

EFFECTIVE EXAM PREPARATION

DEVELOPING COMPARATIVE SKILLS

The grids below can be used for preparation on thematically linked texts to construct a framework which focuses on four different points of comparison.

The grid below uses GCSE (9-1) English Language Component 2 sample exam texts by way of example.

1. First Impressions – Subject and Structure

	Text 1: Unreliable Memoirs – evidence	Text 2: The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie – evidence
The narrator's point of view		
Main characters – eccentric teachers		
Other Characters – intimidated pupils		
Dialogue – comic		
Description – emphasising the unusual classroom environment		



2. Language and effects

The language of each text reveals what is unusual and surprising in a school context. Describe the effect of each pair of quotations:

Text 1 - evidence	Text 2 - evidence	Effect
In quiet desperation	Are we downhearted	
Certainly you had to be more careful than he was.	rubbed out with her duster the long division sum she always kept on the blackboard in case of intrusions from outside	
like an ancient Greek god in receipt of bad news	like a gladiator with raised arm and eyes flashing like a sword	
like some sinister leftover from a battle on the Somme	she cried again, turning radiantly to the window light, as if Caesar sat there	
those dreadful days when everyone else seemed to be doubling in size overnight	They stood up with wide eyes while Miss Brodie sat down at her desk	

Clearly these classrooms are dangerous places, with little regard for health and safety, and where learning often takes place by accident. They are certainly intimidating places to be.

3. Language and Style

Both texts describe the past. Clive James uses the first person to describe his own experiences. Muriel Spark uses the third person, and is an omniscient narrator. How do the writers' voices ensure that the young Clive James and Miss Brodie are both memorable and unusual characters?

Text 1 - evidence	Text 2 - evidence	Effect
the only thing that made me worth knowing was my good marks	Miss Brodie passed behind her with her head up, up, and shut the door with the utmost meaning	
I obstinately stayed small	When she had gone Miss Brodie looked hard at the door for a long time. A girl, called Judith, giggled	
The smoke enveloped us all	A vulgar American remarked to me, "It looks like a mighty fine quarry	
came back from the shadows to ruin science for me	Stupid as ever, said Miss Brodie	
I was thereby established all over again as teacher's pet, but at least it was something	She looked disapprovingly towards the door	

4. Language and Style – Comic Technique

Both writers use comic exaggeration to make the classroom experience as well as the teachers larger than life and funny. Both writers are determined to make you laugh. While James is laughing at his younger self, Spark may be laughing at everyone. Compare the comic effect of each pair of quotations:

Quotation from Text 1	Quotation from Text 2
Either that year or the year after, his voice broke. He had acne for about two days and grew a foot taller	Miss Brodie passed behind her with her head up, up
Effect: the exaggeration shows that for the narrator, Carnaby seemed to mature by magic. Both texts have characters who seem larger than life.	Effect: the repetition shows how determined Miss Brodie is to defy the headmistress. Clive James shows us his own feeling. Muriel Spark shows the effect of Miss Brodie on others.
Quotation from Text 1	Quotation from Text 2
Shocked, scorched and gassed, Mr. Ryan was carried away, never to return	any arithmetic periods when Miss Brodie should happen not to be teaching arithmetic
Effect:	Effect:
Quotation from Text 1	Quotation from Text 2
Mary Luke being magically resurrected after each burial	Qualifying examination or no qualifying examination, you will have the benefit of my experiences in Italy
Effect:	Effect:
Quotation from Text 1	Quotation from Text 2
Why he should have been called Mary was lost in antiquity	Miss Brodie stood in her brown dress like a gladiator with raised arm and eyes flashing like a sword
Effect:	Effect:

Activity:

- Read the following thematically linked texts (based on text types for Component 1)
- Fill in the tables below.

	Text 1	Text 2
First impressions		
Narrator's point of view		
(subject & structure)		

	Text 1 - evidence	Text 2 - evidence	Effect
Language and effects			

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THEMATICALLY LINKED NON-FICTION TEXTS

(PRACTICE FOR COMPONENT 1)

Text 1

In 1835 Charles Darwin visited the Galapagos Islands, a cluster of islands 600 miles west of South America, and among other plants and animals, he came across tortoises. In this extract from his journal, he describes his observations about the tortoises.

In the Galapagos Islands

I will first describe the habits of the tortoise. Some grow to an immense size: Mr Lawson, vice-governor of the colony, told us that he had seen several so large, that it required six or eight men to lift them from the ground, and that some had afforded as much as two hundred pounds of meat.

The tortoises which live on these islands where there is no water or in the lower and arid parts of the others, feed chiefly on the succulent cactus. Those which frequent the higher and damp regions, eat the leaves of various trees, a kind of berry (called a guayavita) which is acid and austere, and likewise a pale green lichen, that hangs in tresses from the boughs of the trees.

The tortoise is very fond of water, drinking large quantities, and wallowing in the mud. The larger islands alone possess springs, and these are always situated towards the central parts, and at a considerable height. The tortoises, therefore, which frequent the lower districts, when thirsty, are obliged to travel from a

long distance. Hence broad and well-beaten paths branch off in every direction from the wells down to the sea coast; and the Spaniards by following them up, first discovered the watering places.

When I landed at Chatham Island, I could not imagine what animal travelled so methodically along well-chosen tracks. Near the springs it was a curious spectacle to behold many of these huge creatures, one set eagerly travelling onwards with outstretched necks, and another set returning, after having drunk their fill. When the tortoise arrives at the spring, quite regardless of any spectator, he buries his head in the water above his eyes, and greedily swallows great mouthfuls, at the rate of about ten in a minute. The inhabitants say each animal stays three or four days in the neighbourhood of the water. The tortoises then return to the lower country; but they differed respecting the frequency of these visits. The animal probably regulates them according to the nature of the food on which it has lived. It is, however, certain that tortoises can subsist even on those islands, where there is no other water than what falls during a few rainy days in the year.

Text 2

This is an extract from an information book about tortoises, written in 2003 by Peter Young.

Tortoise

Tortoises look and are old, almost mythical creatures. They are primeval, the oldest of the living land reptiles, their age confirmed by fossil remains. Tortoises are the surviving link between animal life in water and on land. Some 280 million years ago, when coal was being formed from rotting vegetation in forest swamps, reptiles were the first creatures to emerge and breed on land.

So named from the Latin *reptilis* (creeping), reptiles, including tortoises, developed to survive in a dry environment. Fins became strong legs; they had tough skins, jaws that enabled them to eat plants, and they laid durable eggs. Their presence on land led to a cycle of improvement. For example, they ate seeds that passed undamaged through the gut and were deposited complete with fertiliser, thus increasing the animal's food supply. Gradually they came to be the lords of creation, ending the dominance of marine creatures within the animal kingdom.

The Age of the Reptiles was a long one, from about 245 to 65 million years ago. During that time, though, many species

died out, to reappear only as museum specimens or digital reconstructions. Tortoises, which emerged early in that period, have survived for some 225 million years. They are living fossils. Hardy, self-contained creatures, they have survived geological upheaval, volcanic activity and climatic swings.

Apart from the fact that they are reptiles, it is not difficult to see why they have survived. The obvious reason is that they have an external skeleton, a bony shell that boxes them in. This evolved over time. Originally to protect their flesh, the creatures grew a series of horny plates or scales. These became larger, eventually joining together to create the shell as we know it today.

Most tortoises have a high domed shell that is strong and hard to crack. The dome shape is difficult for predators to get their jaws around. It does have a disadvantage, though, should the creature when climbing tumble back on to it. All they can do is wave their legs helplessly in the air, trying to right themselves. Rescue can only come from some outsider tipping them over.

Made up of interlocking horny plates called scutes (Latin: *scutum*, shield), the shell stays the same shape as the tortoise increases in size. Of all the protective measures adopted within

the animal kingdom, it is one of the surest. It is not an absolute protection, but it deters many predators. Indeed, a tortoise's shell is not unlike a soldier's helmet. Like soldiers, too, tortoises are often camouflaged, the pattern of their shells blending in with their environment for extra safety. The young soft-shelled are still at risk, as were the giant tortoises on remote Indian and Pacific Ocean islands. Having no natural enemies before man, they could afford, in evolutionary terms to reduce considerably the bony part of their shells, which were not particularly hard. Nevertheless, they could be used as stepping stones. It was claimed that on Galapagos they were so numerous that it was possible to walk quite long distances on their backs without touching the ground.