

X270/12/11

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2013

MONDAY, 20 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 shopping (**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 in *The Times newspaper*, Carol Midgley considers the attraction of shopping and the power of “consumerism”.

ADDICTED TO SHOPPING

This is a story about modern consumerism; it is being written inside a mall. From my vantage point on a wooden bench purposely designed to be uncomfortable and placed alongside a digital screen pulsing ever-changing adverts selling other outlets, other products, other ways here to spend, spend, spend, I can watch shoals of people
5 hurrying in and out of stores honouring the creed of the turbo-consumer: live to shop.

A young woman rushes by at a semi-trot. On her shoulder is an eco tote-bag bearing the slogan “All You Need is Love”. But she evidently doesn’t subscribe to this ideology; she is laden with branded carrier bags. What she really needs, it seems, are more shoes, skirts, scarves, belts. How often do you go clothes shopping, I ask when
10 I catch her up. “Most lunch breaks and every weekend ideally,” she says. Why? She eyes me dubiously: “Because I love it.”

How did we get here? How did we get to a point where shopping became the premier leisure activity, where we gladly boarded the work-to-spend treadmill, the insatiable pursuit of “more”, which resulted in there being, for example, 121 mobile phones for
15 every 100 people in the UK? Does it even matter? Shopping doesn’t kill anyone, it keeps the economy going and provides one in six jobs. If it makes people happy, why not leave them to it?

Well, that’s just it. Turbo-consumerism—the age of instant gratification and voracious appetite for “stuff”—cannot make us happy and it never will. Every time
20 we are seduced into buying one product, another appears that is “new”, “improved”, better than the one you have. Turbo-consumerism is the heroin of human happiness, reliant on the fact that our needs are never satisfied. A consumer society can’t allow us to stop shopping and be content because then the whole system would die. Instead it has to sell us just enough to keep us going but never enough that our wants are
25 satisfied. The brief high we feel is compensation for not having a richer, fuller life.

For years, shops, retail centres, giant malls have been taking over public spaces worldwide, creating a mainstream monoculture. The pedestrianisation of city centres, though largely regarded as pro-citizen, is in fact primarily to maximise “footfall” and shoppers’ “grazing time”. This retail creep has ensured that increasingly there’s
30 not much else to do but shop. The more we consume, the less space there is to be anything other than consumers. The space to be citizens and make decisions equally and collectively about the world around us is diminished. It may be a free country, but we simply have the freedom to shop. Kings as consumers, pawns as citizens.

Am I over-catastrophising the consumer phenomenon? In the Liverpool One
35 shopping “experience”, where I am sitting, a place teeming with shoppers despite the credit crunch, and punctuated by *Massive Reductions!* signs, people don’t look particularly disempowered or depressed. Purposeful, I suppose, but also strangely distracted, as if they do not notice the environment around them, merely the magnetic shop signs. I understand the siren call of TK Maxx and how a £3 top can mend a bad
40 day. But the question is, why does it?

We can answer this question from the basis of evolutionary psychology. The human body is a practical tool for reproduction and survival, but it is also the advertising and packaging for our genes and our “fitness indicators”. When a modern woman buys a new dress or a man a Rolex watch, they are really self-marketing, saying: “Look at me, I’m attractive, successful, fertile, healthy—mate with me.” It isn’t that we are materialistic; in a marketing-dominated culture we just don’t know any other way to do it.

But here’s the thing: much of this is simply not true. In reality, consumerism is a poor means of self-advertising because the vast majority of people don’t notice or care what you are wearing. The fundamental consumerist delusion is that branded goods are the most effective way of signalling to others our “fitness”. But even in a turbo-consumer world it’s a fallacy that we care more about the artificial products displayed by people than their conversation, their wit, or their affection. Yet when mineral water advertised with a photo of a nearly nude Jennifer Aniston sells for 870 times the price of tap water, then marketing dominates life on Earth. Marketers understand that they are selling the sizzle not the steak.

Back at the mall, I speak to two young shoppers staggering under the weight of their carrier bags. Will they go home now and put their feet up? “No, we’re taking these bags home in a taxi,” says one. “Then we’re coming back to do another hour before the shops close.”

PASSAGE 2

Writing in The Guardian newspaper, Will Hutton considers the same topic from a different point of view.

THE GENIUS OF SHOPPING

My two daughters have been addicted to shopping for years. From big city luxurious shopping mall to idiosyncratic old clothes shop, they fall upon it greedily. Sometimes they strike gold; but, even if they come away empty-handed, the experience of just sizing up and calibrating what’s on offer seems reason enough to have invested an irrational number of hours.

They are fully paid-up members of the allegedly futile and empty materialist culture: rootless, obsessive shoppers for whom filling up their shopping bags is a substitute for politics, community participation, family or faith. Critics of this culture indulge in a collective mass tut-tutting: shopping and everything that goes with it are apparently symbolic of what is wrong with the modern age. Serious shoppers are “slaves to the market”, enemies of collective action, whose individualistic appetite is helping to homogenise our high streets while destroying our moral wellbeing.

Critics also deplore the outcome—industrialised shopping malls, mass advertising, the manipulation of desire by producers and retailers—as if the consumers at the other end of all this effort were just brainwashed dolts colluding unwittingly in the destruction of their spiritual life and the interpersonal relationships which are central to their happiness. Shopping on this scale and with this degree of commitment, critics believe, is a form of psychosis.

There is a partial truth in this condemnation, but it too quickly casts the individual shopper as an empty vessel morally corroded by the dark forces of anonymous markets. Critics of shopping are so busy delivering their views that they rarely have the time to surrender to savouring that moment when they might unexpectedly enhance their lives by finding another diverting item on which to spend money—in short, by shopping.

25 My experience of shopping in Hong Kong recently has made me realise that shopping
is enormous fun and profoundly satisfying. I'd dashed in to buy cheap gifts for my
family and had intended to spend no more than 30 minutes. Instead, I found myself
drawn into the heady delights of shopping. Choosing between a cornucopia of famous
watch brands, not one of which costs more than £4, is an experience I defy anybody not
30 to enjoy. And on top of that, you can pick and mix every detail: case, colour, buckle,
strap. I was shopping as my daughters shop—giving myself over to the minutiae of the
experience.

On three floors almost every shop you pass excites another taste or way you might
express yourself. Binoculars and telescopes; pocket DVD players; walking sticks; silk
wall hangings; leather belts; mirrors; porcelain figurines—it was endless. The bargain
35 prices were an invitation to the recognition that individuals have an infinity of wants,
some of which we don't even know about or have forgotten; I fell upon the binoculars
with all the delight of a child. Much of the pleasure is not even the buying; it is acquiring
the knowledge of the immense range of goods that exist that might satiate your possible
wants. Shopping, as my daughters tell me, is life-affirming.

40 I would even extend the argument to the shopping mall—the quintessential expression
of the alleged degradation of shopping. Hong Kong proclaims itself the shopping
capital of the world; its malls are marble-floored temples to consumption that make
their British counterparts look tawdry. But instead of recoiling from the excess, I found
it attractive. The effort made to present the goods well is an act of creativity in its own
45 right. The collective impact throbs with vitality.

To condemn shopping as somehow degrading to those who take it seriously as a cultural
expression of themselves is to obscure an important dimension of our lives. True
happiness may be about the quality of our interpersonal relationships and wanting to
belong to a just society; but it is also about the opportunity to express how we want to
50 live through what we buy. The genius of shopping is that it offers ordinary people the
chance both to generate and to satisfy their multiple wants—as well as propelling our
economy. Instead of the denigration of shopping culture it is time to recognise that the
millions who love it are not stupid, being manipulated or slaves to the market—they are
doing something important.

[END OF TEXT]

[OPEN OUT]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Passage 1—Article is adapted from “*Buying stuff is the ‘heroin of human happiness’*” by Carol Midgley, taken from *The Times*, 22 July 2009. Permission is being sought from News Corp UK & Ireland Ltd.

Passage 2—Article is adapted from “*Shopping and tut-tutting*” by Will Hutton from *The Guardian*, 4 September 2005. © Guardian News and Media Ltd 2005.