Sydenham
High School

gdst Girls' Day School Trust

Sample English Entrance Examination Paper

1 hour (+ 10 minutes reading time)

Reading Passage

The Whole Town's Sleeping

The following extract is from The Whole Town's Sleeping, a short thriller[1] by Ray Bradbury. It is about a woman, Lavinia Nebbs, who walks home in the dark by herself through an isolated ravine.[2]

Lavinia stood on the edge of the one hundred and thirteen steps that went down the steep hill and then across the bridge towards Park Street. There was only one lantern to see by. Three minutes from now, she thought, I'll be putting my key in my house door. Nothing can happen in just one hundred and eighty seconds. She started down the long dark-green steps into the deep ravine.

'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten steps,' she counted in a whisper. She felt she was running, but she was not running. 'Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty steps,' she breathed. 'One fifth of the way!'

The ravine was deep, black and black, black! And the world was gone behind, the world of safe people in bed, the locked doors, the town, the chemist, the theatre, the lights, everything was gone from her evening before. Only the ravine existed and lived, black and huge, about her.

'Nothing's happened, has it? No-one around, is there?' she whispered to herself as she counted her way up the steps. Twenty-four, twenty-five steps. 'Remember that old ghost story you told each other when you were children?'

She listened to her shoes on the steps.

'That story about a man who comes into your house when you're upstairs in bed. And now he's at the first step, coming up to your room. Now he's on the second step… The third, then the fourth and then the fifth! Oh, how you used to laugh and scream at that story! And now the horrid man is at the twelfth step and now he's opening the door of your room and now he's standing by your bed… 'I'VE GOT YOU!'

She screamed. It was like nothing she'd ever heard, that scream. She had never screamed that loud in her life. She stopped, she froze, she clung to the wooden banister. Her heart exploded in her. The sound of the terrified beating filled the universe.

'There, there!' she screamed to herself. 'At the bottom of the steps! A man, under the light! No, now he's gone! He was *waiting there*!'

She listened.

Silence.

The bridge was empty.

Nothing, Lavinia thought, holding her heart. Nothing. Fool! That story… but what shall I do?

'I'll go the rest of the way,' she decided. Her heartbeats faded. 'That silly story…'

She began again, counting the steps. 'Thirty-five, thirty-six, careful, don't fall. Oh I am a fool. Thirty-seven steps, thirty-eight, nine and forty, and two makes forty-two – almost halfway'.

And yet, she froze again.

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[1] Thriller – an exciting or scary story

[2] Ravine – a deep, narrow valley or gorge with steep sides

Wait, she told herself.

She took a step.

There was an echo.

She took another step.

Another echo. Another step, just a fraction of a moment later.

'Someone's following me,' she whispered to the ravine, to the black crickets and dark-green hidden frogs and the black stream. 'Someone's on the steps behind me. I don't dare turn around'.

Another step, another echo.

Every time she took a step, there was another one.

A step and an echo.

Section 1: comprehension questions (30 minutes)

1. Find two adjectives used to describe nature in paragraph 1. (1 mark)

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2. Re-read paragraph 1. What impression do we get of the setting? (1 mark)

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3. Re-read paragraph 3. Explain what is meant by the following:

- 'The world was gone behind' (1 mark)

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- The ravine was 'black and huge, about her' (1 mark)

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4. Re-read paragraph 6. Why has the writer put 'I'VE GOT YOU!' in capital letters? Give two reasons. (2 marks)

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5. Re-read paragraph 7. What does Lavinia's movement tell us about how she is feeling? Pick two verbs and explain what you can tell from each. (4 marks)

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6. Why is Lavinia scared? Choose **two** answers and **tick your choices** (2 marks)

- ☐ Lavinia is frightened because of the ghost story she told herself
- ☐ Lavinia thinks she has seen someone at the bottom of the steps
- ☐ Lavinia is afraid of falling down the steps
- ☐ Lavinia is lost and cannot find her way home

7. Re-read paragraphs 12-14.

Pick **two** quotations from the passage that show Lavinia is feeling calmer. Explain how each quotation shows this (4 marks).

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8. In paragraphs 15-19, the writer starts each sentence on a new line. Why do you think this might be? Give one reason (1 mark).

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9. How does the writer create a sense of Lavinia's isolation in paragraph 21? Choose one quotation and explain your answer (2 marks)

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10. This story is considered to be a thriller. What makes this story thrilling, or scary? (1 mark)

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Total /20

Section 2: writing paper (30 minutes)

50 marks (20 marks for content, 20 marks for style and 10 marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar)

Choose **one** of the following tasks.

Imagine that you are Lavinia's friend. Lavinia told you about what happened and you are worried that she was out by herself at night. Write a **formal letter** to a local police officer to **describe** what happened and to **explain** your thoughts and feelings about the event.

You might consider:

- Why the ravine was a dangerous place to be at night
- What happened to scare Lavinia on her way home
- How the police officer can help

Or

The ravine is a creepy and mysterious place. Think of a different place that might be considered creepy or mysterious. **Describe** the setting and **explain** how someone might feel as they walk through.

You might consider:

- Where this setting is
- What it looks like
- How it makes someone feel as they visit

You should plan your work.