**IB ENGLISH – WORKS IN TRANSLATION**

**THE READER BERNHARD SCHLINK (SL)**

**CLOSE READING SKILLS – PRACTICE FOR PAPER 1**

Read the following extract from Chapter One of *The Reader* and answer the questions that follow.

**Extract 1: Part 1, Chapter 1 (p1)**

WHEN I was fifteen, I got hepatitis. It started in the fall and lasted until spring. As the old

year darkened and turned colder, I got weaker and weaker. Things didn’t start to improve until the new year. January was warm, and my mother moved my bed out onto the balcony. I saw sky, sun, clouds, and heard the voices of children playing in the courtyard. As dusk came one evening in February, there was the sound of a blackbird singing.

The first time I ventured outside, it was to go from Blumenstrasse, where we lived on the second floor of a massive turn-of-the-century building, to Bahnhofstrasse. That’s where I’d thrown up on the way home from school one day the previous October. I’d been feeling weak for days, in a way that was completely new to me. Every step was an effort. When I was faced with stairs either at home or at school, my legs would hardly carry me. I had no appetite. Even if I sat down at the table hungry, I soon felt queasy. I woke up every morning with a dry mouth and the sensation that my insides were in the wrong place and too heavy for my body. I was ashamed of being so weak. I was even more ashamed when I threw up. That was another thing that had never happened to me before. My mouth was suddenly full, I tried to swallow everything down again, and clenched my teeth with my hand in front of my mouth, but it all burst out of my mouth anyway straight through my fingers. I leaned against the wall of the building, looked down at the vomit around my feet, and retched something clear and sticky.

When rescue came, it was almost an assault. The woman seized my arm and pulled me through the dark entryway into the courtyard. Up above there were lines strung from window to window, loaded with laundry. Wood was stacked in the courtyard; in an open workshop a saw screamed and shavings flew. The woman turned on the tap, washed my hand first, and then cupped both of hers and threw water in my face. I dried myself with a handkerchief.

“Get that one!” There were two pails standing by the faucet; she grabbed one and filled it. I took the other one, filled it, and followed her through the entryway. She swung her arm, the water sluiced down across the walk and washed the vomit into the gutter. Then she took my pail and sent a second wave of water across the walk.

When she straightened up, she saw I was crying. “Hey, kid,” she said, startled, “hey, kid”— and took me in her arms. I wasn’t much taller than she was, I could feel her breasts against my chest. I smelled the sourness of my own breath and felt her fresh sweat as she held me, and didn’t know where to look. I stopped crying.

1 There are two characters in this extract: the narrator, whose name is Michael, and the woman. **In the first two paragraphs only,** analyse how the writer uses language to create a sense of pity or sympathy for Michael

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2 Analyse how the writer uses language to characterise the woman. In your answer you will need to include specific language techniques as well as some analysis of their effects. (eg. “The writer uses the metaphor “Blah blah blah” to characterise the woman as being friendly and generous. This is effective because it suggests yada yada yada…”)

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**THE READER BERNHARD SCHLINK**

**CLOSE READING SKILLS – PRACTICE FOR PAPER 1**

**Extract 2: Part 2, Chapter** **3 (p93)**

We drove along Bergstrasse under blossoming fruit trees. We were bubbling over with exhilaration: finally we could put all our training into practice. We did not feel like mere spectators, or listeners, or recorders. Watching and listening and recording were our contributions to the exploration of history.

The court was in a turn-of-the-century building, but devoid of the gloomy pomposity so characteristic of court buildings of the time. The room that housed the assize court had a row of large windows down the left-hand side, with milky glass that blocked the view of the

outdoors but let in a great deal of light. The prosecutors sat in front of the windows, and against the bright spring and summer daylight they were no more than black silhouettes. The court, three judges in black robes and six selected local citizens, was in place at the head of the courtroom and on the right-hand side was the bench of defendants and their lawyers: there were so many of them that the extra chairs and tables stretched into the middle of the room in front of the public seats. Some of the defendants and their lawyers were sitting with their backs to us. One of them was Hanna. I did not recognize her until she was called, and she stood up and stepped forward. Of course I recognized the name as soon as I heard it: Hanna Schmitz. Then I also recognized the body, the head with the hair gathered in an unfamiliar knot, the neck, the broad back, and the strong arms. She held herself very straight, balanced on both feet. Her arms were relaxed at her sides. She wore a gray dress with short sleeves. I recognized her, but I felt nothing. Nothing at all.

**Extract 3: Part 2, Chapter 4 (p98)**

Only once did Hanna look at the spectators and over at me. Usually she was brought in by a guard and took her place and then kept her eyes fixed on the bench throughout the day’s proceedings. It appeared arrogant, as did the fact that she didn’t talk to the other defendants and almost never with her lawyer either. However, as the trial went on, the other defendants talked less among themselves too. When there were breaks in the proceedings, they stood with relatives and friends, and in the mornings they waved and called hello to them when they saw them in the public benches. During the breaks Hanna remained in her seat.

So I watched her from behind. I saw her head, her neck, her shoulders. I decoded her head, her neck, her shoulders. When she was being discussed, she held her head very erect. When she felt she was being unjustly treated, slandered, or attacked and she was struggling to respond, she rolled her shoulders forward and her neck swelled, showing the play of muscles. The objections were regularly overruled, and her shoulders regularly sank. She never shrugged, and she never shook her head. She was too keyed up to allow herself anything as casual as a shrug or a shake of the head. Nor did she allow herself to hold her head at an angle, or to let it fall, or to lean her chin on her hand. She sat as if frozen. It must have hurt to sit that way.

**Guiding questions:**

* How does Schlink emphasise Michael’s changing emotions in extract 1 alone.
* Compare Michael’s emotions in both extracts. How does Schlink emphasise how Michael’s emotions are slightly different in extract 2.

Write about 2 – 3 paragraphs for each question above.

Share your writing with Mr McG somehow (Eg. GoogleDoc, Airdrop, Email, hand in a bit of paper)

**Extract 4: Part 2, Chapter 10 (p131)**

I have rediscovered the place in the woods where Hanna’s secret became clear to me. There is nothing special about it now, nor was there anything special then, no strangely shaped tree or cliff, no unusual view of the city and the plain, nothing that would invite startling associations. In thinking about Hanna, going round and round in the same tracks week after week, one thought had split off, taken another direction, and finally produced its own conclusion. When it did so, it was done—it could have been anywhere, or at least anywhere the familiarity of the surroundings and the scenery allowed what was truly surprising, what didn’t come like a bolt from the blue, but had been growing inside myself, to be recognized and accepted. It happened on a path that climbed steeply up the mountain, crossed the road, passed a spring, and then wound under old, tall, dark trees and out into light underbrush.

Hanna could neither read nor write.

That was why she had had people read to her. That was why she had let me do all the writing and reading on our bicycle trip and why she had lost control that morning in the hotel when she found my note, realized I would assume she knew what it said, and was afraid she’d be exposed. That was why she had avoided being promoted by the streetcar company; as a conductor she could conceal her weakness, but it would have become obvious when she was being trained to become a driver. That was also why she had refused the promotion at Siemens and become a guard. That was why she had admitted to writing the report in order to escape a confrontation with an expert. Had she talked herself into a corner at the trial for the same reason? Because she couldn’t read the daughter’s book or the indictment, couldn’t see the openings that would allow her to build a defense, and thus could not prepare herself accordingly? Was that why she sent her chosen wards to Auschwitz? To silence them in case they had noticed something? And was that why she always chose the weak ones in the first place?

Was that why? I could understand that she was ashamed at not being able to read or write, and would rather drive me away than expose herself. I was no stranger to shame as the cause of behavior that was deviant or defensive, secretive or misleading or hurtful. But could Hanna’s shame at being illiterate be sufficient reason for her behavior at the trial or in the camp? To accept exposure as a criminal for fear of being exposed as an illiterate? To commit crimes to avoid the same thing?

How often I have asked myself these same questions, both then and since. If Hanna’s motive was fear of exposure—why opt for the horrible exposure as a criminal over the harmless exposure as an illiterate? Or did she believe she could escape exposure altogether? Was she simply stupid? And was she vain enough, and evil enough, to become a criminal simply to avoid exposure?

**Guiding question**

Analyse how Schlink emphasises that the narrator, Michael, is surprised as he discovers Hanna’s secret.

**Extract 5: Part 3, Chapter 6 (p186)**

I read the note and was filled with joy and jubilation. “She can write, she can write!” In these years I had read everything I could lay my hands on to do with illiteracy. I knew about the helplessness in everyday activities, finding one’s way or finding an address or choosing a meal in a restaurant, about how illiterates anxiously stick to prescribed patterns and familiar routines, about how much energy it takes to conceal one’s inability to read and write, energy lost to actual living. Illiteracy is dependence. By finding the courage to learn to read and write, Hanna had advanced from dependence to independence, a step towards liberation.

Then I looked at Hanna’s handwriting and saw how much energy and struggle the writing had cost her. I was proud of her. At the same time, I was sorry for her, sorry for her delayed and failed life, sorry for the delays and failures of life in general. I thought that if the right time gets missed, if one has refused or been refused something for too long, it’s too late, even if it is finally tackled with energy and received with joy. Or is there no such thing as “too late”? Is there only “late,” and is “late” always better than “never”? I don’t know.

After the first note came a steady stream of others. They were always only a few lines, a thank you, a wish to hear more of a particular author or to hear no more, a comment on an author or a poem or a story or a character in a novel, an observation about prison. “The forsythia is already in flower in the yard” or “I like the fact that there have been so many storms this summer” or “From my window I can see the birds flocking to fly south”—often it was Hanna’s note that first made me pay attention to the forsythia, the summer storms, or the flocks of birds. Her remarks about literature often landed astonishingly on the mark. “Schnitzler barks, Stefan Zweig is a dead dog” or “Keller needs a woman” or “Goethe’s poems are like tiny paintings in beautiful frames” or “Lenz must write on a typewriter.” Because she knew nothing about the authors, she assumed they were contemporaries, unless something indicated this was obviously impossible. I was astonished at how much older literature can actually be read as if it were contemporary; to anyone ignorant of history, it would be easy to see ways of life in earlier times simply as ways of life in foreign countries.

I never wrote to Hanna. But I kept reading to her. When I spent a year in America, I sent cassettes from there. When I was on vacation or was particularly busy, it might take longer for me to finish the next cassette; I never established a definite rhythm, but sent cassettes sometimes every week or two weeks, and sometimes only every three or four weeks. I didn’t worry that Hanna might not need my cassettes now that she had learned to read by herself. She could read as well. Reading aloud was my way of speaking to her, with her.

I kept all her notes. The handwriting changed. At first she forced the letters into the same slant and the right height and width. Once she had managed that, she became lighter and more confident. Her handwriting never became fluid, but it acquired something of the severe beauty that characterizes the writing of old people who have written little in their lives.

**Guiding question**

How does the writer emphasises that the narrator, Michael, is proud of Hanna’s achievement.