



A-level

ENGLISH LITERATURE A

Paper 2B Texts in shared contexts: Modern times: Literature
from 1945 to the present day

June 2018

Insert

Extract from *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, published in 2000.

'You are quite the political prisoners . . . not giving a thing away. All right: may one ask *what it is* that you are protesting about?'

Both children pointed urgently to their armbands.

'Vegetables? You are protesting for the rights of vegetables?'

Irie held one hand over her mouth to stop herself screaming the answer, while Magid set about his writing pad in a flurry. WE ARE PROTESTING ABOUT THE HARVEST FESTIVAL.

Samad growled, 'I told you already. I don't want you participating in that nonsense. It has nothing to do with us, Magid. Why are you always trying to be somebody you are not?'

There was a mutual, silent anger as each acknowledged the painful incident that was being referred to. A few months earlier, on Magid's ninth birthday, a group of very nice-looking white boys with meticulous manners had turned up on the doorstep and asked for Mark Smith.

'Mark? No Mark here,' Alsana had said, bending down to their level with a genial smile. 'Only the family Iqbal in here. You have the wrong house.'

But before she had finished the sentence, Magid had dashed to the door, ushering his mother out of view.

'Hi, guys.'

'Hi, Mark.'

'Off to the chess club, Mum.'

'Yes, M – M – Mark,' said Alsana, close to tears at this final snub, the replacement of 'Mum' for 'Amma'. 'Do not be late, now.'

'I GIVE YOU A GLORIOUS NAME LIKE MAGID MAHFOOZ MURSHED MUBTASIM IQBAL!' Samad had yelled after Magid when he returned home that evening and whipped up the stairs like a bullet to hide in his room. 'AND YOU WANT TO BE CALLED MARK SMITH!'

But this was just a symptom of a far deeper malaise. Magid really wanted to be *in some other family*. He wanted to own cats and not cockroaches, he wanted his mother to make the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine; he wanted to have a trellis of flowers growing up one side of the house instead of the ever growing pile of other people's rubbish; he wanted a piano in the hallway in place of the broken door off cousin Kurshed's car; he wanted to go on biking holidays to France, not day-trips to Blackpool to visit aunties; he wanted the floor of his room to be shiny wood, not the orange and green swirled carpet left over from the restaurant; he wanted his father to be a doctor, not a one-handed waiter; and this month Magid had converted all these desires into a wish to join in with the Harvest Festival like Mark Smith would. Like everybody else would.

BUT WE WANT TO DO IT. OR WE'LL GET A DETENTION. MRS OWENS SAID IT IS TRADITION.

Samad blew his top. 'Whose tradition?' he bellowed, as a tearful Magid began to scribble frantically once more. 'Dammit, you are a Muslim, not a wood sprite! I *told* you, Magid, I told you the condition upon which you would be allowed. You come with me on haj. If I am to touch that black stone before I die I will do it with my eldest son by my side.'

Magid broke the pencil halfway through his reply, scrawling the second half with blunt lead. IT'S NOT FAIR! I CAN'T GO ON HAJ. I'VE GOT TO GO TO SCHOOL. I DON'T HAVE TIME TO GO TO MECCA. IT'S NOT FAIR!

'Welcome to the twentieth century. It's not fair. It's never fair.'

Magid ripped the next piece of paper from the pad and held it up in front of his father's face. YOU TOLD HER DAD NOT TO LET HER GO.

Samad couldn't deny it. Last Tuesday he had asked Archie to show solidarity by keeping Irie at home the week of the festival. Archie had hedged and haggled, fearing Clara's wrath, but Samad had reassured him: *Take a leaf from my book, Archibald. Who wears the trousers in my house?* Archie had thought about Alsana, so often found in those lovely silken trousers with the tapered ankle, and of Samad, who regularly wore a long piece of embroidered grey cotton, a lungi, wrapped round his waist, to all intents and purposes, a skirt. But he kept the thought to himself.

WE WON'T SPEAK IF YOU DON'T LET US GO. WE WON'T SPEAK EVER, EVER, EVER, EVER AGAIN. WHEN WE DIE EVERYONE WILL SAY IT WAS YOU. YOU YOU YOU.

Great, thought Samad, more blood and sticky guilt on my one good hand.

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