

# AQA GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1: Explorations in creative reading and writing

**SET D**

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## Insert

The source that follows is:

Source A: 20th Century prose-fiction

*Two Old Women: An Alaskan Legend Of Betrayal, Courage And Survival* by Velma Wallis

An extract from the novel published in 1993.

**Source A**

Source A is taken from a novel by Velma Wallis. It is set in Alaska during a particularly cold winter. The story is based on a Native American legend.

In this particular band<sup>1</sup> were two old women cared for by The People<sup>2</sup> for many years. The older woman's name was Ch'idzigyaak, for she reminded her parents of a chickadee bird when she was born. The other woman's name was Sa', meaning "star," because at the time of her birth her mother had been looking at the fall night sky, concentrating on the distant stars to take her mind away from the painful labour contractions.

The chief would instruct the younger men to set up shelters for these two old women each time the band arrived at a new campsite, and to provide them with wood and water. The younger women pulled the two elder women's possessions from one camp to the next and, in turn, the old women tanned<sup>3</sup> animal skins for those who helped them. The arrangement worked well.

However, the two old women shared a character flaw unusual for people of those times. Constantly they complained of aches and pains, and they carried walking sticks to attest to their handicaps. Surprisingly, the others seemed not to mind, despite having been taught from the days of their childhood that weakness was not tolerated among the inhabitants of this harsh motherland. Yet, no one reprimanded the two women, and they continued to travel with the stronger ones – until one fateful day.

On that day, something more than the cold hung in the air as The People gathered around their few flickering fires and listened to the chief. He was a man who stood almost a head taller than the other men. From within the folds of his parka ruff he spoke about the cold, hard days they were to expect and of what each would have to contribute if they were to survive the winter.

Then, in a loud, clear voice he made a sudden announcement: "The council and I have arrived at a decision." The chief paused as if to find the strength to voice his next words. "We are going to have to leave the old ones behind."

His eyes quickly scanned the crowd for reactions. But the hunger and cold had taken their toll, and The People did not seem to be shocked. Many expected this to happen, and some thought it for the best. In those days, leaving the old behind in times of starvation was not an unknown act, although in this band it was happening for the first time. The starkness of the primitive land seemed to demand it, as the people, to survive, were forced to imitate some of the ways of the animals. Like the younger, more able wolves who shun the old leader of the pack, these people would leave the old behind so that they could move faster without the extra burden.

<sup>1</sup> A travelling Native American tribe

<sup>2</sup> Fellow tribespeople

<sup>3</sup> Convert into leather

40 The older woman, Ch'idzigyaak, had a daughter and a grandson among the group. The chief looked into the crowd for them and saw that they, too, had shown no reaction. Greatly relieved that the unpleasant announcement had been made without incident, the chief instructed everyone to pack immediately. Meanwhile, this brave man who was their leader could not bring himself to look at the two old women, for he did not feel so strong now.

45 The chief understood why The People who cared for the old women did not raise objections. In these hard times, many of the men became frustrated and were angered easily, and one wrong thing said or done could cause an uproar and make matters worse. So it was that the weak and beaten members of the tribe kept what dismay they felt to themselves, for they knew that the cold could bring on a wave of panic followed by cruelty and brutality among people fighting for survival.

50 In the many years the women had been with the band, the chief had come to feel affection for them. Now, he wanted to be away as quickly as possible so that the two old women could not look at him and make him feel worse than he had ever felt in his life.

55 The two women sat old and small before the campfire with their chins held up proudly, disguising their shock. In their younger days they had seen very old people left behind, but they never expected such a fate.

**END OF SOURCE**



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