

WITHINGTON GIRLS'
SCHOOL

ENTRANCE EXAMINATION
2025
ENGLISH COMPREHENSION

This is an extract from a short story called “Maharajah – the Elephant who Walked to Manchester”, inspired by a true story. It features two children, Edith and William, and takes place in 1872 in a village in the Lake District in northern England.

5 I sit with one leg on either side of a wobbly gate, staring at the dusty road. A dark swarm of swallows dart and swoop in the late spring evening above me. Sunlight has turned the hills to gold but discontent means that I cannot see their beauty today. Below is the village in which I was born and where I have lived quietly for fourteen years. There is one church, two hundred houses, a small school, a handful of meagre shops with a hotel that stands opposite the vicarage where I live.

As the birds above fly down the valley, I think about what they will see as they go. First the smoky smudge of Manchester. Then they might fly south to London, capital of the empire, where Queen Victoria, Empress of India, sits on her throne. I’ve never seen a queen. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything that matters. I wonder if I ever will.

10 “Are they coming yet?” asks my younger brother William who sits on the verge at my feet. He holds in his hand a small, battered but much-loved wooden elephant.

“But they left Kendal yesterday, the newspaper said,” William persists, “so they should arrive here tonight.” In his other hand is the now dog-eared article he regards as an Oracle. “Tell me the story of the elephant again, Edith,” he begs.

15 “If I must,” I say, “Maharajah was born in India, where monkeys live in every tree and the days melt like wax. When he was a baby, his mother died and he was taken in and sold to a zoo in Scotland. Imagine how he must have cried on that long journey all alone from the heat of India to the dark nights and short days of the north.”

“I think I might cry, if that were me,” William says.

20 I smile and continue my story, “Well, after a few years of this, Maharajah was sold again and this time his home is to be...”

“Manchester!” cries William, “and Father says that one day we might go to the zoo at Belle Vue to see him.”

25 “Yes,” I agree, “but the story is not over yet, is it? When the zookeeper took Maharajah to the station to put him upon the train to Manchester, Maharajah just took one look at the little dark carriage that they wanted him to go into and he...”

30 William chimes in and finishes the story, “...lifted up both big feet and smashed the carriage to pieces!” His face is now glowing as he thinks of the elephant running amok at a busy station. I feel sad as I think of Maharajah’s fear of the steam, the noise and the people. What right did anyone have to sell him as if he was a bale of cotton?

“And then...” William insists.

“And then,” I continue, “the keeper said, “Maharajah must go to Manchester. But if he won’t go on a train and we can’t go on a boat, then we must walk - we must walk all the way to Manchester.””

35 “And he’s going to come through our village,” William calls triumphantly. “And we’re going to see him!”

Comprehension

Spend about 40 minutes on this section

Please circle the correct answer. If you change your mind, put a clear cross (X) through the wrong answer and circle your new choice.

1. In what month of the year is the story most likely to occur? **(1 mark)**
 - a. August
 - b. March
 - c. June
 - d. September

2. In the first paragraph, which emotion does the narrator feel most strongly? **(1 mark)**
 - a. Happy
 - b. Thoughtful
 - c. Peaceful
 - d. Unhappy

3. How old is the narrator? **(1 mark)**
 - a. Thirteen
 - b. Fourteen
 - c. It does not say
 - d. Eight

4. What does the word 'meagre' mean in line 5? **(1 mark)**
 - a. Poor quality
 - b. Cheap
 - c. Small
 - d. Useful

5. In line 7, what does the word 'smudge' most likely suggest about Manchester? **(1 mark)**
 - a. It's full of pollution
 - b. It's busy
 - c. She can't see it properly
 - d. It's full of rubbish

6. In line 10, what does the word 'verge' mean? **(1 mark)**
 - a. Road
 - b. Grass
 - c. Path
 - d. Gravel

7. In line 11, what is the most likely reason that the elephant is 'battered'? **(1 mark)**
 - a. It is old
 - b. William forgets about it
 - c. William often plays with it
 - d. William was given it second hand

8. In line 13, what is the meaning of the word 'dog-eared'? **(1 mark)**
 - a. It is dirty
 - b. It looks like it's been chewed by a dog
 - c. It is reliable
 - d. The corners are bent down

9. In lines 15-16, what technique is used in 'the days melt like wax'? **(1 mark)**
- Personification
 - Simile
 - Metaphor
 - Repetition
10. In line 17, what type of word is 'Imagine'? **(1 mark)**
- Command
 - Noun
 - Adverb
 - Adjective
11. In line 19, William says "I think I might cry, if that were me." What does this show the reader about William? **(1 mark)**
- He thinks it is a sad story
 - He often cries
 - He wouldn't like to live in a hot country
 - He feels empathy for the elephant
12. In line 20, why does the narrator smile? **(1 mark)**
- She likes what William said
 - She thinks what William said is funny
 - She wants to see the elephant
 - She just wants to get on with her story
13. In line 22, what kind of word is 'might'? **(1 mark)**
- Noun
 - Modal verb
 - Adjective
 - Verb
14. In the paragraph beginning on line 27, which quotation tells the reader that William has heard the story before? **(1 mark)**
- William chimes in
 - His face is now glowing
 - and smashed the carriage to pieces
 - and finishes the story
15. What other word could you use for 'amok' which has a similar meaning and fits the story? **(1 mark)**
- Disruptively
 - Quickly
 - Calmly
 - Impatiently
16. What is the most likely reason Maharajah didn't get into the carriage? **(1 mark)**
- He doesn't like trains
 - He was frightened by the small carriage
 - He didn't want to go to Manchester
 - He was homesick

17. In line 30, what kind of word is 'bale'? **(1 mark)**

- a. Simile
- b. Noun
- c. Adjective
- d. Verb

18. In line 34, what kind of word is 'triumphantly'? **(1 mark)**

- a. Adverb
- b. Verb
- c. Modal verb
- d. Adjective

19. What tense is the story told in? **(1 mark)**

- a. Past
- b. Present
- c. Future
- d. It changes

20. What perspective is the story told from? **(1 mark)**

- a. First person
- b. Second person
- c. Third person
- d. It changes

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ENGLISH ESSAY

FOR MARKER'S USE ONLY

Accurate punctuation	/5
Accurate spelling	/5
Ambitious vocabulary	/5
Flair, imagination and ambition	/10
Total	/25