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NATIONAL  
QUALIFICATIONS  
2015

FRIDAY, 15 MAY  
9.00 AM – 10.45 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 James Bond (**Understanding—U**);

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

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



PASSAGE 1

Writing for the American website Counter-Currents, Jef Costello discusses the cultural importance of the fictional British spy hero James Bond, who was created by the novelist Ian Fleming in 1953 and has been the subject of many films since 1962.

**THE STUFF OF MODERN MYTH**

There really is something important about James Bond—very important. James Bond is a hero for the modern age, a claim which has often been made. But I mean it in a special sense: Bond is a hero in spite of modernity, an anti-modern hero who manages to triumph over—and, indeed, harness—the very forces that turn most modern men  
5 into soulless appendages to their desktop computers. In this modern world we are all functionaries and office flunkies. This is why Bond is important, and this is why we’ve worshipped at the cinematic altar of Bond for half a century. We long to be as unfettered as he is.

Day after day, we grow more and more anxious about the extent to which work encroaches  
10 on our lives, and a huge part of this problem has to do with our much ballyhooed advances in technology. Technology has always been a big part of the James Bond films. There are gadgets galore in the Bond films; they seem to celebrate technology. But things are much more complicated than they seem.

If we pay careful attention to the Bond films, we realise that Bond’s attitude towards  
15 technology is disdainful. It is clear that he regards the real business of spying as a matter of physical stamina and mental agility. He is contemptuous of the idea that what he does could be done better by—or even with—machines. Again and again when the time finally comes for Bond to save the day, he does so with his own wits and guts. In other words, the films wind up siding with Bond and declaring that technology is not the  
20 answer, often concluding with Bond taking delight in destroying the villains’ hardware.

The classic Bond villains tend to set themselves up with ultra-modern lairs filled with impressive technological marvels, and all of it constructed out of miles and miles of gleaming stainless steel. By contrast, Bond’s own environment—M’s office, Whitehall, and Bond’s apartment—is ultra-traditional. The contrast could not be clearer. The  
25 good dwell in small, warm, and human spaces surrounded by organic materials and decorations chosen for their charm, or because they suggest national heritage. The evil, by contrast, dwell in huge, cold, intimidating, depersonalised spaces made of metal, stripped of anything charming and anything that suggests national identity—or cluttered with objects suggesting a confusion of national identities. And here the space  
30 is inhabited by emotionless human automata, who often refer to each other only as numbers.

Unlike his enemies, Bond is very much a patriot who sees himself as serving Queen and Country. Much has been made of the fact that Bond is a kind of wish fulfilment for the post-imperial British. He came along at a time when British power and prestige were on  
35 the wane. But Bond allows the British to pretend that they are still a world power, and that it’s up to them to come riding to the rescue with Bond as a latter day Sir Lancelot fighting against evil incarnate.

That the Bond stories are “modern myths” has often been asserted, and there’s quite a bit to this. The Bond books and films have become twentieth-century folk epics. They are the same basic stories that have been passed down through the centuries but with the hero and the villain adapted to our technological age. No longer is it the Devil’s power that people fear but the new demons of machinery and atomic power. The evil vampire has exchanged his castle for the villainous Dr. No’s subterranean laboratory, his fangs for Dr. No’s steel claws, and his unholy source of power for Dr. No’s atomic reactor. In the same vein, Bond’s gadgets are simply modernised versions of things like magic swords and spears, helmets of invisibility, and indestructible shields.

All the traditional mythic elements are present in Bond. So how exactly do the Bond myths make clear the difference between good and evil? Well, Bond may not be an idealist, but he certainly is a moralist. I have always been convinced that one of the reasons liberal critics tend to hate Bond is that, unlike them, he is not morally confused. Bond has no compunction at all about passing moral judgements.

Bond electrocutes people, harpoons them, strangles them, feeds them to piranha fish, dumps them into pits of boiling mud, explodes them with shark gun pellets, drops them off cliffs, throws them from airplanes, sets them on fire, and sometimes just shoots them. He doesn’t agonise over it later. He doesn’t wonder if he did the right thing. No, one of the things that characterises Bond is moral certainty. He knows who the bad guys are, and he knows they deserve it. Bond relies entirely on his own judgement, and is sure of his moral authority to punish evildoers.

Myths such as James Bond make clear the difference between good and evil. They show us eternal truth shining through; they erect archetypes of heroism and virtue; they give us something to aspire to. Audiences respond to Bond so strongly because he provides a kind of spiritual fuel. Bond is indeed the stuff of modern myth.

## PASSAGE 2

*Writing in The Times newspaper in November 2012, shortly after the release of the Bond film Skyfall, Ben Macintyre discusses what James Bond represents today.*

### TOTAL CERTAINTY IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

Right, pay attention, 007. After 50 years and 23 films, your franchise has achieved mission impossible. You have single-handedly made Britain feel good about growing old and answered the question first posed by Ian Fleming in 1953: how do you maintain British pride in a declining British empire?

“Where are we going?” asks M in *Skyfall*, the most recent Bond film. “We’re going back to the past,” James Bond replies. “Somewhere where we have the advantage.” *Skyfall* is about the past and its relationship with the present. It is about ageing robustly, as characters and as a country. It is about patriotism without cloying nostalgia; about acknowledging the past without being trapped by it; about getting the job done with grit and wit.

*Skyfall* is the perfect testament to Britain’s new-found confidence in 2012, a fitting coda to the Queen’s Jubilee and the London Olympics, when the country took a long, hard look at itself and was quite pleased, in an understated, self-mocking, wry sort of way,

with what it saw. The film's motif is a kitsch figurine of a flag-wearing British bulldog  
15 on M's desk, cracked and battered, but glued together and still whole. Daniel Craig's  
Bond is comfortable in his own scarred skin like no 007 before him. His stubble is  
greying. He can't shoot straight, but he knows what to do, because "sometimes the  
old-fashioned ways are still the best". With Bond tied to a chair, the villain cackles:  
20 "Britain, the Empire, MI6, you're living in a ruin and you just don't know it yet." But  
he is wrong. This Bond knows perfectly well that he is not in his prime, that Britain is  
vulnerable, but 007 is still striving.

Bond was Fleming's answer to a country in imperial decline, a nation that had emerged  
from the Second World War victorious, but limping badly. Like many others in the  
early 1950s, Fleming was appalled by the legacy of war: the rationing, the slump in  
25 self-esteem, the withering of imperial self-assurance in the dreary, dowdy age of  
austerity.

Yet as an officer in naval intelligence, Fleming knew that British spy-craft and  
technological wizardry had been vital to victory; in the spy game, America had played  
second fiddle. But Britain's importance was fast disappearing when Fleming sat down  
30 to write *Casino Royale*. He created Bond as a counterweight to national insecurity, a  
character with the innate moral rectitude of the Second World War, but now fighting  
murkier, more ambiguous battles. In Bond's world, Britain still calls the shots; the  
Americans need Bond; the world needs Britain to save the world, as Britain had done  
during the war.

35 This was fantasy—inspired and enduring, but fantasy nonetheless—and increasingly  
divorced from reality as the Bond series progressed. The British Secret Service was  
revealed to be riddled with traitors. Far from relying on them, the CIA came to regard  
their British counterparts with mounting suspicion.

Fleming (and Bond) strove to ignore Britain's declining power. Britain may have been  
40 gripped by post-war anxiety, the old certainties may have crumbled, but no ambivalence  
was allowed to seep into either Fleming's novels or the films: the film Bond is immune  
to doubt, his legend burnished in each new incarnation, with faster cars, better tailoring,  
improved violence, more girls, more martinis. In Britain, the films allowed the post-war  
generation to wallow in nostalgia, that most British of afflictions, recalling a time when  
45 Britain was great (or believed it was).

The film Bond displays total certainty in an uncertain world. For most of his film  
incarnation, however, Bond is actually straining to keep up the act, just as Britain has  
struggled to find a comfortable role in the post-war world.

But in *Skyfall*, Bond is Britain—not a mythical, made-up Britain inflated to bolster its  
50 historical self-image and impress foreigners, but a real Britain that has finally come to  
terms with what it is: proud, but not to the point of arrogance; stylish still, but a bit  
knackered.

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