

11+ PRACTICE PACK

OWL Tuition Test 4a

11+ English Complete Practice Pack

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Owl Tutors 11 + Entrance Examination

English Paper 4 A (Comprehension)

Total marks: 25

Time allowed:

5 minutes reading, then 40 mins writing

Full name:

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The Woman in Black

At first all seemed very quiet, very still, and I wondered why I had awoken. Then, with a missed heartbeat, I realized that Spider was up and standing at the door. Every hair of her body was on end, her ears were pricked, her tail erect, the whole of her tense, as if ready to spring. And she was emitting a soft, low growl from deep in her throat. I sat up paralysed, frozen in the bed, conscious only of the dog and the prickling of my own skin and of what suddenly seemed a different kind of silence, ominous and dreadful.

And then, from somewhere within the depths of the house – but somewhere not very far from the room in which I was – I heard a noise. It was a faint noise, and, strain my ears as I might, I could not make out exactly what it was. It was a sound like a regular yet intermittent bump or rumble. Nothing else happened. There were no footsteps, no creaking floorboards, the air was absolutely still, the wind did not moan through the casement. Only the muffled noise went on and the dog continued to stand, bristling at the door, now putting her nose to the gap at the bottom and snuffling along, now taking a pace backwards, head cocked, and, like me, listening, listening. And, every so often, she growled again.

In the end, I suppose because nothing else happened and because I did have the dog to take with me, I managed to get out of bed, although I was shaken and my heartbeat uncomfortably fast within me. But it took some time for me to find sufficient reserves of courage to enable me to open the bedroom door and stand out in the dark corridor. The moment I did so, Spider shot ahead and I heard her padding about, sniffing intently at every closed door, still growling and grumbling down in her throat.

After a while, I heard the odd sound again. It seemed to be coming from along the passage to my left, at the far end. But it was still quite impossible to identify. Very cautiously, listening, hardly breathing, I ventured a few steps in that direction. Spider went ahead of me. The passage

led only to three other bedrooms on either side and, one by one, regaining my nerve as I went, I opened them and looked inside each one. Nothing, only heavy old furniture and empty unmade beds and, in the rooms at the back of the house, moonlight. Down below me, on the ground floor of the house, silence, a seething, blanketing, almost tangible silence, and a musty darkness, thick as felt.

And then I reached the door at the very end of the passage. Spider was there before me and her body, as she sniffed beneath it, went rigid, her growling grew louder. I put my hand on her collar, stroked the rough, short hair, as much for my own reassurance as for hers. I could feel the tension in her limbs and body and it answered to my own.

My throat felt constricted and dry and I had begun to shiver. There was something in that room and I could not get to it, nor would I dare to, if I were able.

By Susan Hill

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Questions and answers to follow.

Questions

- 1) Who is Spider? (1 mark)
- 2) What is Spider doing? (2 marks)
- 3) How does the narrator describe the noise? (2 marks)
- 4) How would you describe the atmosphere in the room? (Use your own words.) (3 marks)
- 5) Find three phrases where the writer is building tension? (3 marks)
- 6) Explain one example of sensory language. How does it make the writing more interesting? (3 marks)
- 7) Why does the narrator go out into the corridor? (2 marks)
- 8) Use the following quotation to explain how the narrator feels at the end of the passage. (1 mark)

'My throat felt constricted and dry and I had begun to shiver.'
- 9) Look at the last sentence of the extract. Explain how a phrase in this sentence makes you feel. (2 marks)
- 10) Think about what you have learnt so far. What do you think that the narrator will find if they open the door? (1 mark)
- 11) Carry on the narrative using as much imagery as you can. (5)

Paper Notes: 11+ English Question Booklet (Test 4a)

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+ comprehension paper designed for students preparing for **selective school entrance examinations** at Year 7 entry. The paper focuses on close reading, textual analysis, and creative writing skills through a single extended passage from **Susan Hill's gothic novel 'The Woman in Black'**.

The test awards **25 marks** and allows **5 minutes reading time** followed by **40 minutes writing time**. Students must demonstrate their ability to retrieve information, analyse language techniques (particularly sensory description and tension-building), and respond creatively by continuing the narrative in the same gothic style.

The paper suits students working at or towards **11+ standard** who need practice with literary comprehension under timed conditions. The extract is challenging but accessible, requiring students to infer meaning from atmospheric description and to articulate their own emotional response to suspenseful writing. The final creative task (worth 5 marks) demands familiarity with imagery and narrative voice.

How this paper is organised

The paper opens with **11 comprehension questions** ranging from 1 to 5 marks each, totalling 25 marks. Questions 1 to 3 test basic retrieval (identifying Spider as the dog, describing her behaviour, and locating descriptive phrases about the noise). Questions 4 to 6 require **deeper language analysis**: explaining atmosphere in your own words, finding three tension-building phrases, and explaining the effect of sensory language.

Questions 7 and 8 probe motivation and feeling, asking why the narrator ventures into the corridor and how a quotation reveals his emotional state. Questions 9 and 10 demand **personal response and prediction**, asking how a phrase makes you feel and what might be behind the door.

Question 11 is a **creative writing task** worth 5 marks. Students must continue the narrative using as much imagery as possible, maintaining the gothic tone and suspenseful pacing established by Susan Hill. This tests both comprehension of style and the ability to produce original writing under exam conditions.

Topics covered

- Close reading of gothic fiction, specifically a suspenseful extract from Susan Hill's 'The Woman in Black'
- Retrieval of explicit information (character identification, actions, descriptive details)
- Inference and deduction about character motivation and emotional state
- Analysis of how writers build tension through sentence structure, repetition, and pacing
- Identification and explanation of sensory language (touch, sound, sight) and its effect on the reader
- Use of own words to describe atmosphere and tone in literary prose
- Personal response to specific phrases and their emotional impact
- Prediction based on narrative clues and understanding of genre conventions
- Creative narrative writing that mirrors the style, tone, and imagery of a given extract
- Understanding of gothic literary devices including foreshadowing, pathetic fallacy, and suspense

How to use this paper for revision

- Read the passage twice during the 5-minute reading time: once for general understanding, then again to identify key moments of tension and sensory detail.
- Underline or note phrases that describe atmosphere, sound, or the dog's behaviour so you can locate evidence quickly when answering questions 2, 3, and 5.
- For questions asking 'in your own words', practise paraphrasing rather than lifting phrases directly from the text; examiners want to see you understand meaning.
- When analysing language effects (question 6), always explain both what the technique is and how it makes the reader feel or imagine the scene more vividly.
- For the creative writing task (question 11), spend 2 minutes planning your continuation: decide whether to reveal what is behind the door or maintain suspense, and list three or four images you will include.
- Practise writing gothic descriptions at home using all five senses and short, sharp sentences to mimic Hill's tension-building style.
- Look up any unfamiliar vocabulary from the passage (casement, tangible, constricted) and use a similar level of sophisticated word choice in your own narrative.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Copying phrases word-for-word from the passage when the question asks for 'your own words' (question 4), which loses marks for lack of understanding.
- Listing three phrases for question 5 without explaining how each one builds tension; quotation alone is not enough.
- Choosing an example of sensory language (question 6) but only naming it (e.g. 'this is a simile') without explaining the effect on the reader's imagination.
- Writing a vague or generalised answer to question 8 (e.g. 'he feels scared') rather than using the specific quotation to describe physical fear symptoms.
- Rushing the creative writing task (question 11) and producing a brief, flat continuation with no descriptive detail or imagery, losing easy marks.
- Breaking the gothic tone in question 11 by introducing modern dialogue, humour, or anti-climactic explanations instead of sustaining suspense.

Exam technique

Allocate your 40 minutes carefully: aim to spend roughly **25 minutes on questions 1 to 10** and **15 minutes on question 11**. The short-answer questions (1 to 3 marks) should take 2 to 4 minutes each; longer analytical questions (question 6) may need 5 minutes. Write in complete sentences even for 1-mark answers, and always refer to the text with quotations or close paraphrases.

For **language analysis questions** (5, 6, 9), use the P.E.E. structure: point, evidence (quotation), explanation of effect. Examiners reward students who can articulate why a technique works, not just identify it. If a question is worth 3 marks, aim to make three distinct points or develop one point in depth.

In **question 11**, plan before you write. Decide on your narrative direction (reveal or withhold the threat), list sensory images you will include, and check your opening sentence mirrors Hill's style (perhaps starting with a short, tense fragment or a description of the door opening). Write one or two substantial paragraphs rather than rushing through five scrappy sentences. Leave 2 minutes to re-read your creative response and correct obvious spelling or punctuation errors.

What to revise alongside this paper

Students preparing for this paper should also revise **other gothic or suspense extracts** (try short passages from Poe, Shelley's 'Frankenstein', or Brontë's 'Jane Eyre') to familiarise themselves with the conventions of the genre: isolated settings, heightened senses, ambiguous threats, and pathetic fallacy. Practise identifying and explaining a

range of **language devices** including simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration, and repetition, as 11+ papers often ask for similar analytical tasks.

Work on **creative writing in different voices and genres**. Try continuing extracts in the same style (matching tone, sentence length, and vocabulary level) as well as writing original suspenseful openings. Build vocabulary lists of sophisticated adjectives and verbs associated with fear, darkness, and silence. Finally, revise **inference and deduction skills** by answering 'why' and 'how does the writer make you feel' questions on a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts, as these higher-order comprehension skills underpin many 11+ English papers.

Key terms

Tension, Atmosphere, Sensory language, Gothic fiction, Imagery, Inference, Quotation, Narrative voice, Simile, Metaphor, Personification, Foreshadowing, Suspense, Textual evidence, Creative continuation

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Answers

- 1) Spider is the narrator's dog. (1)
- 2) Spider is growling at the door because they want to leave the room / because they want to investigate the noise. (2)
- 3) The narrator describes the noise to be faint and muffled. Other acceptable answers are regular / intermittent bump or rumble. (2)
- 4) The atmosphere in the room is strange and tense with the feeling that something scary is about to happen. Any similar answer that engages with the sense of tension. (3)
- 5) Tension is built by the writer using the following phrases: 'I sat up paralysed, frozen in the bed', 'And, every so often, she growled again', 'After a while, I heard the odd sound again.' Any phrases that show an understanding that the dog, the silence and the narrator's actions are being used to create tension. (3)
- 6) The sensory language in 'a musty darkness, thick as felt,' makes the language more interesting because it helps us feel how heavy the darkness is. Accept any other example of sensory language with an explanation. (3)
- 7) The narrator goes out into the corridor because she has the dog with her, and she wants to investigate the sound. (2)
- 8) The quotation shows us that the narrator feels fearful of what is behind the door. (1)

- 9) The phrase, 'there was something in that room', makes me feel a strong sense of dread for what the narrator might discover. (2)

- 10) Award any responses that focus on the silence or the thing making the sound. (1)

- 11) In the continuation award one mark for similes, alliteration, metaphors, senses, onomatopoeia and personification. (5)

Answer-Key Notes: 11+ English Answers (Test 4a)

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

Use the mark scheme to score each answer, then compare the student's language and reasoning with the model answers provided. Many questions in this paper reward understanding of atmosphere and technique rather than simple retrieval, so a child may have grasped the story but failed to articulate **how the writer creates tension**.

Distinguish between misreadings of the text (a comprehension gap) and responses that show understanding but lack the precise terminology or detail the mark scheme requires. If a student writes 'the room feels creepy' for Q4 but does not mention tension or foreboding, they have understood the mood but not expressed it in exam language.

The worked examples below explain why certain quotations, descriptive phrases and inferences earn marks. Refer to them when a student's answer is close but incomplete, so you can identify exactly which element was missing.

Score interpretation

This 25-mark paper tests close reading, quotation selection, language analysis and creative writing. Questions 1–3 are retrieval (5 marks total); questions 4–9 test inference, atmosphere and reader response (16 marks); questions 10–11 are predictive and creative (6 marks). A score below 12 suggests the student struggles to move beyond literal comprehension or cannot identify how a writer builds mood.

Between 13 and 19 marks indicates solid understanding of the extract but weaker explanations of technique or personal response. These students often identify the right quotations (Q5) but do not say **why those phrases build tension**. Check whether marks were lost on the explanation questions (Q6, Q9) or the creative continuation (Q11).

A score of 20 or above shows confident analysis and the ability to write about effects on the reader. Students in this band usually lose marks on Q11, where the rubric awards one mark per device and many children use repetition (for example, three similes but no personification). Encourage variety in imagery to secure all five marks.

Worked examples

Retrieval and inference, Q1-3

These early questions reward careful reading and the ability to synthesise details from across the first two paragraphs. Q3 is a common stumbling block because the mark scheme accepts **several synonyms** (faint, muffled, regular, intermittent, bump, rumble). Students who write only 'quiet' or 'strange' have not quoted or paraphrased the text closely enough.

Q2 : Spider is growling at the door because they want to leave the room / because they want to investigate the noise.

The text says Spider is 'standing at the door' with 'every hair... on end' and 'emitting a soft, low growl'. The dog's body language (tense, alert) shows curiosity or alarm, not aggression. Answers must link the growling to **either wanting to leave or wanting to investigate**; saying only 'she is scared' does not explain the behaviour at the door.

Q3 : Faint and muffled. Also accept regular / intermittent bump or rumble.

The passage describes the noise as 'faint', 'muffled', 'regular yet intermittent' and 'like a... bump or rumble'. Any two of these adjectives or nouns earn the marks. Students who write 'scary' or 'mysterious' are describing the **effect** rather than the sound itself, and score zero unless they also include a word from the text.

Atmosphere and tension, Q4-5

Q4 awards three marks for describing atmosphere **in the student's own words**, so direct quotation scores nothing. The mark scheme wants 'strange', 'tense' and a sense of imminent fear. Q5 asks for three phrases that build tension; many students quote correctly but do not say *why* each phrase works. The mark scheme accepts any quotations that reference the dog, the silence or the narrator's paralysis.

Q4 : Strange and tense with the feeling that something scary is about to happen.

The question asks students to **describe the atmosphere using their own words**. Copying 'ominous and dreadful' from the text earns no credit. The model answer captures the unease (strange), the physical and emotional strain (tense) and the anticipation of danger (something scary is about to happen). Answers that say only 'creepy' or 'dark' are too vague and score one mark at most.

Q5 : 'I sat up paralysed, frozen in the bed', 'And, every so often, she growled again', 'After a while, I heard the odd sound again.'

Each phrase shows a different technique: the narrator's physical paralysis conveys fear; the dog's repeated growling sustains unease; the return of the sound after silence creates a pattern of dread. Students may choose other quotations (for example, 'ominous and dreadful', 'hardly breathing') provided they explain that the writer uses **the dog, silence or the narrator's reactions** to heighten tension.

Language analysis, Q6

This three-mark question requires students to identify sensory language, quote it and explain its effect. The model answer analyses 'a musty darkness, thick as felt' by noting that 'thick as felt' is a simile that makes the darkness feel heavy and suffocating. Many students will quote correctly but write only 'it makes it more descriptive', which is too general. The explanation must say **what the reader feels or imagines** because of the language choice.

Q6 : 'A musty darkness, thick as felt' helps us feel how heavy the darkness is.

The simile 'thick as felt' compares darkness (usually insubstantial) to a heavy fabric, so the reader imagines air that is **dense and oppressive**. 'Musty' adds smell, reinforcing the sense of an old, enclosed space. Students who write 'it is sensory because it uses the senses' have not explained the *effect*. The mark scheme wants: quotation (1 mark), identification of the device or sense (1 mark), explanation of effect (1 mark).

Inference and reader response, Q7–9

Q7 tests whether students can infer motive from action. The narrator leaves the bedroom because she has the dog for company and wants to investigate. Answers that omit either reason score only one mark. Q8 and Q9 ask students to explain how a quotation reveals feeling or makes the reader feel something. These are **personal-response questions**, so the mark scheme accepts any reasonable answer provided it references fear, dread or apprehension.

Q7 : She has the dog with her, and she wants to investigate the sound.

The text says 'I suppose because nothing else happened and because I did have the dog to take with me, I managed to get out of bed'. The narrator's courage depends on **two conditions**: Spider's presence (companionship and protection) and the need to identify the noise. Writing only 'she is brave' or 'she is curious' misses the role of the dog.

Q9 : The phrase 'there was something in that room' makes me feel a strong sense of dread for what the narrator might discover.

The vague noun 'something' (rather than a specific creature or person) forces the reader to imagine the worst. The model answer names the emotion ('dread') and explains that the **unknown threat** is more frightening than a known one. Students who write 'it makes me feel scared' without saying *why* score one mark instead of two.

Prediction and creative writing, Q10–11

Q10 is a one-mark prediction, accepting any answer that focuses on the silence or the source of the noise. Q11 awards one mark per literary device (similes, alliteration, metaphors, senses, onomatopoeia, personification) up to five marks. Many students will use **the same device repeatedly** and lose marks. Encourage a checklist approach: one simile, one example of alliteration, one appeal to the senses, and so on.

Q11 : One mark each for similes, alliteration, metaphors, senses, onomatopoeia and personification (maximum 5 marks).

The mark scheme rewards **variety of technique**, not quality of story. A continuation that uses three similes ('as cold as ice', 'like a shadow', 'soft as velvet') but no other devices scores only one mark. To earn full marks, the student must demonstrate range: for example, a simile ('the door creaked like a wounded animal'), alliteration ('slowly, silently'), a sensory detail ('the air tasted metallic'), onomatopoeia ('thud') and personification ('the darkness wrapped around me'). Mark generously if a device is recognisable, even if the writing is otherwise weak.

Next steps

After marking, ask the student to revisit any question where they scored one mark out of two or three. These partial answers show understanding but lack detail or terminology. For questions 4–6 and 9, practise **explaining effects in two sentences**: one to name the technique or feeling, one to say why it works. Use other Susan Hill extracts or similar ghost-story passages to build confidence in atmospheric analysis.

If the score is below 15, focus on the difference between retrieval (what the text says) and inference (what the text implies). If the score is above 20, challenge the student to write a second continuation for Q11 using the five devices they did not use the first time, then compare both versions. This reinforces the principle that variety of technique is as important as narrative coherence in creative tasks set within a comprehension paper.

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