

GCSE 2020  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE,  
PRACTICE READING TASK A



# INTRODUCTION TASK A

## Practice reading tasks for English Language GCSE 2020

To prepare for the reading element of your GCSE English Language examinations, we have set out two reading tasks – Task A and Task B. When you have practised both you will have covered the major demands of your 2020 GCSE reading assessment, whichever examination board you are entered for in England.

These demands are that during your GCSE, you have the opportunity:

- to read and respond to nineteenth century, twentieth century and twenty-first century texts which are either fiction or non-fiction;
- to compare two of those texts;
- to respond to all four reading assessment objectives

## Practice reading Task A

This reading task consists of four questions based on an extract from a nineteenth century American novel, *Little Women*.

You will have 45 minutes to read the text and answer the four questions. The questions cover three of the four reading Assessment Objectives (AO) which will be included in your 2020 GCSE English Language examination. These Assessment Objectives are listed below.

- AO1**
- Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas
  - Select and synthesise evidence from different texts
- AO2** Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views
- AO4** Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references

## How to do your best on reading questions

After each question, you will find set out the AO which the question covers.

If you compare the wording of each of the questions with the wording of the AO below it, you will notice key words in the question are the same as the wording of the particular AO. Learn to recognise the link.

In your GCSE the question paper will not identify the particular AO but the wording of the question will help you to understand how you are expected to respond to the question. As you consider the question, highlight the key words and refer to them as you write your answer. This will help you to stay focused on meeting the requirements of the question.

Another important point to remember is that each question will indicate how many marks it is worth. So make sure you spend a proportionate amount of time on the questions worth higher marks. For example question 1 is worth 1 mark and question 4 is worth 15 marks.

When you have attempted each of the four questions, compare your response with the mark scheme. Tick where you have responded correctly in your answer.

Consider the mark scheme and identify where you have missed key points. Decide what you could have done to improve your mark.

You will note questions worth more marks have mark schemes divided into levels. Look at the words used in each level. These words describe to the examiner how to classify performance. They also tell you how to improve your performance to get a higher mark.

Finally, remember when you have revised Task A and Task B, you will have covered 50% of your English Language GCSE examination. Time spent preparing now, will mean you understand exactly what is expected of you in your GCSE and so you will be prepared to do your very best in the reading assessments.

## TASK A - STIMULUS

**Read the text below and answer Questions 1–4 on the question paper.**

In this extract Jo March attempts to cook for her sisters, friend of the family Miss Crocker and next door neighbour Laurie.

### **Little Women: Louisa May Alcott**

Having rekindled the fire, she thought she would go to market while the water heated. The walk revived her spirits, and flattering herself that she had made good bargains, she trudged home again, after buying a very young lobster, some very old asparagus, and two boxes of acid strawberries. By the time she got cleared up, the dinner arrived and the stove was red-hot. Hannah had left a pan of bread to rise, Meg had worked it up early, set it on the hearth for a second rising, and forgotten it. Meg was entertaining Sallie Gardiner in the parlor, when the door flew open and a floury, crocky<sup>1</sup>, flushed, and dishevelled figure appeared, demanding tartly...

“I say, isn’t bread risen enough when it runs over the pans?”...

...Language cannot describe the anxieties, experiences, and exertions which Jo underwent that morning, and the dinner she served up became a standing joke. Fearing to ask any more advice, she did her best alone, and discovered that something more than energy and good will is necessary to make a cook. She boiled the asparagus for an hour and was grieved to find the heads cooked off and the stalks harder than ever. The bread burned black; for the salad dressing so aggravated her that she could not make it fit to eat. The lobster was a scarlet mystery to her, but she hammered and poked till it was unshelled and its meager proportions concealed in a grove of lettuce leaves. The potatoes had to be hurried, not to keep the asparagus waiting, and were not done at the last. The blancmange was lumpy, and the strawberries not as ripe as they looked, having been skilfully ‘deaconed’<sup>2</sup>.

“Well, they can eat beef and bread and butter, if they are hungry, only it’s mortifying to have to spend your whole morning for nothing,” thought Jo, as she rang the bell half an hour later than usual, and stood, hot, tired, and dispirited, surveying the feast spread before Laurie,

accustomed to all sorts of elegance, and Miss Crocker, whose tattling tongue would report them far and wide.

Poor Jo would gladly have gone under the table, as one thing after another was tasted and left, while Amy giggled, Meg looked distressed, Miss Crocker pursed her lips<sup>3</sup>, and Laurie talked and laughed with all his might to give a cheerful tone to the festive scene. Jo's one strong point was the fruit, for she had sugared it well, and had a pitcher of rich cream to eat with it. Her hot cheeks cooled a trifle, and she drew a long breath as the pretty glass plates went round, and everyone looked graciously at the little rosy islands floating in a sea of cream. Miss Crocker tasted first, made a wry face, and drank some water hastily. Jo, who refused, thinking there might not be enough, for they dwindled sadly after the picking over, glanced at Laurie, but he was eating away manfully, though there was a slight pucker about his mouth and he kept his eye fixed on his plate. Amy, who was fond of delicate fare, took a heaping spoonful, choked, hid her face in her napkin, and left the table precipitately<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> dirty

<sup>2</sup> hidden at the bottom so the imperfect fruit cannot be seen

<sup>3</sup> to pucker the lips to show distaste

<sup>4</sup> quickly

"Oh, what is it?" exclaimed Jo, trembling.

"Salt instead of sugar, and the cream is sour," replied Meg with a tragic gesture. Jo uttered a groan and fell back in her chair, remembering that she had given a last hasty powdering to the berries out of one of the two boxes on the kitchen table, and had neglected to put the milk in the refrigerator.

Acknowledgment:

Little Women, Louisa May Alcott, 2014, Scholastic Press. (Work is out of copyright.)

## TASK A: READING - Q1

Read the text and answer ALL questions.

You should spend about 1 hour on this section.

### Question 1

From lines 1–5, identify a phrase which shows that Jo needed cheering up.

(1 mark)



## TASK A: READING - Q2

### Question 2

From lines 7–13, **give two ways** in which the writer shows that **Jo is not a confident cook**.

**(2 mark)**

## TASK A: READING - Q3

### Question 3

In lines 26–37, how does the writer use **language** and **structure** to show the reactions of those eating the dinner? **(6 marks)**

Support your views with reference to the text.

## TASK A: READING - Q4

### Question 4

In this extract, there is an **attempt to show the experience** of trying to do something new.

**Evaluate how successfully** this is achieved.

**(15 marks)**

Support your views with detailed reference to the text