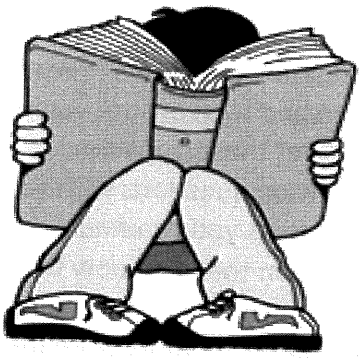
St Joseph's English Department

Helping to prepare your child for their GCSE English Language Exams 2023-24



Key Questions

What is the format of the exam?

The course is made up of 2 separate papers.

Paper 1 tests your child's ability to read and respond to **one fiction text** and to complete a piece of creative or narrative writing

Paper 2 tests your child's ability to compare perspectives and ideas in **two non-fiction texts** and to complete a piece of writing where they argue or persuade.

When are the exams?

These exams will take place in the summer of 2024. AQA have not, as yet, finalised the exam timetable.

How should my child manage their time in the exams?

Paper 1 is 1 hour and 45 minutes long. There are 40 marks for Section A and 40 marks for Section B. They should spend approximately 50 minutes on Section A and 55 minutes on Section B.

Paper 2 is 1 hour and 45 minutes long There are 40 marks for Section A and 40 marks for Section B. They should spend approximately 50 minutes on Section A and 55 minutes on Section B.

Question 5 in Section B of both exams is worth the most marks and half of your child's total GCSE grade; please remind them to spend approximately 45 minutes writing this question and 10 minutes planning and checking their work.

Answer all questions on the paper.

How can I help?

- Ensure your child is revising. Your child will be given a revision workbook which contains texts and tasks to complete to guide them through their revision. Why not work through this with your child?
- Ensure your child reads a range of fiction and non-fiction texts; encourage them to tell you what they are about and how they know.
- Ask your child what the effect and/or purpose of a fiction or non-fiction text is and how they know; ask them to comment on the ways language and structural features are used.
- Previously the lowest marked question for our students in Paper 1 has been the structure and evaluation questions (question 3 and 4) and in Paper 2 comparing writer's perspectives; ensure your child is confident with what this means and how to answer these questions.
- Work through the following questions with your child. Use the texts we have included and any other texts you can find.
- These are unusual exams in that we know the questions your child will be asked, we just don't know the texts. So, the more familiar with what to look for in each of the questions, the more prepared your child will be.

What is a non-fiction text?

- A text that is factual and aims to give its reader information.
- They are written to inform, persuade, explain, advise, argue and describe.
- Types of texts include:
  - Hard hitting articles stating opinions
  - Travel books
  - Diaries or journals
  - Biographies
  - Autobiographies
  - Documentary scripts
  - Information sheets
  - Web pages

What is a fiction text?

- A text based on the writer's imagination that uses language a highly creative and artful way
- Types of texts include:
  - Novels
  - Short stories
  - Film, television or playscripts
  - Poetry

The questions that follow are designed to help your child with:

Paper 1

The questions can be applied to any of the fiction texts we have included at the back of this booklet.

1) List four things we learn about...
In this question your child must find four specific points that demonstrate what they learn about a topic specified in the question. This question is worth 4 marks.

-Find four things you learn about the main focus of the text.
-Find four facts from the text

2) How does the writer use language to...?
In this question your child must identify specific ways language features are used in the text and explain what effect they have on the reader. They must use quotations to show the language feature in use and explain the effects in detail. This question is worth 8 marks.

-Can you pick out four or five different ways language is used in a text?
-Can you find quotations that show these language features being used?
-Can you explain how the writer has used these language features in the text?
-Can you explain the effects of specific examples of language features?

When writing about the way LANGUAGE is used, your child should be looking at the way the text is written. Why not test your child to check they know the features listed on the next page?

Alliteration			
Simile			
Metaphor			
Personal pronouns			
Rhetorical questions			
Personification			
List of three/Triplets			
Adjectives			
Adverbs			
Nouns (concrete and abstract)			
Verbs			
Symbolism			
Onomatopoeia			
Exaggeration/Hyperbole			
Repetition			
Oxymoron			
Pathetic Fallacy			

3) How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

In this question your child must identify specific ways structural features are used in the text and explain what effect they have on the reader. They must use quotations to show the structural feature in use and explain the effects in detail. This question is worth 8 marks.

- When you first start to read the text, what is the writer focusing your attention on?
- How is this being developed and what structural feature is evident at this point?
- Why might the writer have deliberately chosen to begin the text with this focus
- What other main points of focus does the writer develop in sequence after the starting point?
- Why is the writer taking you through this particular sequence?
- What does the writer focus your attention on at the end of the text?
- How are you left thinking or feeling at the end and why?

4) A student having read the text said...To what extent do you agree?
In this question your child must make a clear judgement in response to a statement that is made by another reader of the text. This question is worth 12 marks.

-Can you identify some of the writer's methods to support the student's response?
-Can you think of a counter-argument?

The questions that follow are designed to help your child with:

Paper 2

The questions can be applied to any of the non-fiction texts we have included at the back of this booklet.

1) True or False?
In this question your child must show what they understand about a topic and issues specified in the question. They must identify the 4 true statements from a list of 8 statements. This question is worth 4 marks

-What do you understand about the main issues of the text?
-Can you work out what the main issues of the text?
-Can you find quotations and explain in detail, in your own words, what they reveal about the main issues raised in the text?

2) Write a summary of...
In this question your child must interpret the implied meanings of the two texts and write a summary of what they understand about the focus of the question. This question is worth 8 marks.

- Can you tell me how ...is similar?
- Can you find evidence from the texts to show this?

3) How does the writer use language to...?
In this question your child must identify specific ways language features are used in the text and explain what effect they have on the reader. They must use quotations to show the language feature in use and explain the effects in detail. This question is worth 12 marks.

-Can you pick out four or five different ways language is used in a text?
-Can you find quotations that show these language features being used?
-Can you explain how the writer has used these language features in the text?
-Can you explain the effects of specific examples of language features?

4) Compare how the writers convey their different perspectives and feelings about...
For this question, your child must refer to the whole of Source A, together with whole of Source B. This question is worth 16 marks.

- Can you tell me how the writer of Source A feels/thinks about...?
- Can you tell me how the writer of Source B feels/thinks about...?
- Can you compare the methods the writers use to convey their different perspectives and feelings?

The following pages contain a selection of fiction and non-fiction texts for you to read with your child.

Use the questions in the previous pages to help your child practise the skills needed for their exam.

Paper 1
Fiction texts

St Joseph's Catholic Academy
English Department

I'm the King of the Castle

by Susan Hill

Three months ago, his grandmother died, and then they had moved to this house.

'I will not live there again, until it belongs to me,' his father had said. Though the old man lay upstairs, after a second stroke, and lingered, giving no trouble.

The boy was taken up to see him.

'You must not be afraid,' his father said nervously, 'he is a very old man, now, very ill.'

'I am never afraid,' And that was no more than the truth, though his father would not have believed it.

It will be very moving, Joseph Hooper had decided, with the three generations together and one upon his deathbed, the eldest son of the eldest son of the eldest son. For, in middle age, he was acquiring a dynastic sense.

But it had not been moving. The old man had breathed noisily, and dribbled a little, and never woken. The sick room smelled sour.

'Ah well, 'Mr Hooper had said, and coughed, 'he is very ill. You know. But I am glad you have seen him.'

Why?'

'Well – because you are his only grandson. His heir, I suppose. Yes. It is only as it should be.'

The boy looked towards the bed. His skin is already dead, he thought, it is old and dry. But he saw that the bones of the eye-sockets, and the nose and jaw, showed through it, and gleamed. Everything about him, from the stubble of hair down to the folded line of sheet, was bleached and grey-ish white.

'All he looks like,' 'Edmund Hooper said, 'is one of his dead old moths.'

'That is not the way to speak! You must show respect.'

His father had led him out. Though I am only able to show respect now, he thought, to behave towards my father as I should, because he is dying, he is almost gone away from me.

Edmund Hooper, walking down the great staircase into the wood-panelled hall, thought nothing of his grandfather. But later, he remembered the moth-like whiteness of the very old skin.

Now they had moved, Joseph Hooper was master in his own house.

He said, 'I shall be away in London a good deal. I cannot live here the whole time, even in your holidays.'

'That won't be anything new, will it?

He looked away from his son's gaze, irritated. I do my best, he thought, it is not the easiest of tasks without a woman beside me.

'Ah, but we shall be looking into things, 'he said, 'I shall see about getting you a friend, as well as someone to look after us in this house. Something is soon to be done.'

Edmund Hooper thought, I don't want anything to be done about it, nobody must come here, as he walked between the yew trees at the bottom of the garden.

'You had better not go into the Red Room without asking me. I shall keep the key in here.'

'I wouldn't do any harm there, why can't I go?'
'Well - there are a good many valuable things. That is all. Really.' Joseph Hooper sighed, sitting at his desk, in the room facing the long lawn. 'And I cannot think that it will be a room to interest you much.'

For the time being, the house was to be kept as it was, until he could decide which of the furniture to be rid of, which of their own to bring.

He moved his hands uneasily about over the papers on his desk, oppressed by them, uncertain where he should begin.

Though he was accustomed to paperwork. But his father's affairs had been left in disarray, he was ashamed of the paraphernalia of death.

'Can I have the key now, then?'

'*May*...'

'O.K.'

'The key for the Red Room?'

'Yes.'

'Well...'

Mr. Joseph Hooper moved his hand towards the small, left-side drawer in the desk, underneath the drawer where sealing wax had always been kept. But then, said 'No, No, you had really much better be playing cricket in the sun, Edmund, something of that sort. You have been shown everything there is in the Red Room.'

'There's nobody to play cricket with.'

'Ah, well now, I shall soon be doing something about that, you shall have your friend.'

'Anyway, I don't like cricket.'

'Edmund, you will not be difficult, please, I have a good deal to do, I cannot waste time in foolish arguments.'

Hooper went out, wishing he had said nothing. He wanted nothing to be done, nobody should come here.

But he knew where to find the key.

Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha

by Roddy Doyle

We were coming down our road. Kevin stopped at a gate and bashed it with his stick. It was Missis Quigley's gate; she was always looking out the window but she never did anything.

–Quigley!

–Quigley!

–Quigley Quigley Quigley!

Liam and Aidan turned down their culdesac. We said nothing; they said nothing. Liam and Aidan had a dead mother. Missis O'Connell was her name.

–It'd be brilliant, wouldn't it? I said.

–Yeah, said Kevin.—Cool.

We were talking about having a dead ma. Sinbad, my little brother, started crying. Liam was in my class in school. He dirtied his trousers one day—the smell of it rushed at us like the blast of heat when an oven door was opened—and the master did nothing. He didn't shout or slam his desk with his leather or anything. He told us to fold our arms and go asleep and when we did he carried Liam out of the class. He didn't come back for ages and Liam didn't come back at all.

James O'Keefe whispered,—If I did a gick in me pants he'd kill me!

–Yeah.

–It's not fair, said James O'Keefe.—So it's not.

The master, Mister Hennessey, hated James O'Keefe. He'd be writing something on the board with his back to us and he'd say,—O'Keefe, I know you're up to something down there. Don't let me catch you. He said it one morning and James O'Keefe wasn't even in. He was at home with the mumps.

Henno brought Liam to the teachers' toilet and cleaned him up and then he brought him to the headmaster's office and the headmaster brought him to his auntie's in his car because there was no one at home in his own house. Liam's auntie's house was in Raheny.

–He used up two rolls of toilet paper, Liam told us.—And he gave me a shilling.

–He did not; show us it.

–There.

–That's only threepence.

–I spent the rest, said Liam.

He got the remains of a packet of Toffo out of his pocket and showed it to us.

–There, he said.

–Give us one.

–There's only four left, said Liam; he was putting the packet back in his pocket.

–Ah, said Kevin.

He pushed Liam.

Liam went home.

Today, we were coming home from the building site. We'd got a load of six-inch nails and a few bits of plank for making boats, and we'd been pushing bricks into a trench full of wet cement when Aidan started running away. We could hear his asthma, and we all ran as well. We were being chased. I had to wait for Sinbad. I looked back and there was no one after us but I didn't say anything. I grabbed Sinbad's hand and ran and caught up with the rest of them. We stopped when we got out of the fields onto the end of the road. We laughed. We roared through the gap in the hedge. We got into the gap and looked to see if there was anyone coming to get us. Sinbad's sleeve was caught in the thorns.

–The man's coming! said Kevin, and he slid through the gap.

We left Sinbad stuck in the hedge and pretended we'd run away. We heard him snivelling. We crouched behind the gate pillars of the last house before the road stopped at the hedge, O'Driscoll's.

–Patrick, Sinbad whinged.

–Sinbahhhd, said Kevin.

Aidan had his knuckles in his mouth. Liam threw a stone at the hedge.

–I'm telling Mammy, said Sinbad.

I gave up. I got Sinbad out of the hedge and made him wipe his nose on my sleeve. We were going home for our dinner: shepherd's pie on a Tuesday.

Liam and Aidan's da howled at the moon. Late at night, in his back garden; not every night, only sometimes. I'd never heard him but Kevin said he had. My ma said that he did it because he missed his wife.

–Missis O'Connell?

–That's right.

My da agreed with her.

–He's grieving, said my mother.—The poor man. Kevin's father said that Mister O'Connell howled because he was drunk. He never called him Mister O'Connell; he called him the Tinker.

Remarkable Creatures

by Tracy Chevalier

Chapter 1
Different from all the rocks on the beach

Lightning has struck me all my life. Just once was it real. I shouldn't remember it, for I was little more than a baby. But I do remember. I was in a field, where there were horses and riders performing tricks. Then a storm blew in, and a woman – not Mam – picked me up and brought me under a tree. As she held me tight I looked up and saw the pattern of black leaves against a white sky.

Then there was a noise, like all the trees falling down round me, and a bright, bright light, which was like looking at the sun. A buzz ran right through me. It was as if I'd touched a hot coal, and I could smell singed flesh and sense there was pain, yet it weren't painful. I felt like a stocking turned inside out.

Others begun pulling at me and calling, but I couldn't make a sound. I was carried somewhere, then there was warmth all round, not a blanket, but wet. It was water and I knew water – our house was close to the sea, I could see it from our windows. Then I opened my eyes, and it feels like they haven't been shut since.

The lightning killed the woman holding me, and two girls standing next to her, but I survived. They say I was a quiet, sickly child before the storm, but after it I grew up lively and alert. I cannot say if they're right, but the memory of that lighting still runs through me like a shiver. It marks powerful moments of my life: seeing the first crocodile skull Joe found, and finding its body myself; discovering my other monsters on the beach; meeting Colonel Birch. Other times I'll feel the lighting strike and wonder why it's come. Sometimes I don't understand, but accept what the lightning tells me, for the lightning is me. It entered me when I was a baby and never left.

I feel an echo of the lightning each time I find a fossil, a little jolt that says, "Yes, Mary Anning, you are different from all the rocks on the beach." That is why I am a hunter: to feel that bolt of lightning, and that difference, every day.

Paper 2
Non-fiction texts

St Joseph's Catholic Academy
English Department

Touching the Void

by Joe Simpson

I glanced at the rope stretched tautly above me. It ran up the wall and disappeared onto the slope above. There was no possibility of getting back to that slope some twenty feet above me. I looked at the wall of the crevasse close by my shoulder. On the other side another wall of ice towered up ten feet away. I was hanging in a shaft of water ice. The decision to look down came as I was in the process of turning. I swung round quickly, catching my smashed knee on the ice wall and howling in a frenzy of pain and fright. Instead of seeing the rope twisting loosely in a void beneath me, I stared blankly at the snow below my feet, not fully believing what I was seeing. A floor! There was a wide snow-covered floor fifteen feet below me. There was no emptiness, and no black void. I swore softly, and heard it whisper off the walls around me. Then I let out a cry of delight and relief which boomed round the crevasse. I yelled again and again, listening to the echoes, and laughed between the yells. I was at the bottom of the crevasse.

When I recovered my wits I looked more carefully at the carpet of snow above which I was dangling. My jubilation was quickly tempered when I spotted dark menacing holes in the surface. It wasn't a floor after all. The crevasse opened up into a pear-shaped dome, its sides curving away from me to a width of fifty feet before narrowing again. The snow floor cut through the flat end of this cavern, while the walls above me tapered in to form the thin end of the pear barely ten feet across and nearly100 feet high. Small fragments of crusty snow patterned down from the roof.

I looked round the enclosed vault of snow and ice, familiarising myself with its shape and size. The walls opposite closed in but didn't meet. A narrow gap had been filled with snow from above to form a cone which rose all the way to the roof. It was about fifteen feet wide at the base and as little as four or five feet across the top.

A pillar of gold light beamed diagonally from a small hole in the roof, spraying bright reflections off the far wall of the crevasse. I was mesmerised by this beam and sunlight burning through the vaulted ceiling from the real world outside. It had me so fixated that I forgot about the uncertain floor below and let myself slide down the rest of the rope. I was going to reach that sunbeam. I knew it then with absolute certainty. How I would do it, and when I would reach it were not considered. I just knew.

In seconds my whole outlook had changed. The weary frightened hours of night were forgotten, and the abseil which had filled me with such claustrophobic dread had been swept away. The twelve despairing hours I had spent in the unnatural hush of this awesome place seemed suddenly to have been nothing like the nightmare I had imagined. I could do something positive. I could crawl and climb, and keep on doing so until I had escaped from this grave. Before, there had been nothing for me to do except lie on the bridge trying not to feel scared and lonely, and that helplessness had been my worst enemy. Now I had a plan.

The change in me was astonishing. I felt invigorated, full of energy and optimism. I could see possible dangers, very real risks that could destroy my hopes, but somehow I knew I could overcome them. It was as if I had been given this one blessed chance to get out and I was grasping it with every ounce of strength left in me. A powerful feeling of confidence and pride swept over me as I realised how right I had been to leave the bridge. I had made the right decision against the worst of my fears. I had done it, and I was sure that nothing now could be worse than those hours of torture on the bridge.

My boots touched the snow and I stopped descending. I sat in my harness, hanging free on the rope a few feet from the floor, and examined

the surface cautiously. The snow looked soft and powdery, and I was immediately suspicious of it. I looked along the edge where the floor joined the walls and soon found what I was looking for. In several places there were dark gaps between the ice walls and the snow. It was not a floor so much as a suspended ceiling across the crevasse dividing the abyss below from the upper chamber, where I sat. The start of the snow slope running up to the sunshine lay forty feet from me. The inviting snow-carpet between me and the slope tempted me to run across it. The idea made me chuckle. I had forgotten that my right leg was useless. Okay. Crawl across it... but which way? Straight across, or keeping near to the back wall?

It was a difficult decision. I was less worried about putting my foot through the floor than by the damage such a fall would do to the fragile surface. The last thing I wanted was to destroy the floor and myself stranded on the wrong side of an uncrossable gap. That would be too much to bear. I glanced nervously at the beam of sunlight, trying to draw strength from it, and made my mind up at once. I would cross in the middle. It was the shortest distance and there was nothing to suggest that it would be any riskier than at the sides. I gently lowered myself until I was sitting on the snow but with most of my weight still on the rope. It was agonising to inch the rope out and let my weight down gradually. I found myself holding my breath, every muscle in my body tensed. I became acutely aware of the slightest movement in the snow, and I wondered whether I would end up sinking slowly through the floor. Then some of the tension in the rope relaxed, and I realised that the floor was holding. I breathed deeply, and I released my aching hand from the rope.

Let's talk about the climb up Everest, one step at a time

interview with Sir Edmund Hilary

Sir Edmund Hillary: I never climbed up anything one step at a time. You read so much about how, at extreme altitudes, you take one step and then you stop and pant and puff for a while, and then take one more step. I don't ever remember doing that. You're much slower in higher altitudes because of the lack of oxygen, but I used to keep moving pretty steadily most of the time and I didn't have to stop too often for panting and puffing. I think I was pretty well adapted and acclimatized to altitude and I was very fit in those days, so I could keep moving very freely.

Can you tell us about any specific challenges along the way as you were ascending?

Sir Edmund Hillary: Well there were lots of challenges. Even the route we were climbing Mt. Everest was one of the two easiest routes on the mountain as we know now. Of course, nobody had climbed it then. But even so, there are demanding parts of it. At the bottom of the mountain, there's the ice fall, where it's a great tumbled ruin of ice that's all pouring down and filled with crevasses and ice walls. It's under slow but constant movement. It's a dangerous place because things are always tumbling down. So you have to establish a route up through that which you can get with reasonable safety. But over the years, literally dozens of people have died in the crevasses. They've been engulfed by ice walls falling down and things of that nature. I had one experience on the ice fall with Tenzing. We were actually descending after having been further up the mountain and it was getting close towards dark so we wanted to get through the ice fall before darkness fell. We were roped together, but I was rushing down ahead in the lead. About half-way down there was a narrow crevasse, I guess it was about four feet wide, but just a bit too wide to step across. On the lower lip was a great chunk of ice stuck against the ice wall, and we'd used that as sort of a stepping stone to get over the gap. I came rushing down the hill without thinking too carefully, I just leapt in the air and landed on the chunk of ice, whereupon the chunk of ice broke off and dropped into the crevasse with me on top of it. It was interesting how everything seemed to start going slowly, even though I was free-falling into the crevasse. My mind, obviously, was working very quickly indeed. The great chunk of ice started tipping over and I realized, if I wasn't careful, I'd be crushed between the ice and the wall of the crevasse. So I just sort of bent my knees and leapt in the air. I was still falling, but now I was a couple of feet clear of the chunk of ice. Time really seemed to pass even though I was falling clear and I realized that unless the rope came tight fairly soon, I would come to a rather sticky end on the bottom of the crevasse. Up top, Tenzing had acted very quickly. He had thrust his ice axe into the snow, whipped the rope around it, and the rope came tight with a twang and I was stopped and swung in against the ice wall. The great chunk of ice just carried on and smashed to smithereens at the bottom of the crevasse. Then really the rest was what I would have called a routine mountaineering matter. I had my ice axe and my crampons on my feet, so I chipped steps in the side, I was able to bridge the crevasse, and I worked my way up to the top and got safely out. I wouldn't have said at any stage, because it all happened so quickly, fear really didn't have much opportunity to emerge. My only idea was to get safely out of this unfortunate predicament. And of course, without Tenzing's very competent mountaineer's response, I certainly wouldn't have made it. But once he had stopped me, then I was able to, using the techniques of mountaineering, to get myself safely to the top, again. When you've been going as long as I have, many of them have happened during the course of your life, but you tend to forget them, really. I think nature tricks us a little bit because you tend to remember the good moments rather than the uncomfortable ones. So when you leave the mountain, you remember the great moments on the mountain, and as soon as you leave the mountain, you want to go back again.

I fell through Arctic ice

by Gary Rolfe

I have travelled 11,000 Arctic miles with dogs, summer and winter. They've been my life. There are fewer than 300 purebred Canadian Eskimo dogs left in the world and I had 15 of them. I sank all my love and money into those dogs, proud to keep the breed's working talents alive. I learnt from the best, guys who in the 1980s had crossed Antarctica and made it to the North Pole with dogs, perfectionists who knew all there was to know. I watched, listened, kept my mouth shut, and one day decided to go it alone. It felt a natural progression.

Alone, it's always dangerous. Something was bound to go wrong one day, and on Sunday March 5 last year it did. Moving over Amundsen Gulf in the Northwest Passage, sea ice gave way. Everything was sinking: my dogs, my sled and me. We kicked for our lives. Powerful Arctic Ocean currents dragged vast sheets of sea ice. Underwater, I couldn't find the hole I had fallen through and had to make one, punching, then breathing again as ice and sea water clashed against my face.

Polar bears eat people, and swim to kill. We'd crossed bear tracks an hour before going through the ice. I remember thinking, did the bastard follow us? Was he under us now? What will it feel like when he bites? The floe edge was a mile away, this a busy hunting area where bears bludgeon seals twice my size. Frantic, I ripped off my mittens. Trying to save my dogs, I was prepared to lose my hands to savage cold. It wasn't enough. Soon drowning and the cold had killed all but one of them.

Out of the water I stripped off sodden, icing-up clothing. The cold was brutal. My limbs and head shook uncontrollably. I stopped shivering, indicating I was severely hypothermic. I was slowly dying. Barely conscious, I pulled on my down suit with fingers that knocked like wood. My blood was freezing. Human consciousness is lost when the body temperature plummets below 30C. I was heading for oblivion.

My satellite phone failed. I always have a phone backed up with a ground to air VHF transceiver, but it made no difference – I knew no plane was flying over. I flipped my location beacon. This is a last resort. To flip it means I'm in a life-threatening situation and want out. In the end three polar bear hunters came out on snowmobiles. What they saw frightened them.

I had fourth-degree frostbite, the worst form. My fingers were covered in deathly black blisters, my hands freezing to the bone. The pain when it thaws is colossal, at the top of the human tolerance scale, like a huge invisible parasite with a million fangs. The agony was suffocating; I writhed with it, wild for relief.

Heavy doses of morphine helped to dull the pain for two months. The side-effects included dreams, hallucinations, flashbacks – and constipation. Just as well because for weeks I couldn't wipe my arse. I went eight days without a crap. When prune juice was administered, I passed a turd the size of a baby's leg.

My fingers were debrided, scalpels cutting dead meat off thumbs and fingers. It hurt. Fingernails dropped off and smelt funny, and tendons stiffened. Physiotherapy was agony, but I wanted my hands back so badly and to endure meant to get better. My fingers looked a bloody mess, distorted and gnarled. They were always disturbingly cold. I was told the longer we waited, the better: even dead-looking fingers can recover.

Exercising my hands took up all my days – and within minutes they would stiffen up, giving the impression they were dying on me. I kept going, though, and one day I clasped a cup with my right hand. I was so excited. The first time I went out in the sun, my fingers turned blue. Without fingerprint ridges, picking up coins was difficult. Coins felt freezing, copper ones less so.

Soon the time to thaw before the saw was up. The surgeon cut a tip as if sharpening a pencil.

I felt nothing. It jolted me to learn that the fingertip was dead. It was the only part still black, solid and stone-cold; if it wasn't removed, I'd have been susceptible to dry gangrene. It had to go.

I left hospital with 27 stitches and a metal plate on one stub-ended finger. Surgeons described my recovery as "inexplicable" – I had been expected to lose both hands.

So what now? My dogs and I were inseparable; I miss them desperately. All I want is dog hairs on my clothes again. The plan is a move to Greenland. It's time to live again.

Extract from Scott's diary

February 2nd, 1911
Impressions
The seductive folds of the sleeping-bag.

The hiss of the primus and the fragrant steam of the cooker issuing from the tent ventilator.

The small green tent and the great white road.

The whine of a dog and the neigh of our steeds.

The driving cloud of powdered snow.

The crunch of footsteps which break the surface crust.

The wind blown furrows.

The blue arch beneath the smoky cloud.

The crisp ring of the ponies' hoofs and the swish of the following sledge.

The droning conversation of the march as the driver encourages or chides his horse.

The patter of dog pads.

The gentle flutter of our canvas shelter.

Its deep booming sound under the full force of a blizzard.

The drift snow like finest flour penetrating every hole and corner – flickering up beneath one's head covering, pricking sharply as a sand blast.

The sun with blurred image peeping shyly through the wreathing drift giving pale shadowless light.

The eternal silence of the great white desert. Cloudy columns of snow drift advancing from the south, pale yellow wraiths, heralding the coming storm, blotting out one by one the sharp-cut lines of the land.

The blizzard, Nature's protest – the crevasse, Nature's pitfall – that grim trap for the unwary – no hunter could conceal his snare so perfectly – the light rippled snow bridge gives no hint or sign of the hidden danger, its position unguessable till man or beast is floundering, clawing and struggling for foothold on the brink.

The vast silence broken only by the mellow sounds of the marching column.

Saturday, March 25th, 1911
We have had two days of surprisingly warm weather, the sky overcast, snow falling, wind only in light airs. Last night the sky was clearing, with a southerly wind, and this morning the sea was open all about us. It is disappointing to find the ice so reluctant to hold; at the same time one supposes that the cooling of the water is proceeding and therefore that each day makes it easier for the ice to form – the sun seems to have lost all power, but I imagine its rays still tend to warm the surface water about the noon hours. It is only a week now to the date which I thought would see us all at Cape Evans.

The warmth of the air has produced a comparatively uncomfortable state of affairs in the hut. The ice on the inner roof is melting fast, dripping on the floor and streaming down the sides. The increasing cold is checking the evil even as I write. Comfort could only be ensured in the hut either by making a clean sweep of all the ceiling ice or by keeping the interior at a critical temperature little above freezing-point.

Sunday, March 17th, 1912
Lost track of dates, but think the last correct. Tragedy all along the line. At lunch, the day before yesterday, poor Titus Oates said he couldn't go on; he proposed we should leave him in his sleeping-bag. That we could not do, and induced him to come on, on the afternoon march. In spite of its awful nature for him he struggled on and we made a few miles. At night he was worse and we knew the end had come.

Should this be found I want these facts recorded. Oates' last thoughts were of his Mother, but immediately before he took pride in thinking that his regiment would be pleased with the bold way in which he met his death. We can testify to

his bravery. He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint, and to the very last was able and willing to discuss outside subjects. He did not – would not – give up hope to the very end. He was a brave soul. This was the end. He slept through the night before last, hoping not to wake; but he woke in the morning – yesterday. It was blowing a blizzard. He said, 'I am just going outside and may be some time.' He went out into the blizzard and we have not seen him since.

I take this opportunity of saying that we have stuck to our sick companions to the last. In case of Edgar Evans, when absolutely out of food and he lay insensible, the safety of the remainder seemed to demand his abandonment, but Providence mercifully removed him at this critical moment. He died a natural death, and we did not leave him till two hours after his death. We knew that poor Oates was walking to his death, but though we tried to dissuade him, we knew it was the act of a brave man and an English gentleman. We all hope to meet the end with a similar spirit, and assuredly the end is not far.

I can only write at lunch and then only occasionally. The cold is intense, -40° at midday. My companions are unendingly cheerful, but we are all on the verge of serious frostbites, and though we constantly talk of fetching through I don't think anyone of us believes it in his heart.

R. SCOTT.