

13+ PAST PAPER PACK

Oundle School 13+ English 2023

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School

EXAMINATION PAPER
Non-Common Entrance 2023
Third Form entry

English

Time allowed: 1 hour

Name: _____

Instructions

- Dictionaries are not allowed.
 - Answer on lined paper. Write your name clearly at the top of each sheet of paper that you use.
 - Answer ALL the questions in Section A. Choose ONE question from Section B. You should divide your time equally between both sections.
 - You are expected to write clearly and accurately throughout each of your answers. You should leave some time towards the end of the examination to check your work carefully.
 - The maximum number of marks for this paper is 50.
-

SECTION A: COMPREHENSION

You should spend 30 minutes on this section

In the passage below, the writer shares her childhood memories of moving to a remote house beside a river near the town of Laugharne, in Wales, with her mother and father. Her father is Dylan Thomas, a famous poet. Read the passage and then answer the questions that follow. Leave yourself enough time to answer the last question in full detail.

We were met at the station by Billy Williams. My father, Dylan, my mother, Caitlin, and I piled in to his family taxi with our suitcases and belongings. The taxi took us to the path that led to the Boat House. At the top of the path, by an old iron gate, a clump of daisies radiated their whiteness and, although we were driving past, time seemed to stop. The pathway was too narrow for a car so we carried our bags over the uneven surface while we looked over the low cliff wall at the sand and the water beyond. The overhanging bushes and hanging plants clung to the cliff-face like flags waving a greeting. We walked, laden with bags and books, along the last stretch of the path to our new home, called the Boat House.

It looked heavenly: a place to explore, to run around, where we would be living forever. It had balconies, stepped gardens, a large boat shed and a wall protecting us from the wilds of the friendly estuary beyond. We had fallen upon paradise. As we were settling in, my father wrote to Margaret Taylor, who had arranged for the place, that, 'this is it: the place, the house, the workroom, the time,' and that he could never thank her enough. 'I shall write in this water and tree room on the cliff, every word will be my thanks to you ...'.

In my memory it hardly ever rained that season. From the balcony that ran around the cottage like a midriff*, on two sides of the house, I looked at the river and beyond the view of Laugharne. There was sun on the water.

.....

My mother and I often went on walks starting along the cliffwalk, the trees a dark arch overhead with light flickering in long, thin tongues through the branches. Through the trees you could see the sands below whipped into narrow ridges and imagine water serpents wandering across them. The foxgloves and ferns grew down the cliff and I longed to run down headlong to the shore but couldn't because my mother was always striding ahead, with our dog Mably biting at our heels. I could only just keep up with her, an Olympic-level walker who only just avoided being classed as a runner. Emerging from the untidy trees we climbed over walls and barbed wire fences, to fields of green never seen since. In my memory, the fields are full of primroses and a few rogue daffodils.

As we neared the farm, ducks and geese wandered free across the sloping farmyard. But as we approached Mably, to tie a piece of string on his leather collar, he would jump up. 'That annoying dog,' mother said without passion. She never called him by his name; sometimes he was 'disgusting' or 'vile'. He was a dog who never kept still. I loved him and his brown, white and black patches; he looked the way a dog should look.

We passed the factory and walked briskly towards the town. We could see the high walls of the castle coming towards us as we walked besides the grey expanse of mud and sand, towards the humming pubs and shops. Ignoring the sweet shop, Mother headed for the Cross House Inn, a whitewashed building standing on its own. 'Just saying a word to Mr Crossmouse, see you in a minute.'

I waited outside, looking around for someone to play with. Mably sat down, turning his head from side to side. I looked towards the bus stop, but only boring people waited there. Mr Crossmouse, the landlord, was more a rat than a mouse, with his sharp, small features and darting eyes. After her call, Mother would report, 'Your father's in Brown's, unsurprisingly.' I wondered how Crossmouse knew. News went round so fast in Laugharne I sometimes felt it was a danger to think. 'Come on,' my mother said as we climbed the steps to Brown's Hotel.

Once Mum and I had collected Dad, we set out along King Street. My mother had to slow down as usual to walk with my father, me trailing at the rear. It was a five-minute walk home. 'Come on,' urged my parents, half-way along the cliff walk.

As I caught up, my father said that he was busy today and not to make a noise, then disappeared into his study. 'What about dad's lunch?' I asked. Meanwhile he stuck his head out to say, 'Cat, will you tell her to be quiet today?' I was indignant at his distrust, which was brought about because I sometimes encouraged my friends to press their bicycle bells, sing, and bark with Mably as we passed outside the study. If it was a lucky day, Father would push his battered kitchen chair back from his table and open the door to shout at us, waving a weak finger. His response was all I wanted and we would go yelling away down the hill.

**midriff* the middle part of the body

1. Look again at lines 1-14. The writer feels positive about arriving at the Boat House. Explain how she expresses these feelings. Use quotations to support your answer. [4 marks]
2. Using your own words, what do we learn about the writer's mother? [3 marks]
3. Look again at lines 37-48. What impressions does the writer create of the town of Laugharne and how are these expressed? [5 marks]
4. The writer greatly admires her father but is also frustrated by him. Looking at the passage as a whole, give examples of the way the writer explains her feelings about her father. Looking at the passage as a whole, what do we learn about the character of the writer? [5 marks]
5. How does the writer try to create interest in her childhood experiences? Refer closely to the text to support your answer. [8 marks]

[Total: 25 marks]

TURN OVER

SECTION B: COMPREHENSION

You should spend 30 minutes on this section

Answer ONE of the following questions. You are reminded of the importance of clear and accurate written English and of careful presentation in your answer. All questions carry equal marks.

1. Describe a place that you know well and enjoy visiting or a place that you greatly enjoyed when you went there for the first time. Write in a way that creates a clear picture in the reader's mind of what happened and how you felt. [25 marks]

OR

2. "“That annoying dog,” mother said without passion.’ Write a story that begins with these words. [25 marks]

OR

3. 'Living with your family is always a mix of the good and the bad.' Use this title as the basis for EITHER:

(a) an article in a teenage magazine aimed at giving advice to teenagers about living with family

OR

(b) an article in a magazine aimed at parents/guardians, giving advice about living with teenagers.

[25 marks]

END OF PAPER

Paper Notes: 13+ English Question Paper (13+ English Past Paper (2023))

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

Overview

This is **Oundle School's Non-Common Entrance English examination paper for Third Form entry**, sat in **2023**. Oundle School is an independent school in Northamptonshire, and this paper forms part of their internal assessment for **13+ entrance** (Year 9 entry). The paper runs for one hour and carries 50 marks, divided equally between comprehension and creative or discursive writing.

The comprehension passage is an autobiographical extract about childhood memories in **Laugharne, Wales**, centred on Dylan Thomas's daughter recalling family life at the Boat House. Students face five graduated questions testing inference, language analysis, and evaluation. Section B offers three creative options: descriptive writing about a memorable place, narrative writing from a given opening, or magazine article writing about family life.

This paper suits students preparing for **13+ entrance to independent schools**, particularly those targeting schools with a literary focus. The comprehension demands sophisticated close reading of a literary memoir, whilst the writing tasks require sustained formal composition under timed conditions. The mix of question types closely mirrors Common Entrance standards, making it valuable practice even for students sitting other 13+ formats.

How this paper is organised

The paper divides into two equal sections, each allocated **30 minutes and 25 marks**. Section A contains five compulsory comprehension questions based on a single prose extract of approximately 600 words. The questions progress in difficulty and length: shorter questions (3-5 marks) ask for specific textual evidence or inference, whilst the final question is an extended **8-mark evaluation** requiring overview of the writer's techniques.

Section B offers a choice of one from three writing tasks, each worth 25 marks. Option 1 is descriptive writing about a place; Option 2 is narrative fiction from a given opening line; Option 3 splits into two alternatives (3a or 3b), both magazine articles on family life but aimed at different audiences. Students must select only one complete task. The rubric emphasises the importance of **clear, accurate written English** and advises leaving time for checking work.

No dictionaries are permitted. Students write on lined paper and must manage their own time, dividing the hour equally across both sections. The balance of marks means neither comprehension nor creative writing can be neglected without significant penalty.

Topics covered

- Close reading of autobiographical prose, extracting meaning and exploring the writer's perspective on family and place
- Inference and deduction from textual detail, particularly identifying emotions and attitudes not explicitly stated
- Analysis of language techniques including imagery, simile, personification, and descriptive phrasing used to create atmosphere
- Evaluation of how a writer constructs narrative voice and sustains reader interest through structure, detail, and tone
- Descriptive writing with focus on creating vivid sense impressions and conveying personal feelings about a place
- Narrative fiction composition from a given opening, demonstrating control of plot, character, dialogue, and pacing
- Transactional writing in magazine article format, adapting register and tone for specified audiences (teenagers or parents)
- Use of quotation and reference to support analytical points in a formal comprehension response
- Written accuracy, spelling, punctuation, and grammatical conventions expected at 13+ level

How to use this paper for revision

- Practise annotating prose extracts as you read them, marking literary devices, shifts in tone, and key quotations that reveal character or mood. This saves time when answering detailed comprehension questions.
- For the 8-mark question on writer's craft, plan a brief three-point structure before writing: technique, effect, and overall evaluation. Examiners reward structured responses that cover multiple methods.
- In Section B descriptive writing, map out five or six vivid sensory details before you start drafting. Strong descriptive pieces layer sight, sound, smell, touch, and emotional response throughout.
- When writing narrative fiction from a given opening, decide immediately on the story's direction and ending. Knowing where you're heading prevents meandering plots and weak conclusions.
- For magazine articles, spend the first two minutes defining your audience clearly. Ask yourself: what tone, vocabulary, and examples suit teenagers versus parents? Then maintain that register consistently.
- Time yourself strictly in practice: 30 minutes per section is tight. Aim for 12 minutes on the first four comprehension questions, 18 minutes on question 5, then 25 minutes writing and 5 minutes checking in Section B.
- Revise a range of literary terminology (metaphor, alliteration, juxtaposition, narrative voice) so you can name techniques confidently in analytical answers. Vague descriptions like 'nice words' score poorly.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Failing to use quotations to support comprehension answers. Simply stating an idea without textual evidence loses marks, even if the interpretation is correct.
- Writing overly long answers for low-mark questions. A 3-mark question needs a focused paragraph, not half a page. Students waste time they need for the extended evaluation question.
- In 'own words' questions (question 2), copying phrases directly from the passage instead of rephrasing. Examiners penalise lifting without transformation.
- Ignoring the instruction to divide time equally. Many students spend 40 minutes on Section A and rush Section B, producing weak creative writing that costs 25 marks.
- In descriptive writing, producing static description with no sense of movement, change, or personal response. The task asks for an experience, not a list of features.
- Starting narrative fiction without planning the ending. Stories that begin strongly but trail off into 'and then I woke up' conclusions score poorly for structure.

Exam technique

Begin by reading the comprehension passage twice: once for overall understanding, then annotating on the second pass for tone, techniques, and key moments. Note where questions direct you to specific line ranges and mark those boundaries clearly. Answer questions 1 to 4 briskly but carefully, aiming for about 12 minutes total, then allocate the remaining 18 minutes to question 5, which carries the most weight and demands a structured, evaluative response covering the whole text.

In Section B, spend three to four minutes choosing your task and planning. If narrative writing appeals but you cannot think of a strong plot from the given opening within two minutes, switch to description or article writing instead. Sustain formal register throughout: even creative tasks are assessed on spelling, punctuation, and grammatical accuracy. Avoid slang, text-speak, or overly casual phrasing unless the task explicitly demands it (for instance, a teenager's authentic voice in Option 3a).

Leave five minutes at the end to proofread both sections. Check for repeated words, missed full stops, and unclear pronoun references. Students who write in paragraphs, vary sentence structure, and deploy accurate punctuation consistently score in the top bands. If you finish the creative task early, use spare time to enhance vocabulary: replace weak verbs and add a telling detail or two rather than sitting idle.

What to revise alongside this paper

Students should revise other literary non-fiction extracts, particularly memoirs, travel writing, and biographical prose, to build familiarity with reflective, personal narrative voice. Practise identifying how writers use **sensory detail and figurative language** to convey place and emotion, as these skills underpin both comprehension and descriptive writing tasks. Revisit work on **narrative structure**, including exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution, to strengthen story-writing technique.

For transactional writing, study examples of magazine articles aimed at different demographics, noting how vocabulary, sentence length, and rhetorical devices shift with audience. Practise writing in a range of registers, from informal and persuasive to advisory and formal. Work on **integrating quotations smoothly** into analytical sentences, a skill tested in comprehension but also useful in essay writing across the curriculum.

Broader reading of 20th-century literary prose, especially Welsh or regional writing, provides cultural context for passages like this one. Explore works by **Dylan Thomas himself** or contemporaries such as Roald Dahl's autobiographical Boy. Stronger candidates might investigate how writers use **retrospective narrative** (adult voice recalling childhood) to create layered meaning, a technique central to this extract and common in 13+ comprehension texts.

Key terms

Inference, Quotation, Language analysis, Imagery, Simile, Personification, Narrative voice, Tone, Descriptive writing, Register, Audience, Transactional writing, Autobiography, Atmosphere, Evaluation

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School

EXAMINATION PAPER
Non-Common Entrance 2023
Fourth Form entry

English

Time allowed: 1 hour

Name: _____

Instructions

- Dictionaries are not allowed.
- Answer on lined paper. Write your name clearly at the top of each sheet of paper that you use.
- Answer ALL the questions in Section A. Choose ONE question from Section B. You should divide your time equally between both sections.
- You are expected to write clearly and accurately throughout each of your answers. You should leave some time towards the end of the examination to check your work carefully.
- The maximum number of marks for this paper is 50.

SECTION A: COMPREHENSION

You should spend 30 minutes on this section

Read Ted Hughes's poem 'To Paint a Water Lily', which describes what is and what is not seen around a pond, and then answer the questions that follow. Leave yourself enough time to answer the last question in full detail.

To Paint a Water Lily

A green level of lily leaves
Roofs the pond's chamber and paves

The flies' furious arena: study
These, the two minds of this lady.

First observe the air's dragonfly 5
That eats meat, that bullets by

Or stands in space to take aim;
Others as dangerous comb the hum

Under the trees. There are battle-shouts
And death-cries everywhere hereabouts 10

But inaudible, so the eyes praise
To see the colours of these flies

Rainbow their arcs, spark, or settle
Cooling like beads of molten metal

Through the spectrum. Think what worse 15
Is the pond-bed's matter of course;

Prehistoric bedragoned times
Crawl that darkness with Latin names,

Have evolved no improvements there,
Jaws for heads, the set stare, 20

Ignorant of age as of hour –
Now paint the long-necked lily-flower

Which, deep in both worlds, can be still
As a painting, trembling hardly at all

Though the dragonfly alight, 25
Whatever horror nudge her root.

Questions

1. Look at lines 5-15. How effective do you find the description of the dragonflies here? Support your answer with close reference to the text. [5 marks]
2. Find an example of metaphor in the poem. How does the poet use this to create a clearer picture of the thing he is describing? [3 marks]
3. Comment on the poet's use of structure in this poem. [4 marks]
4. Look at lines 17-21. What picture does the poet paint of life at the bottom of the pond? [5 marks]
5. Twice in the poem the poet breaks away from the description of pond life to describe someone painting a picture of the pond. What do you think the purpose of this is and how might it fit with what you think the poem is about as a whole? [8 marks]

[Total: 25 marks]

SECTION B: COMPREHENSION

You should spend 30 minutes on this section

Answer ONE of the following questions. You are reminded of the importance of clear and accurate written English and of careful presentation in your answer. All questions carry equal marks.

1. Describe a natural scene (a pond, a river, a woodland, a field, etc.) in such a way that creates a vivid picture in the reader's mind. Do not attempt to write a poem. [25 marks]

OR

2. 'Trembling hardly at all ...' Write a story that begins with these words. [25 marks]

OR

3. 'What's real and what you see.' Use this title as the basis for EITHER:

(a) an article in a teenage magazine

OR

(b) a speech to present to your school assembly.

[25 marks]

END OF PAPER

Paper Notes: 13+ English Question Paper (13+ English Past Paper (2023))

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

Overview

This is the **Oundle School Non-Common Entrance 2023** English paper for **Fourth Form entry** (13+ level, Year 9 entry). The paper is designed for candidates applying to Oundle School who are not taking the Common Entrance exam, providing an alternative assessment route. It carries **50 marks in total** and must be completed in **one hour**.

The paper divides evenly into two sections: **Section A** is a comprehension exercise based on Ted Hughes's poem *To Paint a Water Lily*, worth 25 marks and requiring 30 minutes. **Section B** is a creative or analytical writing task, also worth 25 marks and 30 minutes, with three options from which candidates choose one. The comprehension questions progress from straightforward textual analysis to deeper interpretive work, whilst the writing section offers scope for imaginative prose, narrative fiction, or persuasive non-fiction.

This paper suits candidates preparing for selective independent school entry at 13+, particularly those applying to Oundle or similar schools. It tests both close reading skills and the ability to write clearly and creatively under timed conditions. The inclusion of a modern classic poem (Hughes died in 1998) and varied writing prompts reflects the broad literary and expressive skills expected at this level.

How this paper is organised

The paper opens with clear instructions: dictionaries are not allowed, answers must be written on lined paper, and candidates must complete **all questions in Section A** and **one question from Section B**, dividing their hour equally between the two sections. Time management is explicitly guided, with 30 minutes allocated to each section.

Section A (Comprehension) presents Ted Hughes's 26-line poem *To Paint a Water Lily* in full, followed by five questions worth a total of 25 marks. The questions are weighted differently: Question 1 (5 marks) examines the description of dragonflies in lines 5 to 15, Question 2 (3 marks) asks candidates to identify and explain a metaphor, Question 3 (4 marks) focuses on poetic structure, Question 4 (5 marks) analyses the depiction of pond-bed life in lines 17 to 21, and Question 5 (8 marks, the highest-weighted) explores the meta-poetic framing device and the poem's overall meaning. Candidates are reminded to leave time for the final question.

Section B (Writing) offers three equally weighted 25-mark options: a descriptive piece about a natural scene (explicitly not a poem), a narrative beginning with the words "Trembling hardly at all", or a persuasive piece titled "What's real and what you see" written either as a magazine article or an assembly speech. All questions emphasise the importance of clear, accurate written English and careful presentation.

Topics covered

- Close reading and analysis of twentieth-century poetry (Ted Hughes)
- Identification and explanation of metaphor in descriptive verse
- Commentary on poetic structure, including couplets, rhyme, and thematic organisation
- Interpretation of imagery: violent natural processes, prehistoric life, and stillness versus chaos
- Analysis of meta-poetic devices (the poet addressing the act of painting/creating art)
- Inferential reading: understanding the symbolic function of the water lily
- Descriptive writing: creating vivid sensory impressions of natural settings in prose
- Narrative fiction: opening a story from a given prompt with effective mood and pacing
- Persuasive or expository non-fiction: writing for a teenage magazine or school assembly audience
- Timed exam technique: managing 30 minutes per section, allocating marks proportionally

How to use this paper for revision

- Practise reading Ted Hughes's nature poetry aloud to hear the rhythm and notice how sound reinforces meaning (the hard consonants in "bullets by", the sibilance in "settle").
- When answering comprehension questions, always quote the poem directly and embed short quotations into your own sentences to support each analytical point you make.
- For Question 5, plan your response briefly before writing. Note down two or three ideas about why Hughes frames the poem as instructions to a painter, then develop each idea with textual evidence.
- In Section B, spend five minutes planning your writing. For the descriptive task, list sensory details (sight, sound, smell, texture). For the story, sketch a simple three-part structure. For the article or speech, jot down three key arguments.
- Revise the difference between metaphor, simile, and personification so you can identify and explain figurative language confidently. Hughes uses metaphor extensively (the pond as "chamber", the air as "arena").
- Leave five minutes at the end to proofread. Check spelling, punctuation, and that every paragraph starts with a clear topic sentence. Even small improvements to accuracy can gain marks.
- Read the poem through twice before attempting the questions: once for overall understanding, once to annotate key images, shifts in tone, and structural features like the couplet form.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Identifying a simile ("like beads of molten metal") as a metaphor in Question 2, or failing to explain how the metaphor creates a clearer picture rather than simply naming it.
- Writing about structure in vague terms ("it flows well") instead of commenting on specific features: the couplet rhyme scheme, the two-part organisation (above and below the water), the imperative voice in the framing lines.
- Quoting long chunks of the poem without analysis. Examiners want you to select short, relevant quotations and explain their effect, not copy out whole stanzas.
- In Question 5, describing what the poem says without addressing why Hughes uses the painter's viewpoint. The meta-poetic angle is central: art captures surface beauty whilst the artist knows the hidden violence.
- In Section B, choosing the story prompt but failing to begin with the exact words given ("Trembling hardly at all"). Follow the rubric precisely or risk losing marks for not addressing the task.
- Rushing Section B and producing scrappy, unplanned writing. A five-minute plan and five-minute proofread are better investments than writing flat-out for the full 30 minutes.

Exam technique

Divide your hour strictly: **30 minutes for Section A, 30 minutes for Section B**. Start by reading the Hughes poem twice, annotating as you go (underline powerful images, note rhymes, mark the shift from air to pond-bed at line 15). Then tackle the Section A questions in order, but be conscious of mark allocation. Question 5 is worth 8 marks, so give it more time and depth than Question 2 (3 marks). Aim for roughly one mark per minute: a 5-mark question deserves about five minutes of writing, a 3-mark question about three. If you find yourself stuck, move on and return later rather than losing time.

For Section B, read all three prompts before choosing. Pick the task that excites you most or suits your strengths (descriptive if you enjoy sensory detail, narrative if you like plot, article or speech if you prefer argument). Spend five minutes planning: for descriptive writing, list images in a logical spatial or temporal order; for narrative, sketch beginning, complication, and resolution; for the article or speech, draft three main points and a punchy opening. Then write steadily, keeping an eye on the clock.

Leave five minutes at the end to proofread both sections. Check that your handwriting is legible, that paragraphs are clearly separated, and that you have used full stops and capital letters accurately. In Section A, ensure every answer references the poem

directly. In Section B, check that your piece has a clear structure (introduction, developed middle, conclusion) and that your tone matches the task (formal for a speech, livelier for a magazine article). Small corrections to spelling and punctuation can lift your mark, so never skip this final check.

What to revise alongside this paper

Broaden your reading of **Ted Hughes's poetry**, particularly collections like *Lupercal* and *Moortown Diary*, which share *To Paint a Water Lily's* focus on nature and predation. Explore other twentieth-century nature poets such as **Seamus Heaney** (for example, *Death of a Naturalist*) and **Sylvia Plath** to see how modern poets balance beauty with violence in the natural world. Understanding Hughes's use of myth and symbolism will deepen your response to Question 5's meta-poetic framing.

For descriptive and narrative writing, read contemporary short fiction and creative non-fiction to see how professional writers build atmosphere and manage pacing in brief pieces. Study how authors like **Robert Macfarlane** create vivid sense of place in nature writing. Practise timed descriptive paragraphs (ten minutes, one scene) and opening paragraphs for stories (hook, setting, character voice) to build fluency under exam conditions.

Revise the conventions of magazine articles and formal speeches: how to address a teenage audience with energy and clarity, how to structure an argument with topic sentences and supporting evidence, and how to conclude persuasively. Look at examples from school magazines or TED-style talks aimed at young people. Strengthen your grasp of grammar and punctuation (especially comma use, apostrophes, and paragraph structure) by working through targeted exercises, since Section B explicitly assesses accuracy and presentation alongside content.

Key terms

Metaphor, Simile, Personification, Imagery, Structure (couplets, rhyme scheme), Tone, Juxtaposition (violence vs stillness), Meta-poetic (poetry about art or creation), Inference, Close reading, Descriptive writing, Narrative fiction, Persuasive writing, Sensory detail, Audience and purpose

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OUNDLE

School

EXAMINATION PAPER
Academic Scholarship 2023

English

Time allowed: 2 hours

Name: _____

Instructions

- Dictionaries are not allowed.
- Answer on lined paper. Write your name clearly at the top of each sheet of paper that you use.
- Answer ALL the questions in Section A. Choose ONE question from Section B. You should divide your time appropriately between both sections.
-
- You are expected to write clearly and accurately throughout each of your answers, paying careful attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar. You should leave some time towards the end of the examination to check your work carefully.
- The maximum number of marks for this paper is 55.

SECTION A: COMPREHENSION

You should spend about 60 minutes on this section

Both the poems below are set somewhere there is a lack of water. Read the poems carefully and then answer the questions that follow. Questions 1 and 2 are about the first poem. Questions 3 and 4 are about the second poem. Question 5 invites you to consider both poems together. In all your answers we are looking to see evidence of the depth and sophistication of your understanding and analysis. Question 5 is your opportunity really to show your ability to the full, so give yourself enough time for it. Support all your answers with quotations from the poems, as appropriate.

Burgos

Nightingales crackled in the frost
At Burgos. The day dawned fiercely
On the parched land, on the fields to the east
Of the city, bitter with sage
And thistle. Lonely bells called 5
From the villages; no one answered
Them but the sad priests, fingering
Their beads, praying for the lost people
Of the soil. Everywhere were the slow
Donkeys, carrying silent men 10
To the mesa* to reap their bundles
Of dried grass. In the air an eagle
Circled, shadowless as the God
Who made that country and drinks its blood.

**mesa* an isolated flat-topped ridge or hill

R. S. Thomas (1913-2000)

Blessing

The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water.

Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo 5
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.

Sometimes the sudden rush
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,
silver crashes to the ground 10
and the flow has found
a roar of tongues. From the huts,
a congregation: every man woman
child for streets around

butts in, with pots, brass, copper, aluminium, plastic buckets, frantic hands,	15
and naked children screaming in the liquid sun, their highlights polished to perfection, flashing light, as the blessing sings over their small bones.	20
	25

Imtiaz Dharker (born 1954)

On 'Burgos'

1. How does the poet present the landscape in this poem? [4 marks]
2. Comment on the structure and form of the poem. [5 marks]

On 'Blessing'

3. Discuss some of the examples of contrast in this poem. [5 marks]
4. What do you think this poem is about? [4 marks]

On both poems

5. Compare and contrast these two poems in any way you think is interesting and appropriate.
You may wish to look at:

- the content and meaning of the poems;
- the form and structure of the poems;
- the use of literary techniques.

[12 marks]

[Total: 30 marks]

TURN OVER

SECTION B: COMPREHENSION

You should spend about 60 minutes on this section

The following are all opening sentences from a selection of different novels. Write a story or a piece of descriptive writing using ONE of these sentences as your opening or closing sentence. Credit will be given for how well your writing fits with your chosen sentence as well as for its own creativity and flair. You are reminded of the importance of clear and accurate written English and of careful presentation in your answer. All questions carry equal marks.

1. I am suspected of wanting to kill children. [25 marks]

OR

2. At this time of year it is important to rake up leaves. [25 marks]

OR

3. It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days. [25 marks]

OR

4. When a day that you happen to know is Wednesday starts off by sounding like Sunday, there is something seriously wrong somewhere. [25 marks]

OR

5. I had the story, bit by bit, from various people, and, as generally happens in such cases, each time it was a different story. [25 marks]

END OF PAPER

Paper Notes: 13+ English Question Paper (13+ English Past Paper (2023))

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Overview

This is the **2023 Academic Scholarship English examination** from **Oundle School**, a paper designed for candidates sitting the **13+ entrance examination** for Year 9 entry. The paper carries **55 marks** and is divided into two equal sections, each allocated **60 minutes**, testing both analytical and creative writing skills at an advanced level appropriate for scholarship candidates.

Section A focuses on **poetry comprehension and comparison**, presenting two contrasting poems about water scarcity: R. S. Thomas's 'Burgos' (set in Spain) and Imtiaz Dharker's 'Blessing' (depicting a developing-world community). Candidates must analyse landscape presentation, structure, contrast, and thematic content before producing a comparative essay that demonstrates sophisticated literary understanding. The questions progress from focused analysis to broader critical comparison, with the final question worth 12 marks and explicitly designed to allow candidates to demonstrate the full depth of their ability.

Section B offers **creative writing** through five provocative opening sentences taken from published novels. Candidates select one sentence to use as either the opening or closing of their own story or descriptive piece. The task rewards both creativity and technical skill, assessing how well candidates can match tone and style to their chosen sentence whilst demonstrating the quality of their own imaginative writing. All five options carry equal weight at 25 marks.

How this paper is organised

The examination divides neatly into two sections of equal time allocation, each worth approximately half the total marks. Section A carries **30 marks** and comprises five questions on two poems, beginning with focused analysis (Questions 1-4, worth 4, 5, 5, and 4 marks respectively) and culminating in a **12-mark comparison question** that explicitly encourages candidates to 'show your ability to the full'.

Section B offers five creative writing prompts, each worth **25 marks**, from which candidates must choose only one. The prompts range from the unsettling ('I am suspected of wanting to kill children') to the seemingly mundane ('At this time of year it is important to rake up leaves'), testing candidates' ability to develop narrative or

descriptive writing from diverse starting points. The instruction that the sentence may be used as either opening or closing adds flexibility.

The rubric emphasises the importance of **accurate written English** throughout, with explicit reminders about spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Candidates are instructed to answer on lined paper, write their name on each sheet, and leave time for checking. Dictionaries are not permitted, placing greater emphasis on candidates' existing vocabulary and spelling competence.

Topics covered

- Close reading and analysis of twentieth-century poetry, specifically R. S. Thomas and Imtiaz Dharker
- Identification and discussion of poetic techniques including imagery, metaphor, personification, and religious symbolism
- Analysis of landscape presentation and setting, particularly arid environments and their cultural contexts
- Recognition and discussion of structural features in free verse poetry, including line breaks, stanza organisation, and volta-like shifts
- Examination of contrast as a literary device, including tonal shifts and juxtaposition of poverty and joy
- Comparative analysis across two poems, identifying similarities and differences in theme, form, and technique
- Creative narrative or descriptive writing demonstrating originality and stylistic control
- Adaptation of published opening sentences into coherent fictional or descriptive pieces
- Technical accuracy in extended writing: spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and grammatical construction
- Literary comprehension focused on drought, water scarcity, and their human and spiritual dimensions

How to use this paper for revision

- Practise annotating unseen poems quickly, marking language techniques, structural features, and thematic patterns within the first 5-10 minutes of reading.
- Revise key poetic terminology (enjambment, caesura, sibilance, assonance) and be ready to identify these features and explain their effects in context.
- For comparison questions, plan a structured response that moves between poems rather than treating each separately; use comparative connectives like 'whereas', 'similarly', and 'in contrast'.
- When writing creatively, spend at least five minutes planning your narrative arc or descriptive structure before you begin writing; a clear plan prevents rambling prose.
- Read examples of literary fiction openings to understand different narrative voices and tones; the prompts here echo published novels, so familiarity with varied styles helps.
- Allow 10 minutes at the end to proofread both sections carefully, checking for spelling errors, missing punctuation, and unclear expression.
- Practise writing under timed conditions regularly; 60 minutes for a creative piece or a set of poetry questions requires disciplined pacing.

Common mistakes to avoid

- Failing to quote from the poems to support analytical points; every claim about technique or meaning needs textual evidence embedded in the discussion.
- Treating the two poems separately in Question 5 rather than integrating comparison throughout; examiners reward synthesis, not two mini-essays placed side by side.
- Neglecting to comment on form and structure when explicitly asked; candidates often focus only on language and imagery whilst ignoring line length, stanza breaks, or rhythm.
- In creative writing, choosing a sentence without thinking through how it will shape the whole piece; the fit between sentence and story is explicitly assessed.
- Writing a narrative that ignores the tone or implications of the chosen sentence, producing a mismatch that undermines coherence and sophistication.
- Running out of time because too long is spent on early questions; the 12-mark comparison and 25-mark creative piece deserve proportionate attention.

Exam technique

Begin Section A by reading both poems twice, annotating as you go. Mark unfamiliar words, striking images, and structural features. Answer Questions 1-4 concisely but thoroughly, aiming for around 10-12 minutes per question depending on mark allocation, which leaves a full **25-30 minutes for the comparison essay**. For Question 5, jot down a brief plan noting three or four points of comparison before you write; integrated comparison scores more highly than separate treatment.

In Section B, read all five prompts before choosing. Consider which sentence sparks the most vivid ideas and which suits your strengths (narrative storytelling or atmospheric description). Plan your structure carefully: decide whether the sentence works better as an opening hook or a closing revelation, then sketch a brief outline of five or six key moments or descriptive elements. Aim to finish your creative piece with at least **eight minutes remaining** for proofreading.

Throughout the paper, remember that **technical accuracy is explicitly assessed**. Scholarship examiners expect sophisticated sentence construction, varied punctuation, and flawless spelling. Write clearly, paragraph logically, and reserve time to check every section. If you finish a section early, reread it critically rather than sitting idle; refinement of expression often distinguishes strong answers from exceptional ones.

What to revise alongside this paper

Broaden your poetry knowledge by reading other twentieth-century poets who explore **landscape, spirituality, and social justice**: Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, and Carol Ann Duffy all feature in 13+ and GCSE syllabuses. Practise comparative essay technique using past GCSE poetry anthology pairings, which develop the same skill of synthesising analysis across two texts. R. S. Thomas's work often grapples with faith and rural hardship, so explore his other collections to understand his characteristic style.

For creative writing preparation, study opening chapters from a range of novels to see how professional writers establish voice, setting, and intrigue. Graham Greene, Ian McEwan, and Kazuo Ishiguro (the source of prompt 3) all offer excellent models of controlled, literary prose. Practise writing in different registers (first person unreliable narrator, third person omniscient, present tense immediacy) to develop versatility.

Revise the technical aspects of written English using a good grammar and punctuation guide. At scholarship level, examiners expect mastery of semicolons, colons, and complex sentences. Reading widely remains the single most effective way to absorb sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structures naturally.

Key terms

Imagery, Metaphor, Personification, Symbolism, Juxtaposition, Contrast, Tone, Structure, Enjambment, Free verse, Narrative voice, Descriptive writing, Comparative analysis, Close reading, Textual evidence

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