

YEAR 4 ENGLISH PLACEMENT EXAM SPECIMEN

There are TWO sections. Answer the question in Section A and ONE question from Section B.

The following passage is from *Kiss the Dust* by Elizabeth Laid

The events in this extract take place after Tara and her family have left her home town of Sulaimaniya in Iraqi Kurdistan in the spring of 1984. Her father was being persecuted by the secret police and the family are forced to hide with relatives in a village in the Zagros Mountains.

Up until this point, Tara had felt secure, but then their village is targeted. At the first sign of danger, Tara and her mother, Teriska Khan, and her little sister, Hero, head for the caves, along with all the other villagers seeking refuge, among them an older woman called Baji Rezan.

IN THE MOUNTAINS

Tara could hardly take in the awful things everyone was talking about. The numbers of dead and the names of villages blown to pieces somehow didn't mean anything. It was like listening to the radio or watching the news on TV. It all seemed to be happening to other people, a long way away. And it was hard to believe that they were in immediate danger when things seemed so normal, and everyone was busy with their ordinary springtime work.

Perhaps that was why, when the bombers came, she was taken completely by surprise. It was late in the afternoon. The sun was already going down behind the mountains. Where it still shone, it made all the colours look brilliant and intense, but the shadows were getting longer so fast you could almost see them moving. Tara had gone up to the spring for a pot of water, and she was coming down the hill on her way home again when she heard the roar of aircraft. She looked up. There were four of them, wicked black darts shooting across the golden sky. They were flying so low they had to gain height to skim over the tops of the hills. They were already out of sight when Tara heard two distant thuds that echoed from hillside to hillside. She looked across the valley. A spurt of smoke with an orange flame in the middle was shooting up from a village on the other side.

Tara didn't hang around to see if the bombers had found their target. She ran down the hillside, water from her full pot spilling down her dress. Teriska Khan was already at the gate of the courtyard looking out for her, holding Hero by the hand.

'Quick!' she said. 'We've got to get to the cave!'

'But they've gone,' said Tara, putting her pot down.

'They'll be back,' said Teriska Khan over her shoulder. 'Follow me!' and she started running down the track that led around the shoulder of the hill to a small cave, which went back quite a long way into the rock.

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They were only half way there when the roar came again. This time the planes weren't little black arrows on the far side of the valley but thundering, screaming pieces of machinery, hurling directly overhead, and the falling bombs didn't land with a distant crump, but with shattering explosions that filled the air with suffocating smoke and deadly flying debris.

It was over so quickly that Tara hardly knew what had happened. When the first explosion came she felt something hit her on the back of the head. She was knocked over, and must have blacked out for a moment or two, but she opened her eyes almost at once, and tried to struggle back onto her feet. She could only just manage to sit up. Her legs seemed to have turned to water. People were rushing past her shouting to each other, pushing and shoving to get to the cave. Behind her, from the smoking village, she could hear injured people screaming. Daya and Hero had raced on. They were out of sight already. She had to follow them! She tried to stand up again, but she felt all muzzy and confused. Her legs just didn't seem to be working, and for a moment she thought she was going to faint.

Then she felt someone grabbing her arm and hauling her to her feet.

'Come on, love,' said a rasping voice. It was Baji Rezan.

'It's - it's my head. I can't walk,' whispered Tara.

Baji Rezan put her arm round her and half carried, half dragged her down the path. But they'd only managed to stagger a few yards when the terrifying roar came again. A single plane had got behind the main squadron. It skimmed over the nearest hilltop. The stream of people trying to run away were cruelly lit up by the very last rays of the sun. The pilot saw his chance and veered a little to drop his deadly load right on top of them. The plane was going so fast that most of the bombs went wide, but one landed a bit further down the path in front of Tara and Baji Rezan. All of a sudden there was nothing but a mass of dust and smoke hanging over the road where only a few seconds before there'd been a dozen or more people.

Tara shut her eyes and fell against Baji Rezan, who practically lifted her up. But a minute or two later, Baji Rezan skidded on the path. Tara looked down. What she saw made her stomach heave and she was nearly sick. The ground was spattered with blood. She'd nearly tripped over something. She forced herself to look at it once, quickly, then she turned her eyes away.

Tara felt everything start to go black again.

SECTION A

How does the writer use language to create a sense of danger in the passage?

(50 marks)

SECTION B

Choose one of the following and write about 400 – 500 words.

1. Write about a time you felt very lonely.
2. Write a letter of complaint to your local mayor about problems in your area/neighbourhood.
3. Write a narrative entitled 'The New Student'
4. Write a speech about the importance of helping in your community.

(50 marks)