

Entrance Examination 2020

English Section B - Comprehension

Comprehension Passage

Printed in this booklet you will find the passage on which the comprehension paper is based. The questions are printed in the blue booklet and you should write your answers in the spaces provided on those pages.

You have a minimum of 5 minutes to read through the passage carefully, making any notes that you need alongside the text. You should not begin answering questions until the 5 minute period has finished.

Do not open this booklet until told to do so.

Read through the passage very carefully. We recommend that you spend at least five minutes reading and re-reading the following material before you begin to answer the questions.

Tom lives in a future time. He has gone on a trip with his parents and grandad called Gandy. They have stopped at a service station on the way, which is next to a fence. This fence has been built to stop people from leaving the area and going into the wild forest on the other side. At this point in the story, Tom has just found out that his grandfather is escaping by going under the fence.

Tom was afraid to look. Danger stalked in those woods. Wild men lived there: barbarians and bandits, outlaws and outcasts; great hunting dogs with slavering jaws; trolls from the mountains; dragons with hot, glaring eyes. Tom's own eyes burned as he remembered the awful tales he'd been told.

Tom could only hear his grandad, not see him. The gloomy gap between the building and the fence was full of nettles that gave off a stifling smell; bitter and musty. They were as tall as Tom's waist. They tangled round his knees and stung his bare hands as he pushed his way through them. Gandy's voice rose up from the ground at his feet. 'Go away, Tom. Away. Keep away . . .'

He was lying on his back in a trench that went under the wire. His legs were on the far side of the fence that hung loose above, but not touching, his body. From the trench, his upside-down face stared up at Tom. He groaned as his eyes met Tom's and said, it seemed desperately, 'Clear off, there's a good lad. There's no time . . .'

And he wriggled, arms by his side, fingers digging in the earth, propelling him under the fence.

Tom said, 'Gandy. Grandad. Come back.'

But Gandy was up on his feet on the other side of the fence, brushing the twigs and dirt from his trousers, shaking his head at Tom, white-faced but smiling. He sighed, shakily, turning away with a sad, shy look and a hesitant, helpless wave as if saying, *I'm sorry*.

There was no time. Tom saw that clearly. He had to get Gandy back before something terrible happened to him. Gandy had to be rescued because he didn't know what he was doing. He had gone, all of a sudden, quite bonkers.

Tom said hoarsely, 'Hold on, Gandy, I'm coming.'

He was in the trench, on his back, earth spurting under his fingers, slithering under the wire. Easier for him than for Gandy because he was so much smaller and thinner, but he was scared, all the same. If he touched the fence, even the merest touch, the electric current would go sizzling right through him.

Gandy must have lost his wits suddenly. Or he would have known that what he was doing was dangerous.

The ground between the trees was covered with a spiky undergrowth; sticky brambles that tore at his clothes. He ran, stumbling and terrified. He had never been so close to wild trees before. The specimens in the Nature Parks were tamed so that their cruel, crooked branches could not reach out and catch you. All the same, it was wise not to go near them at dusk when the sap stirred inside them and they grew hungry. And at night, of course, the Nature Park gates were locked until morning. To keep people out. To keep the trees in. 30 35

Now, all around Tom, huge forest trees were rustling and murmuring, their great bushy tops swaying. It seemed to him they were talking.

A twig whipped his face and he wailed, 'Gandy. Oh please . . .'

A hand came over his mouth, an arm round his body. 'Shut up,' Gandy hissed in his ear.

The wood was full of creepings and cracklings. Tom was frozen with fright. It was true what they told you: trees were alive and malevolent. Gandy was holding him so tight it was painful. 40

People were shouting. Men's angry voices. Some one - a woman - screamed. Then a rattle of firing.

Tom tried to struggle free but Gandy's arms were iron bars, holding him. It seemed like hours to Tom before Gandy released him. Tom didn't dare speak, but he rubbed his jaw and looked at his grandfather reproachfully. Gandy said, 'You shouldn't have followed me. You know that, don't you?' 45

Tom felt his mouth dry. 'What'll happen?'

'If you and I haven't been seen, nothing much.'

'But someone was shooting.' 50

'To scare, not to hurt. They don't like people snooping about near the fence.'

'I know *that*,' Tom said, impatiently. 'They tell us at school. You might be electrocuted. Or the trees or the wild men will get you.'

'Ah!' Gandy said. 'Is that what they teach you? It's a long time since I was at school. But I wouldn't worry about the trees, not if I were you.' 55

He gave Tom an odd look; part frown, part a queer little half smile, as if there was something he wasn't sure whether to say or keep hidden. 'Leave it half an hour or so, and you'll be able to slip back without being noticed. Don't worry, I won't leave you until I'm sure you're back safe through the door.'

Tom didn't like the sound of that. He said, 'You're not leaving me. You're coming with me.' 60

Gandy shook his head.

'You forget about me, go back, go to school, take care of your parents. They've only got you.'

Gandy was getting weirder and weirder, Tom thought. No two people ever had more than one child between them. It was against the law. If Gandy could say 'they've only got you' as if other people might have more than one boy or one girl, he must really be sick in his mind. Which meant he must be looked after. Not allowed to go wandering off. 65

Tom said, 'I won't go without you.'

'You'll do as you're told,' Gandy said.

He had gone red in the face as Oldies did when you teased them; chasing after them in the street, playing the Oldies game. Tom hadn't played this game since he was six years old. He said, six years old again suddenly, 'Barmy old bat!' 70

Gandy stared at him. The colour went from his face; so did the anger. 'The trees won't hurt you, nor the fence. It's fear they rely on.'

Then he was gone, pushing his way through the trees, trampling the undergrowth. Tom stood, stiff and still, listening until there was nothing to be heard but the small sounds of the forest; hushed sounds, snaps and swishes and flutters and sighs. Nervously, he put out a hand to touch a tree. Nothing happened. The tree didn't grab at him. But he couldn't believe it was friendly. 75

He wanted to go home very badly. If only he hadn't been so rude to Gandy. It wasn't Gandy's fault that he had suddenly grown old and mad. He needed to be taken care of, not insulted by his horrible grandson. If Tom couldn't look after him, at least he could say he was sorry. 80

He said, under his breath so nothing hostile could hear him, no tree, no wild creature, 'Wait for me, Gandy, I'm coming.' 85

END OF PASSAGE