Independent Schools Examinations Board

COMMON ENTRANCE EXAMINATION AT 11+

ENGLISH

PAPER 1

Monday 19 January 2009

Please read this information before the examination starts.

- You have 5 minutes' reading and planning time.
- After that you may start writing your answers when you are ready to do so. You have 40 minutes for writing.
- Answer in full sentences.
- Use your best handwriting and take care with spelling and punctuation.

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Read the passage below and answer the questions which follow it.

Mary and her father share a love of the birds called racing pigeons. Unfortunately, her father has had to move away from home to find work. At the start of this extract, Mary is running home after school.

A smell assailed her halfway down the passage: strong, rich, savoury. Something she hadn't smelt for weeks. Meat. She ran indoors.

Meat! How had Mum managed to afford it? Mary stepped into the kitchen. Her stomach was begging for food. The whole kitchen was full of that glorious smell.

And then she saw her mother's face, and understood. She felt cold.

'Mum! Mum – you didn't . . .'

Her mother turned away and brought a dish out of the oven. Meat. Brown, glistening, coated in dark gravy. Three mounded shapes. Unmistakably pigeons.

The hunger drained from Mary. Fury took its place.

'My pigeons! You've cooked my pigeons!'

'Your father's pigeons,' her mother corrected her. She was prepared, ready for battle. Mary, taken unaware, choked on her anger and couldn't speak.

'We've had pigeon before,' said Mum calmly. 'Your Dad doesn't give them an old age pension, does he, when they're past it? They go in the pot.'

Mary found her voice. 'But Dad chooses. Dad decides.'

'And Dad's not here.'

'But you don't know them! Which ones – which ones have you taken?' She darted towards the door.

Her mother called out, defensive now, 'Well, it won't be your best one, will it? That's racing home from France right now.'

But Mary, running down the path, shouted, 'She's not the only one. There's Ruby and True Blue, and Bevin, and – and the Gaffer.'

She flung open the loft door, forgetting to be calm. Birds fluttered upwards, startled; feathers floated down.

Ruby was gone, beautiful Ruby, with her dark plumage and deep red eyes. Mum had snatched Ruby from her nest-bowl and wrung her neck. Mary began to shake. Two of the young birds, hatched in March, were gone, two that didn't have names yet, that hadn't proved themselves – and never would now.

Mary closed up the loft and went indoors. Her mother had dished up; there was a plate for her: potatoes, slices of pigeon. Slices of Ruby?

Mary gagged. 'I can't eat that.'

'You'll go hungry, then.'

'You killed Ruby.' Mary's voice rose. 'Ruby!'

'I just took the nearest.'

'But Ruby had a squeaker, a baby. And you killed her.'

'I've got a baby, too. Your sister, Doreen. Isn't she more important than a pigeon?'

Her logic infuriated Mary. 'You'd no right! No right to take them!'

Her mother turned on her. 'I had every right, my girl! It's my job to feed this family; my job to find food. Your brother has the right to eat. And so do I, because if I starve, Doreen starves. If you don't want to eat, that's up to you. You can get out. Go up to your bed. Go on! Out! Upstairs!'

Mary fled. She ran upstairs, into her room, and slammed the door with a crash that shook the house. When her tears subsided she stayed sitting with her back against the door, hugging her anger.

I hate them, she thought. I'll leave home. I'll never speak to her again. But she didn't move. She hugged her knees against her chest and brooded as the sounds of washing-up and voices came from below.

1. How does the writer make it clear in the first four lines that Mary is hungry? (1)

2. Explain what Mary's mother has done to make Mary so furious. (2)

3. There is a big difference between Mary and her mother in lines 11–12. What is it? (3)

4. Mary has eaten pigeon before. Why is the present occasion so different? (3)

5. What does 'defensive' mean, in line 19? Why is Mary's mother defensive? (3)

6. Using information from the whole passage, list the reasons which Mary's mother gives for having taken the pigeons. (3)

7. There are good reasons on both sides. Do you think Mary has the stronger reasons, or her mother? Write down whose side you are on, explaining why, as fully as you can. (4)

8. Line 46 says that Mary 'brooded'. What do you think will happen next? Write the next half-page of the book, describing Mary's thoughts and actions as you think the author might write them. Enjoy being creative. (6)

(Total marks: 25)

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