



# TONBRIDGE SCHOOL

Scholarship Examination Sample Paper

## ENGLISH I

**Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes**

*Answer ALL of the questions in both Section A and Section B.*

*Total marks: 50*

## SECTION A – Poetry Comprehension

Read the following poem carefully and answer the questions that follow. You are advised to pay close attention to the marks available for each section. The poem was written by Simon Armitage (1963 – present).

*A privet is a shrub often grown into a hedge. The narrator of the poem has been made to cut the hedge as a punishment by his father.*

### Privet

Because I'd done wrong I was sent to hell,  
down black steps to the airless tombs  
of mothballed contraptions and broken tools.  
Piled on a shelf every daffodil bulb  
was an animal skull or shrunken head,  
every drawer a seed-tray of mildew and rust.  
In its alcove shrine a bottle of meths  
stood corked and purple like a pickled saint.  
I inched ahead, pushed the door of the furthest crypt  
where starlight broke in through shuttered vents  
and there were the shears, balanced on two nails,  
hanging cruciform on the white-washed wall.  
And because I'd done wrong I was sent  
to the end of the garden to cut the hedge,  
that dividing line between moor and lawn  
gone haywire that summer, all stem and stalk  
where there should have been contour and form.  
The shears were a crude beast, lumpen, pre-war,  
rolling-pin handles on iron-age swords,  
an oiled rivet that rolled like a slow eye,  
jaws that opened to the tips of its wings  
then closed with an executioner's lisp.  
I snipped and prodded at first, pecked at strands,  
then cropped and hacked watching spiders scuttle  
for tunnels and bolt-holes of woven silk,  
and found further in an abandoned nest  
like a begging bowl or a pauper's wreath,  
till two hours on the hedge stood scalped  
and fleeced, raw-looking, stripped of its green,  
my hands blistered, my feet in a litter  
of broken arrows and arrowhead leaves.  
He came from the house to inspect the work,  
didn't speak, ran his eye over the levelled crown  
and the shorn flanks. Then for no reason except  
for the sense that comes from doing a thing  
for its own sake, he lifted me up in his arms  
and laid me down on the top of the hedge,  
just lowered me onto that bed of twigs,  
and I floated there, cushioned and buoyed  
by a million matchwood fingertips,  
held by nothing but needling spokes and spikes,  
released to the universe, buried in sky.

## Glossary

- meths* methylated spirits; a liquid, often purple, used for cleaning  
*crypt* an underground room or vault beneath a church, used as a chapel or burial place  
*pauper* an old way of describing a person with very little money  
*shears* hand-worked hedge clippers like large scissors  
*rivet* the round metal joint that hold the shears together  
*lisp* a tendency to over-pronounce the 's' sound  
*wreath* an arrangement of flowers, leaves, or stems fastened in a ring and used for decoration or for laying on a grave  
*fleeced* possibly linked to the idea of sheep shearing, but also a slang term for being cheated or robbed

## Questions

1. Why do you think the narrator feels he has been 'sent to hell'? [3 marks]
2. Re-read the underlined lines in the poem ('The shears ... executioner's lisp'). What is the effect of the diction (choice of words), structure, language and imagery (metaphors, similes, etc.) in each line or phrase? [8]
3. How does Armitage effectively portray the act of cutting the hedge?  
  
You should make close reference to the language, imagery and title of the poem in your answer. [9]
4. What, in your view, is suggested about the character of the father, and his relationship with the narrator, by the action of laying his son on the hedge at the end of the poem? [5]

**[Total for this section: 25]**

## SECTION B – Prose Comprehension

*Read the following prose extract carefully and answer the questions that follow. You are advised to pay close attention to the marks available for each question.*

*The passage is taken from 'The Book of Dust: Volume One' by Philip Pullman (1946 – present). In the world of the novel people's souls exist outside their bodies in the form of animals: the main character's 'daemon', as these animals are known, is called Asta.*

Three miles up the river Thames from the centre of Oxford, some distance from where the great colleges of Jordan, Gabriel, Balliol and two dozen others contended for mastery in the boat races, out where the city was only a collection of towers and spires in the distance over the misty levels of Port Meadow, there stood the priory of Godstow, where the gentle nuns went about their holy business; and on the opposite bank from the priory there was an inn called The Trout.

The inn was an old stone-built rambling comfortable sort of a place. There was a terrace above the river where peacocks (one called Norman and the other called Barry) stalked amongst the drinkers, helping themselves to snacks without the slightest hesitation and occasionally lifting their heads to utter ferocious and meaningless screams. There was a saloon bar where the gentry, if college scholars count as gentry, took their ale and smoked their pipes; there was a public bar where watermen and farm labourers sat by the fire or played darts, or stood at the bar gossiping or arguing or simply getting quietly drunk; there was a kitchen where the landlord's wife cooked a great joint of meat every day, with a complicated arrangement of wheels and chains turning a spit over an open fire; and there was a potboy called Malcolm Polstead.

Malcolm was the landlord's son and an only child. He was eleven years old, with an inquisitive, kindly disposition, a stocky build, and ginger hair. He went to Ulvercote Elementary School a mile away, and he had friends enough, but he was happiest on his own playing with his daemon Asta in their canoe ...

Like every child of an innkeeper, Malcolm had to work hard around the tavern, washing dishes and glasses, carrying plates of food and tankards of beer, retrieving them when they were empty. He took the work for granted. The only annoyance in his life was a girl called Alice, who helped with washing the dishes. She was fifteen years old, tall and skinny, with lank dark hair that she scraped back in an unflattering ponytail. Lines of self-discontent were already gathering her forehead and around her mouth. She teased Malcolm from the day she arrived: 'Who's your girlfriend, Malcolm, En't you got a girlfriend? Who was you out with last night? Did you kiss her? En't you ever been kissed?'

He ignored her for a long time, but finally Asta leaped at Alice's scrawny jackdaw-daemon, knocking him into the washing-up water and then biting and biting the sodden creature till Alice screamed for pity. She complained bitterly to Malcolm's mother, who said, 'Serves you right. I got no sympathy for you. Keep your nasty mind to yourself.'

## Questions

1. Re-read the extract. How does the writer effectively depict the inn called the Trout in the first two paragraphs?

Refer to the effects of individual words and phrases in your answer. [10]

2. What impression of Malcolm and his character emerges in this extract, and how is this sense created by the writer?

Refer to the effects of individual words and phrases in your answer. [10]

3. How does Pullman capture the sense of tension and conflict between Malcolm and Alice?

Refer to the effects of individual words and phrases in your answer, as well as the form in which the extract is written. [5]

**[Total for this section: 25]**

**END OF PAPER**