

Nineteenth Century Non Fiction

GCSE English · Follows the national curriculum

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

1. Worked example

Summarise each paragraph in one modern sentence.

Step 1 · Paragraph 1

Eliza has finally travelled by train; it was uncomfortable but fast.

Step 2 · Paragraph 2

She expected a quiet beach but found it crowded with factory workers, which annoyed her.

Step 3 · Paragraph 3

Seeing a young mill-girl amazed by the sea made her ashamed of her bad temper.

Step 4 · Paragraph 4

She signs off affectionately to her sister.

Answer: Gist: a privileged woman's irritation at seaside crowds turns into self-criticism.

Check: No paragraph left unexplained.

2. Now try one with the steps

Unpack a long sentence: 'The carriage was close and the motion most disagreeable; yet in a little under three hours we had accomplished what my father, in his day, considered the work of two days.'

Step 1 · Split at the semicolon

Step 2 · Notice 'yet'

Step 3 · Modern version

Answer:

3. Practice

Show your working. The marks tell you how much is expected.

1. In what year is the letter dated? Write the year. [1]

2. Who is the letter written to? [1]

3. Roughly how many hours did the train journey take? Write the number. [1]

4. What does 'close' mean in 'The carriage was close'? [1]

5. What does 'thronged' mean? [1]

6. How old does Eliza think the mill-girl is? Write the number. [1]

7. Give one way to work out the meaning of an unfamiliar 19th-century word. [1]

8. What is Eliza's attitude to the day-trippers in paragraph 2? Give one quotation. [2]

9. Which two words signal the change in Eliza's attitude? [1]

10. Explain the irony in 'an appetite I can only call heroic'. [2]

11. Analyse the simile 'as though she had been shown the face of God'. [3]

12. What does the personification of the sea as 'grave and grey, keeping its own counsel' suggest about Eliza's memories? [2]

13. How does the structure of paragraph 3's last two sentences create meaning? [3]

14. Suggest one piece of 19th-century context that helps you understand this letter, and explain how. [2]

4. Before you hand it in

Panicking at the old-fashioned style and skipping the text.

Summarise each paragraph in one modern sentence before you analyse anything.

Assuming every word means what it means today.

Check the context: does the modern meaning make sense here?

Writing a history paragraph about Victorian railways.

Use context lightly to explain an attitude, then go straight back to the words.

Missing the writer's change of attitude.

Look for 'yet', 'but', 'and yet', 'I confess': they often mark the turn.