



GCSE

C700U20-1A



S18-C700U20-1A



ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 2
19th and 21st Century Non-Fiction Reading
and Transactional/Persuasive Writing

FRIDAY, 8 JUNE 2018 – MORNING

RESOURCE MATERIAL FOR USE WITH SECTION A

Iceland's erupting volcano

The volcano erupting in Iceland has become an instant tourist attraction. Tom Robbins travels by snowmobile and helicopter to see the show.

Just after midnight, two Saturdays ago, Haf Jonsson's baby daughter woke up crying. As he went to comfort her, the phone started to ring. Then his mobile went off, and then his wife's mobile began to ring too. "When I heard that, I knew all the calls would be telling me the volcano had started erupting," he said.

Haf's farm sits on the plains below the Eyjakull icecap and the volcano that lies beneath it. It hadn't erupted since 1823, but he knew that an eruption could melt the ice and send devastating flash floods down the mountain. "There was a heavy smell of sulphur in the air. I ran outside and saw the sky had turned red, then went back and told my wife, 'We're leaving, right now.'"

Thankfully, the floods never came and, after 24 hours, Haf's family was allowed to go home.

Shortly after the eruption, the tourists started arriving. I'd come with a British tour operator which operates a 'volcano hotline'. Travellers who sign up are called as soon as a volcano erupts and are offered a trip to see it.

On my trip I find myself speeding across the ice cap on a snowmobile, one of about 20, getting closer to a plume of smoke that marks the still-exploding volcano.

From a couple of miles away, we first catch sight of the crater, spewing fire into the darkening sky, and we stop to take photos. This is dramatic enough, but our guide motions at us to start up the snowmobiles again and we head closer. Suddenly the ice turns from white to ashen black, and the fiery crater is there before us, 500 metres away. The sight is mesmerising, but oddly familiar from films and TV – I have to remind myself this is for real. The sound is thrilling and unexpected. There is a succession of low booms as the lava explodes up 100 metres into the air, then comes crashing to earth. For me it is an unimaginable privilege to be in that breathtaking wilderness.



The crowd of onlookers is enthralled, the spectacle so beautiful that it's easy to forget the danger, but no one really knows what will happen next. Yesterday a new crack in the volcano opened up, and 50 tourists nearby had to be helicoptered to safety, unhurt but shocked. Locals are more concerned that the eruption may signal the reawakening of another, far more dangerous volcano, nearby. When Eyjakull erupted in the past, it was followed within a year by the eruption of Katla. Beneath Katla's five-mile-wide crater sits 250 square miles of packed ice. If it blows, the floods will wipe out farms, roads, and bridges, and the dust and ash blown into the sky could block aviation routes to Europe and the US.



After half an hour of watching the crater in the freezing cold we are collected by helicopter. From above, we can see the river of molten lava which snakes away for several miles, at one point forming a waterfall of molten lava. Beyond, a string of tiny lights marks the many 4x4s being driven up for a night-time view of the best fireworks display on earth.

Fifteen minutes later, we arrive back at our hotel, just in time for dinner. As we eat, the previous four hours almost seem like a strange dream, except for the reminder in the middle of the table – a shiny black chunk of lava, freshly collected from the bowels of the earth.

Tom Robbins