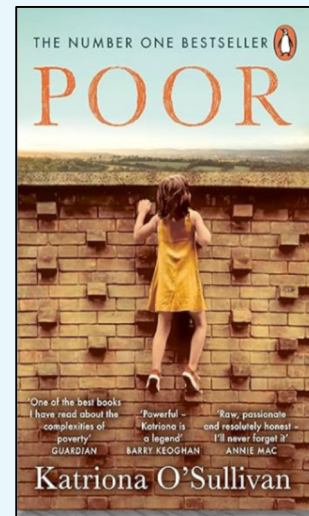
TEXT 1 is an adapted extract from the award-winning memoir, “Poor” by Katriona O’Sullivan. In it the author documents her struggles from early childhood, living in a chaotic home in England. In this extract she returns to primary school after the summer, while her brother, Matthew, begins his first day at school.

1. I don’t remember my own first day of school at all. I just remember my brother Matthew’s. Nursery and Reception are the first two classes for children starting school in the UK. I was a year ahead of Matthew but in our school, the classes were all together in one large open-plan room, which meant we would share the same teacher. By the time we got up the school steps on his first day, Matthew had started screaming.

“Stop it, Matthew,” my mum said and looked over at me. What was I supposed to do? Why was I always dragged into this? All I wanted was to be here at school with my lovely teacher, Mrs Arkinson. I wished that my mum would just go and take Matthew with her. School was my place.

2. One of the teachers’ assistants, Miss Hall, walked over and took my brother by his two arms, pulling his hands off my mum and signalling her to leave. My mum ran out of there. Matthew lost his mind. He kicked the table and the chair, and the assistant teachers ran in circles after him as he slid and burrowed between other pupils in a bid to escape. Other children started crying too.

3. Then my teacher, Mrs Arkinson, came through the door. She stood for a moment taking in the screaming hissing mess that was my brother. She raised her finger and with a firm “Ah-ah!” she stopped him in his tracks. She looked at him and she shook her head. “There will be NO running in my classroom,” she said. “Sit down.” And he did. Although he still cried the whole day, face down into his arm at his desk. He hated being away from my mum.



4. I didn’t understand that at all and, frankly, I was raging. I was so happy to be going back to school after the summer. I liked the way things were set out there, always the same. And we got fed, with school dinners. If it wasn’t for school, I wouldn’t have had a dinner, if I’m honest. Sometimes I would be given breakfast by Mrs Arkinson, if I was in the class early enough, before the others came in. Mrs Arkinson had a blue-and-orange metal cupboard and sometimes she would bring out a a bun or a fairy cake to get me through to lunch.

5. By the time I heard the shutters of the canteen going up, I’d lose concentration for whatever I was doing and instead focus on the delicious smells that wafted down from where the dinner ladies were setting up. The queue in the canteen never moved fast enough for me. My mouth would water in advance as I moved up the queue. The clank of knives and forks, the little cartons of milk, the good food. I would hear the call of “Custahhd! Custahhd!” from the dinner lady, a huge Cypriot woman. I would sit down at the plastic picnic-style tables – always the same one, across from two boys, both called Adam – and eat my food contentedly.

The routines of school, the desk where I knew to sit, the timetable, my school dinners – that was what I needed.

6. I liked school. There was a place for me there. My name was on a list. Mrs Arkinson always checked if I was there and would tick my name. “An Irish girl in my class, what a treat,” she said when I first started. “I’m Irish too,” she added. If I had that in common with Mrs Arkinson, it must be a treasure for sure. “Now,” she said, “I’m glad you’re in my class, one of my own.”

7. I’m sure she made connections with all the children; she had a knack. I loved Mrs Arkinson and I knew she loved me. Her eyes said so. The way she helped me said so. The pat on my head, the hand on my shoulder, the encouragement and rewards. When Mrs Arkinson was pleased with you, well, you felt like you could survive forever on that small nod or pat on the head. It was like she pushed confidence into you.

N.B. Answer ONLY ONE Question A and ONLY ONE Question B.

Question A – 50 Marks

- (i) What impression do you form of Mrs Arkinson from reading the above extract? Make three points in your response. Support your answer with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) Good writing often consists of creating a sense of place and atmosphere. How well do you think Katriona O’Sullivan achieves this? Give reasons for your answer. Support your answer with reference to the text. (15)
- (iii) (a) In childhood we often meet interesting people or experience new events for the first time. Describe a moment from your childhood when you either met an interesting person **or** experienced a new event for the first time. Explain what your feelings were at the time. (10)
- (b) “The routines of school, the desk where I knew to sit, the timetable, my school dinners – that was what I needed.” Explain what you think Katriona O’Sullivan means by this. (10)

Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

Question B – 50 Marks

You are in your final year of second-level school, and have been asked to give a talk, on an open day, to incoming first year students about moving from primary to second-level school. Write the text of the **talk** you would deliver. In your talk you should: introduce yourself and greet the new students, putting them at their ease, reflect on your own first days or weeks in the school, and offer them some helpful advice on how to adjust to the change. Your talk may be serious or humorous or a mixture of both.

TEXT 2 – PLAY CENTRE

TEXT 2 is based on the short story, *Fair Play*, from award-winning writer Jan Carson's collection, *Quickly, While They Still Have Horses*. In this extract, things begin to go terribly wrong for Andrew when he takes his two sons, Angus and Conor, to Bouncy Bob's, a play centre for children.

1. There's a queue to get into Bouncy Bob's. Andrew shepherds his boys to the back. He carries Angus. At home they called Angus "Usain Bolt." Since the second he started walking, the child's been constantly on the move. He's at it now. "Down Papa. Down. Gus want down now." Shauna, his wife, would've known to bring the buggy. She uses the buggy as a restraining device. The buggy's not here, and neither is Shauna. She's at the hairdresser with her mum. It is, as she informed Andrew earlier, his *bloody turn to occupy the weans**. Shauna's sounding more and more like her mother these days. Andrew's working up to saying something; waiting until she's in a decent mood. The words annoy him. *Grand*, which is now her answer to everything. *Wee*, for little. *Wee* this. *Wee* that. When Shauna says *wee love, wee shoes, wee cup of tea*, it makes Andrew want to scream.

2. Eventually - just as Andrew is tottering on the edge of a meltdown – they're ushered through the electric doors, past the sanitising station and the counter where Andrew's forced to leave his nice shoes on a shelf, into the cavernous bowels of Bouncy Bob's. The noise is deafening. Andrew feels a migraine coming on. He finds a grubby-looking table between the trampolines and zip-line. He gets out the Dettol wipes and gives the table a good cleaning. The boys are itching to be off. "Don't go too far," says Andrew. "I'll stay where I can keep an eye on you. Conor, look after your brother. Don't let him go on anything too high." They're off before he can finish. Like rockets. Like bullets fired from a gun.

*Children



3. He sits back in his pinchy plastic chair, and allows himself to relax. *Maybe, this won't be too bad after all*. The boys can entertain themselves and he has *The Guardian* newspaper on his phone. Andrew takes out his phone. He's about to check his texts when a polo-shirted staff member descends upon him with intent. "No photos," he shouts. "There's signs so there is." He gestures wildly at the walls. Andrew looks around. There are indeed signs, printed on standard issue green paper in blocky type. *No phones. No running. No shoes. No smoking. No alcohol. No animals. No fighting. Please remove your child from the play area if they vomit, soil themselves or incur an open wound*.

4. "Are you here by yourself?" asks the man in the green polo. Andrew notes his accusatory tone. "No," says Andrew. "I'm here with my sons." He holds Conor's hoodie up as an alibi. "They were here just a second ago." He looks around. He can't see either of them anywhere. Bouncy Bob's is a blur of primary colours and sweaty noise. "They were just here," he repeats. He's not yet panicking, but there's a tightness in his throat.

5. Andrew does his best not to look harried. He walks slowly, sedately across the floor. Son Number One, Conor, is in the ball pit, being consoled by a teenage employee. His eyes are vampire red from crying. The snot is streaming out of his nose. When he spots Andrew, his volume level cranks up a notch. He half wades, half swims through the balls to meet his father by the exit hatch. "Papa," he howls, "the big boys took my socks and *she*," he hisses, pointing at the teenager in the luminous green shirt, "says I have to get out if I don't have socks on."

6. "Where's Angus?" he asks. Angus is, in fact, standing at the mouth of the giant

tube slide. Andrew has not thought to look this high. There are at least fifty steps to the top of the slide. He hadn't thought Angus capable. But, three different strangers have now approached him, all saying roughly the same thing. "Here, Mister. Are you looking for a wee fella in a yellow t-shirt? He's up the top of the big slide." Before Andrew can make a start on the steps, Angus hollers, "Three, two, one, blast off." Arms extended, Superman style, he launches himself into the slide's plastic mouth. Andrew's wondering how he'll explain this to Shauna. She'll never let him out again unsupervised.

N.B. Answer ONLY ONE Question A and ONLY ONE Question B.

Question A – 50 Marks

- (i) What impression do you form of Andrew from reading the above extract? Make three points in your response. Support your answer with reference to the text. (15)
- (ii) Good writing often consists of creating a sense of place and atmosphere. How well do you think Jan Carson achieves this? Give reasons for your answer. Support your answer with reference to the text. (15)
- (iii) (a) In childhood we often meet interesting people or experience new events for the first time. Describe a moment from your childhood when you either met an interesting person **or** experienced a new event for the first time. Explain what your feelings were at the time. (10)
- (b) "Shauna, his wife, would've known to bring the buggy. She uses the buggy as a restraining device." Explain what you think Jan Carson is saying in this line. (10)

Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

Question B – 50 Marks

You are chairperson of the local community council. The council is launching a project to create, 'A *Playground for the Future*' that will entertain and inspire local children. You have decided to seek funds from local businesses for this project. Write the **email** you would send to local businesses. In your email you should: describe some of the interesting equipment and activities you would like to put in the playground, explain the benefits you believe it will bring to the community, and outline why you feel each business will benefit from donating money towards this project.

TEXT 3 – ADVICE AND IMAGES ABOUT RAISING CHILDREN

This text is based on advice found in books about raising children. The first part of the list is taken from nineteenth-century books, and the second, from twenty-first century books. The advice is in bold, with a comment below it. The second part of TEXT 2 is a collection of photographs capturing various aspects of childhood.

Nineteenth-century books

1. **Spare the rod and spoil the child.** Physical punishment was seen as a necessary tool to instill obedience and good character.
2. **Children should be seen and not heard.** It was important for children to be quiet in the presence of adults.
3. **Parents should maintain emotional distance from their children.** This was especially true of wealthy families who had servants to raise their children.
4. **Do not praise children excessively.** It was thought this would lead to arrogance and a lack of humility.
5. **Avoid showing anger in front of children.** It was believed that children were born with souls of innocence and peace, and this innocence should be preserved.



Image A

Twenty-first century books

6. **Acknowledge and validate your child's emotions.** Don't dismiss your child's emotions, even if they seem minor to you.
7. **Discipline with empathy.** The goal of discipline is to teach, not to punish.
8. **Encourage independence.** Allow your children to do things for themselves, even if it results in mistakes or takes longer.
9. **Teach children to talk about their feelings.** Provide them with the vocabulary and space to express emotions.
10. **Protect your child's connection to you.** Maintain a strong bond with your child, as this is the most important relationship for their development.



Image B



Image C



Image D

N.B. Answer ONLY ONE Question A and ONLY ONE Question B.

Question A – 50 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of the above written list, what **two** pieces of advice do you consider most valuable? Explain why you consider them to be the most valuable. What **one** piece of advice do you consider to be the least valuable? Explain why you consider it the least valuable. (15)
- (ii) The theme of this examination paper is 'Childhood'. Based on what you see in the visual images in TEXT 3 above, which **two** images do you think show the most important aspects of childhood? In both cases, describe what you see and explain the reasons for your choice. (15)
- (iii) (a) In childhood we often meet interesting people or experience new events for the first time. Describe a moment from your childhood when you either met an interesting person **or** experienced a new event for the first time. Explain what your feelings were at the time. (10)
- (b) You have been asked to add **two** new pictures to the collection of photographs in TEXT 3, showing what you believe are other important aspects of childhood. In both cases, outline what the pictures would show and explain why you would add these photographs to the collection. (10)

Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

Question B – 50 Marks

Write a short **dialogue** between a parent and a child where a heated discussion occurs. The two characters have differing views concerning the child's use of his or her phone and social media. In your dialogue you should: outline the different views of each character, reach a high level of emotion in the argument, and find a compromise that both characters agree on in the end.

Write a composition on **any one** of the following composition assignments in **bold print** below.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. One piece of advice given in TEXT 3 is to 'encourage independence' in children.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on how important independence is to you in your life.

2. One piece of advice in TEXT 3 suggests that children should not be praised excessively because it could lead to arrogance.

Write a short story, where a character's arrogance leads to disastrous consequences.

3. In TEXT 2, Andrew faces some of the challenges involved in bringing up children.

Write a speech for or against the motion that: 'All those planning to become parents should be required to do an intensive training course beforehand.'

4. The views in TEXT 3 are supposed to represent good advice.

Write an opinion piece for a newspaper, in which you advise readers about how to be a valuable and involved citizen in today's world.

5. TEXT 2 is set in *Bouncy Bob's*, a children's play centre.

Write a short story, set in a children's playcentre, where a mystery is solved by a gang of curious toddlers.

6. TEXT 1 is set in Katriona O'Sullivan's primary school.

Write an article for a magazine in which you discuss some aspects that would, in your view, create 'The Ideal School'. Your article can be serious or humorous or both.

7. In TEXT 2, the teenage employees at *Bouncy Bob's* appear to have difficult jobs.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on some of the worst jobs (paid or unpaid) that you have ever had to carry out.

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Acknowledgements

TEXT 1: O’Sullivan, Katriona. *Poor*. Penguin. London. 2023

Image: <https://theoxfordwriter.com/poor-by-katriona-osullivan/>

TEXT 2: Carson, Jan. ‘Fair Play’. *Quickly, While They Still Have Horses*. Transworld Publishers Ltd. London. 2024

Image: <https://blog.dubraybooks.ie/2024/03/20/quickly-while-they-still-have-horses-by-jan-carson/>

TEXT 3: *The Rearing and Management of Children*. Cassell’s Household Guide; Frost, G. S. *Victorian Childhoods*. Praeger UK; <https://www.mimimatthews.com>. *The Victorian Baby: 19th Century Advice on Motherhood and Maternity*; Siegel, D. & Payne Bryson, T. *The Whole-Brain Child; No-Drama Discipline*. Robinson; Lythcott-Haims, J. *How to Raise an Adult*. Henry Hold &Co.; Gottman, J & De Claire J. *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. Prentice Hall; Neufeld, G. & Maté, G. *Hold on To Your Kids*. Penguin

Images: https://www.freepik.com/premium-ai-image/children-playing-water-mud-generative-ai_53277660.htm;

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/parenting/much-tv-ok-child-watch-day/>; <https://schooluniforms4less.com>;

<https://akashik.net/age-when-kids-should-begin-to-play-sports.html>

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Leaving Certificate – Ordinary Level

English

Wednesday 3 June

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