



**The Manchester
Grammar School**

Founded 1515

Entrance Examination 2023

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.

This story involves three children, Josh, Ryan and Chelle. The events happen in a place called Magwhite.

For a wonderful moment Ryan thought Josh was going to make it. When they had turned the corner to find the bus already at the stop Josh had burst into a run, scattering starlings and shattering puddles. The bus's engine gave a long, exasperated sigh and shrugged its weight forward as if hulking its shoulders against the rain, but Ryan still believed Josh would snatch success at the last minute, as always. Then, just as Josh drew level with its tail lights, the bus roared sulkily away. 5

Josh chased it for about twenty yards. Then, through the tiny crystal specks of rain that freckled his glasses, Ryan saw his hero stumble, slow and aim a kick at a lamp post.

The bus seemed to have carried away Ryan's stomach, and the last of the summer daylight. Suddenly the dingy string of shops seemed much colder, darker and more dejected than before. Ryan could still taste the chocolate milkshake that had cost them their ride, and the flavour made him feel sick. 10

Behind him he heard Chelle's asthmatic gasping and turned to find her fumbling with her inhaler. She took a deep breath, her round eyes becoming even wider for a second. She stared at Josh's slowly returning figure. 15

Ryan did not want to be stranded in Magwhite with an angry Josh. They were not meant to be in Magwhite at all.

Magwhite was an almost-place. The sad little strings of houses, the minimart and the bike shop were almost a village. The towpath walks were almost pretty. If Magwhite was mentioned, parents' faces stiffened as if they had picked up a bad smell. It was very definitely Out of Bounds. 20

Josh trudged back towards the others, his head bowed, the rain darkening his fierce, blond hair.

'S'all right.' Josh shrugged and wiped the rain off his yellow-tinted sunglasses with his sleeve. 'We'll catch the next one.' 25

Chelle was biting her lower lip, her upper lip pulling down to a point. She was trying not to disagree, because she worshipped Josh more than anybody else in the world, but the words always seemed to dribble out of Chelle like water from a broken tap.

'But ...we haven't got enough money for new tickets for all of us ... we're stuck ...'

'No we're not.' Josh was smiling. 'I have a plan.' 30

Without another word, Josh strode away down the slope towards the canal. Ryan and Chelle exchanged a look and then followed.

He's not going to run off and leave us, is he? ... but what did Josh have to lose if he went home late? Being in trouble meant something different in Josh's home and sometimes Josh seemed to have no fear of that anyway. Ryan caught up with him.

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'Where are we going?' he tried.

'The well.' Josh sounded too calm.

They followed Josh's ruthless pace, struggling through dead nettles until they reached the moss-covered steps that led down to the canal bank and path. Then Josh stopped. To one side of the steps was a small dimple in the ground, and at the bottom of the dimple was a ring of concrete, with a wire mesh covering the hole in the middle.

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Josh got down on his hands and knees. Only when he got out his Swiss Army knife and pulled free the screw-driver attachment did Ryan realise what he was doing. Soon Josh had unscrewed three of the bolts fastening the well cover in place and was starting on the fourth.

'It's a wishing well, isn't it?' Josh explained, continuing to wrestle with the rusty bolts. 'And that means coins. Got it!' The wire mesh came away. 'All right, who's going down? Chelle, you're thin and wriggly. Want to go?'

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Chelle's only answer was a squeak of alarm.

Josh grinned at her. 'All right, then.' He swung his legs over the edge and, to the others' dismay, started to lower himself in.

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A sharp cry echoed in the darkness below them.

'Josh!' squealed Chelle. She threw herself on to her hands and knees beside the well and stared down into the murk, her pale hair falling around her face.

'It stinks down here!' Josh called up suddenly.

'Right, I've got some,' they heard at last. The well's echo gave Josh's voice a solemn and impressive sound. 'Coming up.' Josh whistled to himself as he started to climb. At long last he reappeared and clambered out. He shook one leg and then the other, trying to dance the water out of his trainers.

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Five minutes later they were running down Magwhite's high street just in time to catch the last bus.

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Open-mouthed, the driver looked at the green that slicked Josh's hair and smudged his sunglasses, took in his clothes, dark and clinging with water from the waist down, contemplated the slimy puddle of blackened coins in Josh's outstretched hand.

'You just pulled all that lot out of the well, didn't you?'

'No,' said Josh, with his best bold, unblinking stare.

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It was the total shamelessness of this lie that seemed to throw the driver off-balance. He gave Josh a long look. Then he jabbed at a few buttons on his ticket machine and a loop of three tickets curled into Josh's waiting hand.

Josh sauntered to the back of the bus and waited while Chelle spread the seat with newspapers for him, then settled himself with a grin.

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He did it. At that moment Ryan would willingly have taken a bullet for Josh. He would have followed him over deserts or waded across leech-infested rivers for him. Suddenly he wanted to face some great danger or difficulty and prove himself to his hero in turn, and he was so full of the wish that it seemed it might split him like a conker shell.

END OF PASSAGE