

X270/10/01

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2012

WEDNESDAY, 16 MAY
9.00 AM – 10.00 AM

ENGLISH
INTERMEDIATE 1
Close Reading

Answer all questions.

30 marks are allocated to this paper.

Read the passage carefully and then answer **all** the questions, **using your own words where asked to do so**.

The questions will ask you to show that:

you understand **what** the writer has said (main ideas and supporting details) (**Understanding—U**);

you can identify **how** the writer has said it (techniques of structure and style) (**Analysis—A**);

you can comment on **how well** the writer has achieved his/her purpose (using appropriate evidence) (**Evaluation—E**).

A code letter (U, A, E) is used alongside each question to identify its purpose for you.



SKIRL POWER

In this article, the writer tells us that the skirl, or sound, of the pipes is being heard again – and not only in Scotland.

Tucked away close to London Bridge, the Mudlark Pub might normally take a while to find. Tonight, however, you could locate it blindfold. Upstairs, as out of place as a troupe of Oxfordshire morris dancers round the back of Glasgow Central Station, five pipers are playing their hearts out. Even with the windows closed the decibel levels are substantial. They are Manawatu, a Scottish pipe band from New Zealand, whose unison playing is so precise that it sounds like a single instrument. Towards the end they march downstairs into the street where they do a moonlit lap of honour, watched by a slightly bemused-looking crowd.

The Great Highland Bagpipe is an instrument that inspires almost fanatical levels of passion, despite the fact that most players don't even make a living from it. But it is a passion I want to share. And I'm not alone. Piping is on the up. In Scotland, new pipe bands are springing up, and even in London a growing demand has meant that organised classes for adults have started, apparently for the first time since the 1930s. Run by the Scottish Piping Society of London, they cost around £10 for two hours – probably the best-value music tuition in the capital.

Some students have Scottish roots. Others, like me, simply like the idea of a challenge. A competent violinist and pianist and basic recorder player, I've even dabbled in the ukulele. 'So why not tackle the bagpipes?' I think, as I eye a YouTube performance by the Red Hot Chilli Pipers, the closest thing the piping world has to pin-ups. They have teamed the bagpipe with electric guitars and keyboard, punching out dazzling arrangements of rock anthems, attracting new audiences and players in the process.

Adam Sanderson, the vice-president of the society, is swift to reduce my ambitions to more modest levels. "We get lots of calls from men who say, 'I had a Scottish father and I want to learn the bagpipes in two weeks so I can play at my daughter's wedding,'" he says.

But nothing about the bagpipe is easy. The hand position is deceptively like the recorder yet, as Sanderson says, "halfway between and upside down", and the tuning is based on an ancient scale. Most woodwind instruments have a single or double reed. The bagpipe has four. Moisture can flatten the sound; warmth raise it. Simply achieving accurate tuning can be a minor miracle. Then there's the chanter.

With just nine basic notes, pipers use nifty fingerwork that gives the illusion of playing more notes than are actually possible. Modern technology makes life easier. Synthetic reeds keep their pitch for longer. Pipe bags now come with a Gore-Tex lining. And for the "wet" player there are moisture-control systems – boxes filled with absorbent cat litter.

To find out more about what's involved, I go to the Pipe Band World Championships in Glasgow, where judges take just a day to work their way through more than 200 bands from as far away as Australia and Pakistan. It can seem like an inward-facing event. Literally so. As the bands play the marches, reels and strathspeys known as Ceòl Beag, or light music, they turn away from the audience, watching each other so they don't drop a note.

“It gets under your skin,” says Alan McGeachie, who plays the pipes and is a drummer with the Strathclyde Police Pipe Band, 12 times winners in the world championships. “It’s in your blood. If you decide to leave, you think: ‘Thank God I’m away from it’,
45 and suddenly it grabs you. It’ll be with you to your last day.”

Which is why, early one morning, I am in a rugby clubhouse in South London to get a preview lesson with Alasdair Smith, one of the instructors of the London piping classes. I’ve attempted to get to grips with the fingering, using a practice chanter to honking effect. Then I get to try out a full set of pipes – something that, in reality, no beginner
50 would attempt for months. I blow into the bag like a breathalyser. Instead of there being constant pressure to force the air into the drones and chanter, seamlessly topping up the reservoir of air as I go, the bagpipe “sirens” horribly. Only by blocking two of the three drones do I get near a continuous note.

Then Smith plays a piece from the bagpipe’s classical repertoire, developing into increasingly complex variations. Even to my ears, it’s light years away from my enamel-stripping efforts. Piping can become an all-consuming obsession, he says. “I wouldn’t want to sell it to anyone. It is enormously difficult and it’s a long journey, a striving for perfection. When you’re well tuned and well set up, it’s uniquely captivating. That’s what pipers are striving for.” Unfortunately for my neighbours, I’m beginning to have
60 an inkling of what he means.

Charlotte Phillips, in *The Times*

QUESTIONS

Marks Code

1. The writer tells us that the Mudlark Pub “might normally take a while to find” (lines 1–2).
Explain **as far as possible in your own words** why this is the case. 1 U
2. Why is it appropriate for the writer to use “however” in line 2? 2 A
3. How effective do you find the comparison “as out of place as a troupe of Oxfordshire morris dancers round the back of Glasgow Central Station” (lines 2–3)? 2 E
4. Explain **in your own words** what is meant by “the decibel levels are substantial” (lines 4–5). 2 U
5. Why does the writer find it surprising that “The Great Highland Bagpipe is an instrument that inspires almost fanatical levels of passion” (lines 9–10)?
Explain as far as possible **in your own words**. 1 U
6. Explain **in your own words two** pieces of evidence the writer gives to support her claim that “Piping is on the up” (line 11). 2 U/A
7. **Using your own words as far as possible**, give **two** reasons why the writer thought she might “tackle the bagpipes” (line 18). 2 U

QUESTIONS

Marks Code

8. What does the writer suggest about the group the Red Hot Chilli Pipers by comparing them to “pin-ups” (line 19)? 1 U
9. Explain why any example of the writer’s **word choice** in the sentence in lines 19–21 effectively conveys how impressive the band are. 2 A
10. The writer says “reduce my ambitions to more modest levels” (lines 22–23). Explain **in your own words** what this means. 2 U
11. Explain why the sentence “But nothing about the bagpipe is easy” (line 26) works well at this point in the passage. 2 A
12. Explain why the writer uses inverted commas round “wet” (line 34). 1 A
13. Why does the writer include the expression “or light music” (line 40)? 1 U/A
14. The player Alan McGeachie says that pipe music “gets under your skin” and is “in your blood” (lines 42–44). Explain how **one** expression later in the paragraph shows what he means. 2 A
15. Look at lines 48–52. Explain how any expression from these lines shows that the writer is not impressed by the **sounds** she makes. 2 A
16. Explain how effective you find any part of the expression “light years away from my enamel-stripping efforts” (lines 55–56) in illustrating the difference between Alasdair Smith’s playing and the writer’s. 2 E
17. Explain why it is unfortunate for her neighbours that the writer is beginning to see what Smith means (see lines 59–60). 1 U
18. Think about the passage as a whole. Why might “Skirl Power” be considered an appropriate title for this article? 2 E

Total (30)

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

[Open out for Questions]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Text—Article is adapted from “Skirl Power” by Charlotte Phillips, taken from *The Times*, 29th August 2008. © The Times August 2008.