

# X115/301

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NATIONAL  
QUALIFICATIONS  
2007

FRIDAY, 11 MAY  
9.00 AM – 10.30 AM

ENGLISH  
HIGHER  
Close Reading—Text

**There are TWO passages and questions.**

Read the passages carefully and then answer all the questions, which are printed in a separate booklet.

You should read the passages to:

understand what the writers are saying about the proposal to put online the contents of some major libraries (**Understanding—U**);

analyse their choices of language, imagery and structures to recognise how they convey their points of view and contribute to the impact of the passage (**Analysis—A**);

evaluate how effectively they have achieved their purpose (**Evaluation—E**).



## PASSAGE 1

*In the first passage George Kerevan, writing in The Scotsman newspaper in December 2003, responds to the prospect of an “online library”.*

### DESPITE GOOGLE, WE STILL NEED GOOD LIBRARIES

The internet search engine Google, with whom I spend more time than with my loved ones, is planning to put the contents of the world’s greatest university libraries online, including the Bodleian in Oxford and those of Harvard and Stanford in America. Part of me is ecstatic at the thought of all that information at my fingertips; another part of me is nostalgic, because I think physical libraries, book-lined and cathedral-quiet, are a cherished part of civilisation we lose at our cultural peril.

My love affair with libraries started early, in the Drumchapel housing scheme in the Fifties. For the 60,000 exiles packed off from slum housing to the city’s outer fringe, Glasgow Council neglected the shops and amenities but somehow remembered to put in a public library—actually, a wooden shed. That library was split into two—an adult section and a children’s section. This was an early taste of forbidden fruit. Much useful human reproductive knowledge was gained from certain books examined surreptitiously in the adult biology section.

At university, I discovered the wonder of the library as a physical space. Glasgow University has a skyscraper library, built around a vast atrium stretching up through the various floors. Each floor was devoted to a different subject classification. Working away on the economics floor, I could see other students above or below—chatting, flirting, doodling, panicking—all cocooned in their own separate worlds of knowledge. Intrigued, I soon took to exploring what was on these other planets: science, architecture, even a whole floor of novels. The unique aspect of a physical library is that you can discover knowledge by accident. There are things you know you don’t know, but there are also things you never imagined you did not know.

There is a stock response to my love affair with libraries: that I am being too nostalgic. That the multi-tasking, MTV generation can access information from a computer, get cheap books from the supermarket and still chatter to each other at a thousand decibels. Who needs old-fashioned library buildings? And why should councils subsidise what Google will provide for free?

There is some proof for this line of argument. The number of people in Scotland using their local public library falls every year, with just under a quarter of Scots now borrowing books (admittedly, that was 34 million books). As a result, local authorities have reduced their funding for new books by 30 per cent. Of course, fewer new books mean fewer library users, so guaranteeing the downward spiral.

It may well be that public demand and technical change mean we no longer need the dense neighbourhood network of local libraries of yore. But our culture, local and universal, does demand strategically situated libraries where one can find the material that is too expensive for the ordinary person to buy, or too complex to find online. Such facilities are worth funding publicly because the return in informed citizenship and civic pride is far in excess of the money spent.

Libraries also have that undervalued resource—the trained librarian. The ultimate Achilles’ heel of the internet is that it presents every page of information as being

equally valid, which is of course nonsense. The internet is cluttered with false information, or just plain junk. The library, with its collection honed and developed  
45 by experts, is a guarantee of the quality and veracity of the information contained therein, something that Google can never provide.

Libraries have another function still, which the internet cannot fulfil. Libraries, like museums, are custodians of knowledge—and should be funded as such. It has become the fashion in recent decades to turn our great national libraries and  
50 museums into entertainment centres, with audio-visuals, interactive displays and gimmicks. While I have some enthusiasm for popularising esoteric knowledge, it cannot always be reduced to the level of a child’s view of the universe. We have a duty to future generations to invest in the custodians of our culture, in particular its literature and manuscripts.

55 Of course, I can’t wait for Google to get online with the Bodleian Library’s one million books. Yet here’s one other thing I learned from a physical library space: the daunting scale of human knowledge and our inability to truly comprehend even a fraction of it. On arriving at Glasgow University library, I did a quick calculation of how many economics books there were on the shelves and realised that I could  
60 not read them all. Ever. From which realisation comes the beginning of wisdom—and that is very different from merely imbibing information.

## PASSAGE 2

*In the second passage Ben Macintyre, writing in The Times newspaper, also in December 2003, responds to the same news, and considers the future of the “traditional library”.*

### PARADISE IS PAPER, PARCHMENT AND DUST

I have a halcyon library memory. I am sitting under a cherry tree in the tiny central courtyard of the Cambridge University Library, a book in one hand and an almond slice in the other. On the grass beside me is an incredibly pretty girl. We are surrounded by eight million books. Behind the walls on every side of the  
5 courtyard, the books stretch away in compact ranks hundreds of yards deep, the shelves extending at the rate of two miles a year. There are books beneath us in the subterranean stacks, and they reach into the sky; we are entombed in words, an unimaginable volume of collected knowledge in cold storage, quiet and vast and waiting.

10 Perhaps that was the moment I fell in love with libraries.

Or perhaps it was earlier, growing up in Scotland, when the mobile library would lurch up the road with stocks of Enid Blyton for the kids and supplies of bodice-rippers on the top shelf with saucy covers, to be giggled over when the driver-librarian was having his cup of tea.

15 Or perhaps the moment came earlier yet, when my father took me deep into the Bodleian in Oxford and I inhaled, for the first time, that intoxicating mixture of paper, parchment and dust.

I have spent a substantial portion of my life since in libraries, and I still enter them with a mixture of excitement and awe. I am not alone in this. Veneration for  
20 libraries is as old as writing itself, for a library is more to our culture than a

collection of books: it is a temple, a symbol of power, the hushed core of civilisation, the citadel of memory, with its own mystique, social and sensual as well as intellectual.

25 But now a revolution, widely compared to the invention of printing itself, is taking place among the book shelves, and the library will never be the same again. This week Google announced plans to digitise fifteen million books from five great libraries, including the Bodleian.

30 Some fear that this total library, vast and invisible, could finally destroy traditional libraries, which will become mere warehouses for the physical objects, empty of people and life. However, the advantages of a single scholarly online catalogue are incalculable and rather than destroying libraries, the internet will protect the written word as never before, and render knowledge genuinely democratic. Fanatics always attack the libraries first, dictators seek to control the literature, elites hoard the knowledge that is power. Shi Huangdi, the Chinese emperor of the 3rd century BC,  
35 ordered that all literature, history and philosophy written before the founding of his dynasty should be destroyed. More books were burnt in the 20th century than any other—in Nazi Germany, Bosnia and Afghanistan. With the online library, the books will finally be safe, and the bibliophobes will have been beaten, for ever.

40 But will we bother to browse the shelves when we can merely summon up any book in the world with the push of a button? Are the days of the library as a social organism over? Almost certainly not, for reasons psychological and, ultimately, spiritual. Locating a book online is one thing, reading it is quite another, for there is no aesthetic substitute for the physical object; the computer revolution rolls on inexorably, but the world is reading more paper books than ever.

45 And the traditional library will also survive, because a library is central to our understanding of what it is to be human. Libraries are not just for reading in, but for sociable thinking, exploring and exchanging ideas. They were never silent. Technology will not change that, for even in the starchiest heyday of Victorian self-improvement, libraries were intended to be meeting places of the mind, recreational  
50 as well as educational. The Openshaw branch of the Manchester public library was built complete with a billiard room. Of course just as bookshops have become trendy, offering brain food and cappuccinos, so libraries, under financial and cultural pressure, will have to evolve by more actively welcoming people in to wander and explore . . . and fall in love.

55 Bookish types have always feared change and technology, but the book, and the library, have adapted and endured, retaining their essential magic. Even Hollywood understood. In the 1957 film *Desk Set*, Katherine Hepburn plays a librarian-researcher whose job is threatened by a computer expert (Spencer Tracy) introducing new technology. In the end, the computer turns out to be an asset, not a  
60 danger, Tracy and Hepburn end up smooching, and everyone reads happily ever after.

The marriage of Google and the Bodleian will surely be the same.

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