

11+ PRACTICE PACK

OWL Tuition Test 3a

11+ English Complete Practice Pack

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Owl Tutors 11 + Entrance Examination

English Paper 3 A (Comprehension)

Total marks: 25

Time allowed:
5 minutes reading, then 40 mins writing

Information for parents:

This sample paper has been created for children who are embarking on the 11+ exam. The questions within the paper follow Level 4-5 of the National Curriculum and cover the majority of the KS2 curriculum.

There is a big variation in the level of difficulty amongst different schools' 11+ papers and this paper is designed to reflect the standard level of entry at 11+.

The twilight journey to Hampton Court had been necessary though supremely uncomfortable. Two oarsmen as opposed to one had pulled their blades through the still water of the Thames; the timing of their journey was totally reliant on the tides. The rising tide meant their journey was much faster than usual.

The Thames carried with it swift currents, flowing west, and therefore a journey to Hampton could, with the right tide and the right crew, sometimes, take only an hour and a half. An hour and a half of abject misery for all on board; the rowers had frozen extremities and their ceaseless endeavour was uncomfortably strenuous; the cocoon created for Cecil was just not warm enough.

His very inactivity encouraged the chill to crawl around the hides he hid under and slip through chinks in his covers. The cold chilled his very bones. Despite layers of sheepskin over his legs and around his body, two layers of gloves, one pair of thin pigskin and one pair of thick leather, the chill wind seemed to be able to find every gap and pierce every material.

The rowers were swathed in scarves and mufflers made of cotton and wool. Watching the oarsmen sweat; the steam rising off their bodies; vapour trailing from their open mouths; finding gaps in their swaddling like stew simmering in a covered pot; he marvelled at their industry. They moved like a pendulum, back and forth, their arms worked, rhythmically, they pulled the oars through the water in a reassuringly perfect synchronicity with hardly a splash

The oarsmen's hose were covered in horse-blankets and their doublets covered with a leather jerkin, which made him almost envious. The boatmen's eyes stared at the bank behind him. Every so often, they would turn their heads to check their progress.

If only state and crown could work so closely or so effectively together, if only the bishops and lords could row so uniformly, he mused. If only the factions at court could make such swift progress together, admittedly, they all rowed together but it tended to be in different directions.

From Remember the Fifth of November <https://www.michealfitzalanbooks.com>

Questions:

- 1) What do the following words mean? Blades, chinks and swaddling. (3 marks)
- 2) Where are the rowers and where are they heading? (2 marks)
- 3) How are the rowers helped and hindered? (3 marks)
- 4) What imagery is used to show how Cecil is protected from the elements? (2 marks)
- 5) Find an example of personification and say why it is effective? (2 marks)
- 6) Find an example of a simile, alliteration and onomatopoeia. (3 marks)
- 7) Taking the passage as a whole what two adjectives might describe this journey? (2 marks)
- 8) What do you think factions mean? (2 marks)
- 9) What is meant by the last sentence? (2 marks)
- 10) Continue the story, trying to use as much imagery or figurative language as you can. (4 marks)

Paper Notes: 11+ English Question Booklet (Test 3a)

Compiled by [SATs-Papers.co.uk](https://www.SATs-Papers.co.uk) to help you get the most from this paper.

Overview

This is an **Owl Tutors 11+ English comprehension paper**, designed to assess students preparing for secondary school entrance examinations in the **GL Assessment** style. The paper presents a literary extract from a historical novel and tests close reading, vocabulary knowledge, identification of literary techniques, and creative writing skills.

The passage describes a twilight river journey to Hampton Court in historical times, following a character named Cecil and two oarsmen rowing against the cold. Students must demonstrate understanding of context-specific vocabulary, locate and analyse figurative language including simile, personification and alliteration, and interpret the author's use of extended metaphor. The paper contains **10 questions worth 25 marks** and allows **5 minutes reading time followed by 40 minutes writing time**.

This paper is pitched at **Level 4-5 of the National Curriculum**, covering the majority of the Key Stage 2 English curriculum. It suits students in Year 6 practising for competitive grammar school or independent school entrance exams. The combination of technical language identification, inference and creative continuation makes it a comprehensive test of higher-level comprehension skills.

How this paper is organised

The paper opens with a substantial prose extract of approximately 300 words, taken from Remember the Fifth of November, a historical novel set during the Jacobean period. Students receive **5 minutes of reading time** before the **40-minute writing period** begins, allowing them to absorb the passage and plan their responses.

The **10 questions are worth 25 marks in total**, with marks ranging from 2 to 4 per question. Questions 1 to 9 test comprehension, vocabulary and literary analysis, whilst Question 10 is a creative writing task asking students to continue the story using figurative language. The mark allocation reflects increasing complexity, with vocabulary questions worth fewer marks and the creative continuation carrying the highest weighting.

The paper follows a structured progression from straightforward retrieval (location and destination) through analytical tasks (imagery, personification, sound devices) to higher-order interpretation (tone, inference of vocabulary from context, understanding metaphorical meaning). The final creative task synthesises all the techniques students

have identified in the passage, requiring them to demonstrate understanding through application.

Topics covered

- Reading comprehension of historical fiction extracts with period-appropriate vocabulary and complex sentence structures
- Context-dependent vocabulary interpretation, including archaic and technical terms such as 'blades' (oars), 'chinks' (gaps) and 'swaddling' (wrapped cloth)
- Identification and analysis of personification, particularly the depiction of cold as an active agent
- Recognition and explanation of simile, with focus on the comparison of rowers' movement to a pendulum
- Detection of alliteration and its effect on descriptive passages
- Identification of onomatopoeia in water and movement descriptions
- Inference of meaning from context, particularly understanding 'factions' as political groups with competing interests
- Analysis of extended metaphor, interpreting the comparison between rowing synchronicity and political cooperation
- Selection of appropriate adjectives to summarise tone and atmosphere across a complete passage
- Creative writing continuation using imagery, figurative language and historical narrative voice

How to use this paper for revision

- Read the passage twice during the 5-minute reading time: once for overall meaning, then again to highlight unfamiliar words and note literary techniques you recognise.
- When defining vocabulary in context (Question 1), consider both the literal meaning and how the word functions in this historical setting; 'blades' here refers to oars, not knives.
- For literary device questions, always quote the exact phrase from the text and explain why the technique is effective, not just what it is.
- In Question 9, the metaphor compares rowing to political cooperation; explain that whilst court factions work together, they pull in different directions, unlike the synchronised oarsmen.
- Practise identifying the 'big three' sound devices: **alliteration** (repeated initial consonants), **assonance** (repeated vowel sounds) and **onomatopoeia** (words that sound like their meaning, such as 'splash').
- For the creative continuation, maintain the historical tone and Cecil's perspective; use at least three different types of imagery (simile, metaphor, personification) and descriptive detail about the cold or the Thames.
- Budget approximately 3-4 minutes per question; save at least 10-12 minutes for the 4-mark creative writing task at the end.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Defining vocabulary words in isolation rather than considering their meaning within the historical passage; 'blades' means oars here, not weapons or cutting edges.
- Identifying a literary device correctly (e.g. 'like a pendulum' is a simile) but failing to explain why it is effective or what comparison it creates.
- Confusing personification with metaphor; personification specifically gives human qualities to non-human things, such as the chill 'crawling' around Cecil's hides.
- In Question 7, choosing adjectives that describe only one aspect (such as 'cold') rather than capturing the dual nature of the journey being both necessary and uncomfortable, or laborious yet swift.
- Misinterpreting 'factions' as a verb ('actions') rather than recognising it as a noun meaning political groups or parties with conflicting interests.
- Writing a creative continuation in modern language or switching to present tense, rather than maintaining the formal, descriptive past-tense narrative voice of the original.

Exam technique

Begin by using the 5 minutes of reading time strategically: read the passage once for overall understanding, then skim the questions to see what you will be asked. On your second read, underline or mentally note literary techniques (similes, personification, repeated sounds) and unfamiliar words, as these are likely to feature in the questions.

Tackle the questions in order, as they generally progress from easier retrieval to harder analysis. Questions 1 to 3 can be answered relatively quickly and build confidence. For questions asking you to 'find an example' (Questions 5 and 6), locate the technique first, then write your quotation and explanation together. Always use **quotation marks** around words or phrases lifted from the text.

Allocate roughly 10-12 minutes to Question 10, the creative writing task. Plan a short continuation (one or two paragraphs) that maintains the historical setting and tone, and consciously include at least three different types of figurative language: a simile, a metaphor, and personification of an element such as the wind or water. Quality matters more than length; a tightly written paragraph with varied imagery will score more highly than a long piece lacking technique. Re-read your creative writing if time permits, checking for spelling, punctuation and that your narrative voice matches the original passage.

What to revise alongside this paper

Students should practise identifying and explaining the full range of **figurative language** devices: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole and symbolism. Familiarity with these terms and the ability to explain their effect (not just name them) is essential for 11+ comprehension papers. Work through literary extracts from different periods, particularly Victorian and Jacobean fiction, to build confidence with older vocabulary and formal sentence structures.

Broaden your understanding of **sound devices** including alliteration, assonance, sibilance and onomatopoeia. Practise spotting these in poetry and prose, and learn to articulate why an author might use them (for example, harsh consonant sounds to convey discomfort, or liquid sounds to evoke flowing water). Revise how to write in a **historical narrative voice**, maintaining past tense, formal vocabulary and period-appropriate descriptions; this skill is tested in creative continuation tasks.

Finally, develop your **inference skills** by practising questions that ask what a word means from context, or what an author implies rather than states directly. Read widely in historical fiction (authors such as Leon Garfield, Rosemary Sutcliff or Geoffrey Trease) to encounter rich vocabulary and complex sentence structures similar to those in this passage.

Key terms

Personification, Simile, Alliteration, Onomatopoeia, Imagery, Figurative language, Metaphor, Inference, Context-dependent vocabulary, Tone, Historical narrative, Extended metaphor, Synchronicity, Narrative voice, Descriptive writing

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Answers:

- 1) The words have the following meanings: blades – oars, chinks – gaps, swaddling, clothes or covering.
- 2) The rowers are on the Thames heading for Hampton Court.
- 3) The rowers are helped by the direction of the tide; they are hindered by the weather, which affects their extremities or words to that effect.
- 4) The imagery to show how Cecil is protected uses the metaphor of a cocoon; he is like a pupa wrapped up. (Words to that effect that mention a caterpillar's life cycle: larva, pupation, cocoon).
- 5) 'The chill wind seemed to be able to find every gap and pierce every material is effective because it shows the power of the wind to make its way through layers of clothing.
- 6) An example of a simile is: 'like a stew simmering' (any other comparison with like or as...as); an example of an alliteration is 'cocoon created' (or any other repetition of a sound one after another); and an example of onomatopoeia is 'splash'.
- 7) The journey is cold, uncomfortable, necessary, important, and the rowers are determined. (Any combination of two of these ideas would be awarded two marks).
- 8) Factions are interest groups or groups of people with differing views or objectives. (Any answer that suggests difference or contrast).
- 9) The last sentence suggests that courtiers or interest groups do not work together or are pulling in a different direction to the one Cecil would like. (Accept any answer that has a focus on the idea of pulling in opposite directions or going different ways).
- 10) Award marks for inventiveness, imagination and the use of similes, alliteration, metaphor, senses, onomatopoeia and personification.

Answer-Key Notes: 11+ English Answers (Test 3a)

Compiled by [SATs-Papers.co.uk](https://www.SATs-Papers.co.uk) to help you mark this paper and learn from each answer.

How to use this answer key

This answer key rewards both literal comprehension and technical knowledge of literary devices. **Award marks exactly as the scheme describes:** where alternatives are listed ('any answer that suggests difference or contrast'), credit any reasonable variation. Distinguish between vocabulary errors (Q1, Q8) where the child simply did not know the word, and retrieval mistakes (Q2, Q3) where the answer was in the text but overlooked.

For the literary-device questions (Q4, Q5, Q6), check that the child has identified the correct feature *and* explained or quoted it accurately. Partial answers often show understanding without precision.

Use the worked examples below for the questions that most often trip up students: metaphor versus simile, personification, and interpreting figurative language in context. If your child lost marks on Q9 or Q10, those sections need targeted follow-up before the next paper.

Score interpretation

18 marks or above (72 per cent) suggests solid comprehension and confident handling of figurative language. A child at this level retrieves detail accurately, distinguishes literary devices, and infers meaning from metaphor. The creative continuation (Q10) probably showed imagination and at least two or three devices used correctly.

12–17 marks (48–68 per cent) is typical of a child who understands the passage but struggles with terminology or misses nuance. Vocabulary questions (Q1, Q8) and the metaphor in Q9 often account for lost marks. Revision should focus on learning the six core devices (simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration, onomatopoeia, imagery) with examples, then practising inference questions that ask 'what is meant by...?'

Below 12 marks suggests the text's vocabulary or sentence length posed a barrier. Before attempting similar papers, spend time reading historical or descriptive prose aloud, discussing unfamiliar words in context, and working through one literary device at a time with clear examples. Build confidence with shorter extracts first.

Worked examples

Vocabulary in context, Q1 and Q8

Context clues are everything. Both questions test whether the child can infer meaning from surrounding words rather than relying on prior knowledge. Markers reward any sensible paraphrase: 'blades' need not be defined as 'oars' if 'parts of the oar' or 'paddles' captures the idea. For 'factions', any answer hinting at division or competing groups scores the marks. Lost marks here usually mean the child guessed without re-reading the sentence.

Q1 – swaddling : Clothes or covering

The passage describes the rowers as 'swathed in scarves and mufflers' and later mentions 'gaps in their swaddling'. **The repetition of wrapping and covering** makes the meaning clear even if the child has never met the word before. Answers such as 'wrapping', 'layers', or 'cloth worn for warmth' all score full marks.

Q8 : Interest groups or groups with differing views

The final paragraph contrasts the rowers' perfect synchronicity with the factions at court, who 'rowed together but it tended to be in different directions'. **The opposition between unity and division is the key.** Any answer mentioning disagreement, rival groups, or conflicting aims earns the marks; a dictionary definition is not required.

Imagery and literary devices, Q4–6

Q4 and Q5 ask the child to identify a device *and* explain its effect. Naming the device alone earns only one mark. **The explanation must show understanding:** for the cocoon metaphor, merely writing 'wrapped up' is too vague, but 'protected like a pupa' or 'surrounded and insulated' scores full marks. For Q6, accuracy matters: 'splash' is onomatopoeia because it mimics sound, not because it is descriptive. Many children confuse alliteration (repeated initial sounds) with rhyme or repetition of whole words.

Q4 : Metaphor of a cocoon; like a pupa wrapped up

The passage says 'the cocoon created for Cecil' without stating that it is literally a cocoon. **This is metaphor, not simile**, because there is no 'like' or 'as'. The comparison to a caterpillar's life cycle (larva, pupa, cocoon) shows that Cecil is enclosed and protected, waiting for something to emerge. Answers that mention wrapping or insulation without the life-cycle link score one mark.

Q5 : 'The chill wind seemed to be able to find every gap and pierce every material'

Personification gives the wind human intention and ability. The wind does not literally 'find' gaps or 'pierce' cloth; these verbs suggest deliberate action, making the cold feel like an active enemy. The answer is effective because it emphasises how relentless and invasive the cold is, despite Cecil's many layers. Simply quoting the line earns one mark; explaining the effect of the human verbs earns the second.

Q6 – alliteration : 'Cocoon created' (or other repeated consonant sound)

Alliteration is the **repetition of the same sound at the start of nearby words**. 'Cocoon created' repeats the hard 'c' (or 'k') sound. Other examples in the passage include 'chill... chilled', 'swathed in scarves', and 'synchronicity... splash'. A common mistake is to quote 'perfectly perfect' or similar, which is repetition but not alliteration because the whole word repeats, not just the initial sound.

Inference and interpretation, Q7 and Q9

These questions test whether the child can synthesise information and read between the lines. Q7 asks for adjectives *supported by the whole passage*, not just one sentence: 'cold' is justified by multiple references to wind, frozen extremities, and insufficient coverings. **Q9 is the hardest question on the paper** because it requires understanding a political metaphor. The child must connect the literal image (rowers working in sync) to the figurative meaning (courtiers working at cross purposes). Many children paraphrase the sentence without explaining the underlying comparison.

Q7 : Cold, uncomfortable (or necessary, important, determined)

'Cold' is justified by 'frozen extremities', 'chill wind', and layers of coverings that fail to keep Cecil warm. 'Uncomfortable' is supported by 'abject misery' and the rowers' 'uncomfortably strenuous' work. **Any two adjectives that reflect the passage's dominant tone earn full marks.** 'Determined' scores if the child cites the rowers' 'ceaseless endeavour' or the fact that the journey was 'necessary' despite the hardship.

Q9 : Courtiers do not work together; they pull in different directions

The sentence reads, 'they all rowed together but it tended to be in different directions'. Cecil is reflecting that unlike the oarsmen, whose perfect synchronicity drives the boat forward, **the factions at court work against one another even when ostensibly cooperating.** The rowing metaphor extends through the final paragraph. Answers that mention disunity, conflicting aims, or lack of coordination all score the marks.

Creative writing, Q10

Four marks for a short continuation is generous if the child uses figurative language well.

Markers reward variety and accuracy: a response with one simile, one example of personification, and sensory detail (sight, sound, cold) will score higher than a longer piece with no devices or devices misapplied. The narrative need not be sophisticated; the focus is on technique. A common mistake is to write vivid description without any identifiable literary device, which may earn one or two marks for imagination but misses the question's core requirement.

Q10 example response : As they rounded the bend, Hampton Court loomed like a sleeping giant in the mist. The palace's chimneys pierced the sky, and the oars whispered through the water. Cecil's breath hung in the air, a ghostly cloud that vanished as quickly as it formed.

This response earns full marks because it includes: **simile** ('like a sleeping giant'), **personification** ('oars whispered', 'chimneys pierced'), and **imagery** appealing to sight ('ghostly cloud') and sound. The writing continues the tone of the passage and uses the same historical setting. Even a shorter response scores well if two or three devices are present and correctly deployed.

Next steps

After marking, sit with your child and **revisit every question where marks were lost.** For vocabulary errors (Q1, Q8), model how to use context: read the sentence aloud, cover the difficult word, and ask what word would make sense. For literary-device questions, create a reference sheet with one clear example of each device from this passage, then hunt for the same devices in a new text.

If the score was below 15, work through one or two similar comprehension passages together before attempting another timed paper: read aloud, discuss unfamiliar words, and practise finding one example of each device. If the score was above 18, focus on inference and extended writing. Choose passages with richer figurative language (poetry, historical fiction, or descriptive non-fiction) and practise the 'what is meant by...?' style of question, which tests interpretation rather than retrieval.

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