

EAE 0422 A		Sujet Jury	Sujet Candidat		Code Sujet	CLG 08
------------	--	------------	----------------	--	------------	--------

Your commentary should be focused on A.

A little English education can be a dangerous thing. Alsana's favourite example of this was the old tale of Lord Ellenborough, who, upon taking the Sind province from India, sent a telegram of only one word to Delhi: *peccavi*, a conjugated Latin verb, meaning *I have sinned*.

5 "The English are the only people," she would say with distaste, "who want to teach you and steal from you at the same time." Alsana's mistrust for the Chalfens was no more or less than that.

Clara agreed but for reasons that were closer to home: a family memory; an unforgotten trace of bad blood in the Bowdens. Her own
10 mother, when inside *her* mother (for if this story is to be told, we will have to put them all back inside each other like Russian dolls, Irie back in Clara, Clara back in Hortense, Hortense back in Ambrosia), was silent witness to what happens when all of a sudden an Englishman decides you need an education. For it had not been
15 enough for Captain Charlie Durham—recently posted to Jamaica—to impregnate his landlady's adolescent daughter one drunken evening in the Bowden larder, May 1906. He was not satisfied with simply taking her maidenhood. He had to *teach* her something as well.

20 "Me? He wan' teach *me*?" Ambrosia Bowden had placed her hand over the tiny bump that was Hortense and tried to look as innocent as possible. "Why he wan' teach me?"

"Tree times a week," replied her mother. "An' don' arks me why. But Lord knows, you could do wid some improvin'. Be tankful for gen'russity. Dere is not required whys and wherefores when a
25 hansum, upright English gentleman like Mr Durham wan' be gen'russ."

Even Ambrosia Bowden, a capricious, long-legged, maga village-child who had not seen a schoolroom in all of her fourteen years, knew this advice was mistaken. When an Englishman wants to be

30 generous, the *first* thing you ask is why, because there is always a reason.

"You still here, pickney? 'Im wan' see you. Don' let me spit pon de floor and make you get up dere before it dry!"

35 So Ambrosia Bowden, with Hortense inside her, had dashed up to the Captain's room and returned there three times a week thereafter for instruction. Letters, numbers, the Bible, English history, trigonometry—and when that was finished, when Ambrosia's mother was safely out of the house, anatomy, which was a longer lesson, given on top of the student as she lay on her back, giggling. Captain
40 Durham told her not to worry about the baby, he would do no damage to it. Captain Durham told her that their secret child would be the cleverest Negro boy in Jamaica.

As the months flicked by, Ambrosia learnt a lot of wonderful things from the handsome captain. He taught her how to read the trials of
45 Job and study the warnings of Revelation, to swing a cricket bat, to recite "Jerusalem." How to add up a column of numbers. How to decline a Latin noun. How to kiss a man's ear until he wept like a child. But mostly he taught her that she was no longer a maidservant, that her education had elevated her, that in her heart she was a lady,
50 though her daily chores remained unchanged. In here, in here, he liked to say pointing to somewhere beneath her breastbone, the exact spot, in fact, where she routinely rested her broom. *A maid no more, Ambrosia, a maid no more*, he liked to say, enjoying the pun.

And then one afternoon, when Hortense was five months unborn,
55 Ambrosia sprinted up the stairs in a very loose, disingenuous gingham dress, rapped on the door with one hand, and hid a bunch of English marigolds behind her back with the other. She wanted to surprise her lover with flowers she knew would remind him of home. She banged and banged and called and called. But he was gone.