



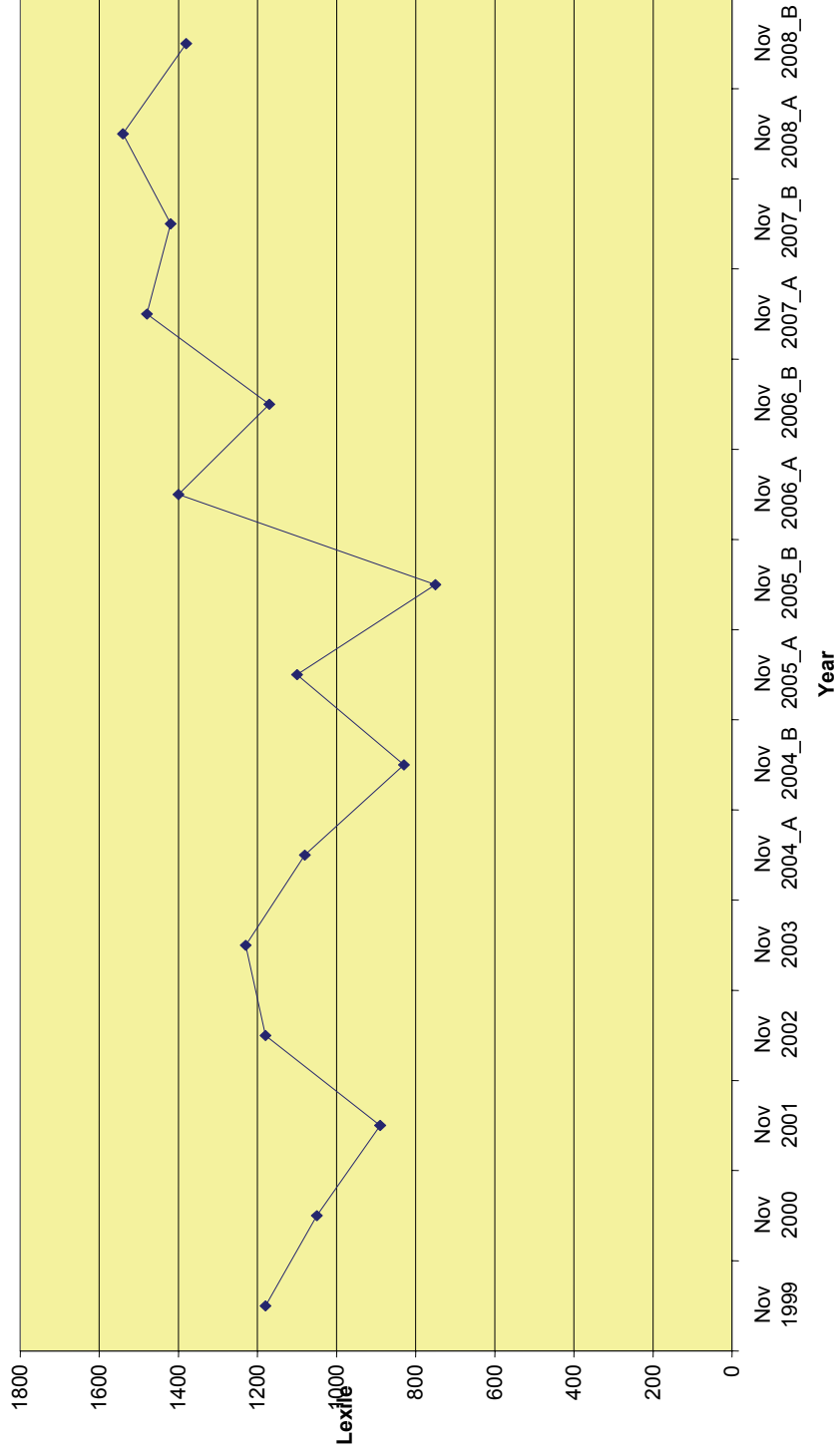
GCE O LEVEL English

Analysis of the Lexile measures for the GCE O level English Paper 2 Reading Comprehension passages indicate that students are required to read and respond to texts with measures of between **1200L** to **1450L**.

From the table and graph below, the level of reading proficiency required of students has been increasing in difficulty over the years.

GCE O Level English : Paper 2		
File	Lexile	Words
Nov 1999	1180	1267
Nov 2000	1050	1251
Nov 2001	890	1346
Nov 2002	1180	1261
Nov 2003	1230	1255
Nov 2004_A	1080	703
Nov 2004_B	830	583
Nov 2005_A	1100	695
Nov 2005_B	750	611
Nov 2006_A	1400	826
Nov 2006_B	1170	667
Nov 2007_A	1480	735
Nov 2007_B	1420	675
Nov 2008_A	1540	810
Nov 2008_B	1380	674

GCE O Level English Paper 2 Lexile Measures



Sample 1 : GCE O Level 2007, Paper 2 Passage 1
735 words, 1480L

Passage A

(In this passage, the author describes Ashoke's experience after a train accident and his family's support to help him through his traumatic ordeal. Unlike his family, Ashoke feels that the antidote to his trauma is one that is away from a place where tragedy struck.)

Ashoke can still remember their shouts; asking if anyone was alive. He remembers trying to shout back, unsuccessfully, his mouth emitting nothing but the faintest rasp. He remembers the sound of people half-dead around him, moaning and tapping on the walls of the train, whispering hoarsely for help, words that only those who were trapped and injured could possibly hear. Blood drenched his chest and the right arm of his shirt. He had been thrust partway out the window. He remembers being unable to see anything at all; for the first hours he thought that perhaps, like his grandfather whom he was on his way to visit, he'd gone blind. He remembers the acrid odour of flames, the buzzing of flies, children crying, the taste of dust and blood on his tongue. They were nowhere, somewhere in a field. Milling about them were villagers, police inspectors, a few doctors. He remembers believing he was dying, that perhaps he was already dead. He could feel his lower half of his body, and was so unaware of the **mangled** limbs of Ghosh that were draped over his legs. Eventually, he saw the cold, unfriendly blue of earliest morning, the moon and a few stars lingering in the sky. The pages of his book, which had been tossed from his hand, fluttered in two sections a few feet away from the train. The glare from a search lantern briefly caught the pages, momentarily distracting one of the rescuers. "Nothing here," Ashoke heard someone say. "Let's keep going."

But the lantern's light lingered, just long enough for Ashoke to raise his hand, a gesture that he believed would consume the small fragment of life within him. He was still clutching a single page of "The Overcoat," crumpled tightly in his fist, and when he raised his hand the wad of paper dropped from his fingers. "Wait!" he heard a voice cry out. "The fellow by that book. I saw him move."

He was pulled from the wreckage, placed on a stretcher, transported on another train to a hospital in Tatanagar. He had broken his pelvis, his right femur, and three of his ribs on the right side. For the next year of his life he lay flat on his back, ordered to keep as still as possible as the bones of his body healed. There was a risk that his right leg might be permanently paralysed. He was transferred to Calcutta Medical College, where two screws were put into his hips. By December he had returned to his parents's house in Alipore, carried through the courtyard and up the red clay stairs like a corpse, **hoisted** on the shoulder of his four brothers. Three times a day he was spoon-fed. He urinated and defecated into a tin pan. Doctors and visitors came and went. Even his blind grandfather from Jamshedpur paid a visit. His family had saved the newspaper account.

In the beginning, for most of the day, he had stared at his bedroom ceiling, at the three beige blades of fan churning at its centre, their edges grimy. He could hear the top edge of the calendar **scraping** against the wall behind him when the fan was on. If he moved his neck to the right he had a view of a window with a dusty bottle of Dettol on its ledge and, if the shutters were open, the concrete of the wall that surrounded the house, the pale brown geckos that scampered there. He listened to the constant parade of sounds outside, footsteps, bicycle bells, the incessant squawking of crows and of the horns of the cycle rickshaws in the lane so narrow that taxis could not fit. He heard the tube well at the corner being pumped into urns. Every evening at dusk he heard a conch shell being blown in the house next door to signal the hour for prayer. He could smell but not see the shimmering green sludge that collected in the open sewer. Life within the house continued. His father came and went from work, his brothers and sisters from school. His mother worked in the kitchen, checking in on him periodically, her lap stained with tumeric. Twice daily the maid twisted rags into buckets of water and wiped the floors.

During the day he was groggy from the painkillers. At night he dreamed either that he was still trapped inside the train or, worse, that the accident had never happened, that he was walking down a street, taking a bath, sitting cross-legged on the floor and eating a plate of food. And then he would wake up, coated in sweat, tears streaming down his face, convinced that he would never live to do such things again. Eventually, in an attempt to avoid his nightmares, he began to read, late at night, mind agile and clear. Yet he refused to read The Russians his grandfather had brought to his bedside, or any novels, for that matter. Those books, set in countries he had never seen, reminded him only of his confinement. Instead, he read his engineering books, trying his best to keep up with his courses, solving equations by flashlight. In those silent hours, he thought often of Ghosh. "Pack a pillow and blanket," he heard Ghosh say. He remembered the address Ghosh had written on a page of his diary, somewhere behind the tram depot in Tollygunge. Now it was the home of a widow, a fatherless son. Each day, to bolster his spirits, his family reminded him of the future, the day he would stand unassisted, walk across the room. It was for this, each day, that his father and mother prayed. For this, that his mother gave up consuming meat on Wednesdays. But as the months passed, Ashoke began to envision another sort of future. He imagined not only walking, but walking away, as far as he could from the place where he was born and in which he had nearly died. The following year, with the aid of a cane, he returned to college and graduated, and without telling his parents, applied to continue his engineering studies abroad. Only after he'd been accepted with a full fellowship, a newly issued passport in hand did he inform them of his plans. "But we already nearly lost you once," his bewildered father had protested. His siblings had pleaded and wept. His mother speechless, had refused food for three days.

Jhumpa Lahiri, 'The Namesake'

Passage B

World War II was coming to an end in the Philippines. In our small village in Botolan, Zamables, life was returning to something like normal.

One day in January 1945, Mother asked me to prepare our horse and caretela carriage so she could go see a doctor. While I was in the fields looking for the horse, I came upon several men chasing a Japanese soldier. Forgetting my task, I immediately joined the chase. After an hour, the hapless soldier was cornered by the river's edge. The mob showed no mercy. They hit him with clubs and stabbed him with bolos. After he died, they kicked his lifeless body, cursed him and spat on his face. The wounds of war – hatred, revenge, prejudice, ruthlessness – were spread raw before me.

I left my village in June 1945 to start a new life in Manila. I worked my way through university and joined the YMCA in 1950 as a youth programme officer. Five years later I got married. In 1959, I attended a three-month UNESCO-sponsored community development course in Mysore City, India. Participants came from Africa, Asia and Scandinavia. Entering the living quarters, I was **dismayed** to discover that my roommate was a Japanese man. Even before we were introduced to each other (his name was Kei Kiriake), I felt that a thick invisible barrier had sprung up between us. Unbidden, memories of war stirred in my mind.

I recalled the Japanese soldier who had looted our house. Finding no money or valuables, he grabbed my father and pressed the cutting edge of his bayonet to his neck. Mother fainted. In desperation, I recalled that rank-and-file soldiers feared the Kempetai, the Japanese military police. I told the soldier that I studied in the Japanese-run school and my teacher, Ino San, was an officer in the Kempetai. "I'll go see him now," I said, speaking the "Nippon-go" I had learned in school. The brutish **lout** lifted his bayonet. My gamble had worked.

Now, more than 15 years later, I could barely tell the difference between the soldier who almost killed my father and Kei – they were both Japanese and they both deserved my contempt. I was rude and inconsiderate to Kei, conveying my hatred in many different ways. Meeting each other, I wrinkled my nose, indicating that I didn't like his smell. I called him "Bowlegged San" to his face. One evening, Kei was writing a letter while I stayed on my bed reading. Our room was silent, as usual, but I was itching for a confrontation. "Can we talk?" I said.

He stopped writing and for the first time we faced each other squarely. I bluntly told him about the atrocities committed by his countrymen during their three-year occupation in the Philippines. My hate list was endless. Throughout my whole tirade, Kei maintained a respectful silence. When I was through, he took a bundle of pictures from his suitcase and laid them on the table. They were photos of Japanese survivors of the atomic bomb – people who were reduced to masses of peeling skin, protruding bones and horrible deformities of all types.

Kei told me that he was a 13-year-old boy in Hiroshima when the bomb was dropped. Unlike almost half of the city's population, he somehow survived the blast. Like most post-war Filipinos, I believed that we had a monopoly on the ills and misfortunes of war. After hearing Kei's story and seeing his photos, that myth was shattered – the Japanese had had their share of misfortunes too. I realized that there are no victors in war, only victims. The icy atmosphere in our room started to thaw.

One day while walking to catch a bus, Kei and I were caught by a heavy downpour. "You know, when I was a kid, I loved to run in the rain," I said. "Me too!" Kei replied. So we found ourselves laughing and running through the rain to the bus stop. Once seated inside the bus I couldn't help but think about our lost childhoods.

When World War II broke out, Kei was ten years old while I was 15. In a way, we became adults overnight. Kei worked in a factory manufacturing war material while I took on countless man-sized jobs just to survive. Suddenly, for a few minutes as we ran through that rain, we were kids again. Kei once asked if I had any "good" memories from the war. My last encounter with the enemy came to mind. It was February 1945 and the US invasion of Manila had started. One day some Japanese soldiers ordered me to harness our carabao to a wagon and drive to the highway. There I joined a hundred wagons overflowing with baggage; the Japanese had begun their retreat to the mountains.

When we stopped to rest, I decided to escape. I knew we would be executed when the Japanese reached their destination, lest we betray their position to the advancing Americans. I asked the guard if I could look for something to eat. "OK," he said. As I hurried through the bush, a snarling dog jumped out and blocked my path. The dog's handler, a Japanese soldier, seized me. Just then, Ino San, my former teacher, emerged from the bush. In a voice full of quiet authority, he told the soldier to let me go. Bowing low to Ino San, the way we used to do in class, I said solemnly, "Domo arigato, Sensei." In a voice filled with sadness, he replied, "Sayonara". I turned and made my dash to freedom.

When I finished my story, Kei said "Ino San more teacher than soldier. He is true Japanese."

*"Healing the Wounds of War" by Emilio R. Aquino
Reader's Digest November 2006*