

**(i) From your reading of this extract, what impression of the old woman do you form? Refer to the text in support of your answer. (15)**

### TEXT 3

This text is adapted from a short story, *The Wintersongs*, in Kevin Barry's award-winning collection, *There are Little Kingdoms*. In this extract an old woman has a mysterious insight into the life of a young girl, Sarah, whom she meets on a train.

The train pulled into a country station and they piled on board with country groans and country wines. They carried raw November on the breath. They carried phones, food, magazines. They asked were the seats taken, for form's sake, but they didn't wait for an answer. The girl tried to project belligerence or even menace but the old woman sat opposite just the same. She was



The Leaving Cert Marking Scheme from 2011 suggests the following as possible points:

- friendly, inquisitive, annoying, lonely
- extrovert, distinctive appearance/speech
- wry sense of humour, observant, insightful, critical
- eccentric, mysterious, "slippery"

What follows is an analysis of the text to demonstrate the range of material available to the candidates in the exam.

- Each numbered bullet contains relevant text from which to form an answer to this question
- **Three or four** such references with analysis would suffice for full marks, depending on the development of the point.
- In fact one impression, perceptively argued and supported from the text, could be deemed sufficient for full marks, according to the marking scheme.
- Most students would choose three or four.
- The passage provides an abundance of possible points; it is never necessary to include all available points in an examination
- **THE COMMENTS IN GREEN ARE IMPRESSIONS FORMED FROM THE QUOTED TEXT.**

1. ...they piled on board with country groans and country wincings. They carried raw November on the breath. They carried phones, food, magazines. They asked were the seats taken, for form's sake, but they didn't wait for an answer.

**AGING AND STIFF, PRAGMATIC, SELF-SUFFICIENT, POLITE BUT PUSHY**

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2. The girl tried to project belligerence or even menace but the old woman sat opposite just the same.

**NOT TO BE INTIMIDATED, BRAVE, STUBBORN**

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3. She was bony and long and turkey-necked, ancient but with a fluency in the features, a face where age surfaces and then recedes again. She wasn't at all shy.

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION SUGGESTS AN OLD BIRD, EVEN A WITCH, YET A MYSTERIOUS AGELESSNESS AT THE SAME TIME...INTELLIGENT, EXPRESSIVE LOOKING, FORWARD IN MANNER**

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4. "Good morning, miss," she said. "It was touch and go whether I'd make it. Anyway I'm here and I'm in the one piece, just about. What time have we? Nine o'clock? What did you say your name was?"

**SENSE OF HUMOUR, SELF-DEPRICATING, INSENSITIVE TO THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE GIRL, CHATTY, PERSISTENT**

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5. The girl made a broad mime of adjusting her iPod, and assumed a dead-eyed glaze, but the old woman smiled and shuffled to rearrange her bony body for comfort.

**NOT TO BE INTIMIDATED, WILL NOT BE DEFLECTED FROM HER MISSION, PERSISTENT**

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6. "What age did you say you were? Hah! So you were born – I'll do the maths – you were born in 1988? The Seoul Olympics; I lost a kidney in 1988. Here, above, watch – the new road. This is the by-pass they're after putting down. Look! Look! They're to cut out Nenagh altogether. No harm."

**INTUITIVE, TOUGH OLD SURVIVOR, OPINIONATED, THICK SKINNED**

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7. She tried to put a fence up, but the old one was a talker.

**NOT TO BE PUT OFF**

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8. *"What if I told you," she said, "that I can see how it'll work out? What if I said it's written all over your face? Pay no attention. I'm rambling."*

**INTUITIVE, MAY HAVE OCCULT POWERS,  
SELF-DEPRECATING HUMOUR**

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9. *"I've been meaning to ask, actually, have you a boyfriend on the scene? No? Who are you trying to kid? With your beauty? No?"*

**MAINTAINS MONOLOGUE, INVESTIGATING, CURIOUS, INTUITIVE,  
OPINIONATED, CREATES AN ANSWER FROM THE GIRL'S EXPRESSION  
AND BODY LANGUAGE**

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10. *"Trees," said the old woman. "Trees! Calming, apparently! But they can give you a sore throat. Something in the sap, I think. Put me near trees and I find the throat goes septic."*

**A WACKY ECOLOGIST, WITCH LIKE IN HER NATURE LORE, COMPLAINS A  
BIT, ECCENTRIC**

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11. The old lady's face seemed to slip, her features came loose, disintegrated, and then rearranged. She was slippery. It was clammy on the train, and the old woman opened her coat and loosened the collar of her blouse and there was a cheap chain and cross on her neck – it flashed with a trinket menace. For a while she was silent; then she hummed to herself.

**ECCENTRIC, EXPRESSIVE FEATURES, WITCH LIKE AGAIN, RESTLESS,  
INTIMIDATING, RELIGIOUS**

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12. *"What about yourself?" she said. "I wouldn't go so far as to call you the chatty type. What's your own situation? Do you want me to take a guess at it?"*

She made as though to sketch in the air and drew broad strokes with bony fingers.

**PERSISTENT, SARCASTIC, HAS A WITCH LIKE AURA ABOUT HER**

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13. *"Let's see what we've got: the eyes are outside your head so you were up early; you got dressed in the dark, didn't you? The case was packed since last night; you had it hid under the stairs; you opened the front door, stepped out into the street and pulled the door after you. You'd be mistaken for angelic. But there's awful distance in you. There's coldness, isn't there, Sarah? You were going to get out as soon as you could and not a word to anyone about it."*

**IMPOSES HERSELF, INSIGHTFUL, HAS A SIXTH SENSE, IS SAGE LIKE**

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14. The world around withdrew from them. The woman reached across the table and took the girl's slate-cold hands in hers. There was no way to reverse from this, or to pull back.  
*"Listen," she said, "I have news for you. Brace yourself, child, because here it comes.  
Everything has a consequence. Years later you'll still have to answer the question: was the right thing done?"*

**POWERFUL, FORCEFUL, FORWARD, INTUITIVE**

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15. The old woman went out through the yards. She threw no shadow in the white sun. She went past the rusted trailers and in among the carriage-building sheds and vanished, left no trace. She became light, air, dust.

**GHOSTLY, WITCH-LIKE MYSTERIOUS.**