AQA

GCSE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 21st Century prose-fiction

Labyrinth by Kate Mosse

An extract from a novel written in 2005.

Please turn the page over to see the source

Source A

Alice, a university student, has volunteered to help on an archaeological dig looking for any evidence of the past. She is in the Pyrenees Mountains in France during her summer holidays.

Alice unscrews the top of her water bottle. It's warm, but she's too thirsty to care and drinks it down in great gulps. Below, the heat haze shimmers above the dented tarmac of the road. Above her, the sky is an endless blue. The cicadas* keep up their unrelenting chorus, hidden in the shade of the dry grass.

It's her first time in the Pyrenees, although she feels very much at home. She's been told that in the winter the jagged peaks of the mountains are covered with snow. In the spring, delicate flowers of pink and mauve and white peep out from their hiding places in the great expanses of rock. In early summer, the pastures are green and speckled with yellow buttercups. But now, the sun has flattened the land into submission, turning the greens to brown. It is a beautiful place, she thinks, yet somehow an inhospitable one. It's a place of secrets, one that has seen too much and concealed too much to be at peace with itself.

In the main camp on the lower slopes, Alice can see her colleagues standing under the big canvas awning. She can just pick out Shelagh in her trademark black outfit. She's surprised they've stopped already. It's early in the day to be taking a break, but then the whole team is a bit demoralised.

It's painstaking and monotonous work for the most part, the digging and scraping, the cataloguing and recording, and so far they've turned up little of significance to justify their efforts. They've come across a few fragments of medieval pots and bowls, and a couple of late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century arrowheads, but certainly no evidence of the Stone Age village which is the focus of the excavation.

Alice is tempted to go down and join her friends and colleagues. Her calves are already aching from squatting. The muscles in her shoulders are tense. But she knows that if she stops now, she'll lose her momentum.

Hopefully, her luck's about to change. Earlier, she'd noticed something glinting beneath a large boulder, propped against the side of the mountain, neat and tidy, almost as if it had been placed there by a giant hand. Although she can't make out what the object is, even how big it is, she's been digging all morning and she doesn't think it will be much longer before she can reach it.

She knows she should fetch someone. Or at least tell Shelagh, her best friend, who is the deputy on the dig. Alice is not a trained archaeologist, just a volunteer spending some of her summer holiday doing something worthwhile. But it's her last full day on site and she wants to prove herself. If she goes back down to the main camp now and admits she's on to something, everybody will want to be involved, and it will no longer be her discovery.

In the days and weeks to come, Alice will look back to this moment. She will remember the quality of the light, the dust in her mouth, and wonder at how different things might have been had she made the choice to go and not stay. If she had played by the rules.

She drains the last drop of water from the bottle and tosses it into her rucksack. For the next hour or so, as the sun climbs higher in the sky and the temperature rises, Alice carries on working. The only sounds are the scrape of metal on rock, the whine of insects and the occasional buzz of a light aircraft in the distance.

* cicadas – small winged insects which make a clicking song-like noise

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