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The Manchester Grammar School

Entrance Examination 2016
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, set in Victorian London, focuses on a young boy, Oliver. At this point in the story, he is staying with an old thief, Fagin. The events take place in Fagin's room.

It was late next morning when Oliver awoke, from a sound, long sleep. There was no other person in the room apart from the old man, who was boiling some coffee in a saucepan for breakfast, and whistling softly to himself as he stirred it round and round, with an iron spoon. He would stop every now and then to listen when there was the slightest noise below; when he had satisfied himself, he would go on whistling and stirring again, as before.

Although Oliver had roused himself from sleep, he was not thoroughly awake. He was in a drowsy state between sleeping and waking.

He saw the old man, Fagin, with his half-closed eyes. He heard his low whistling and recognised the sound of the spoon grating against the saucepan's sides and yet he was only half conscious of everything happening around him.

When the coffee was done, Fagin drew the saucepan to the hob. He stood in a hesitant attitude for a few minutes, as if he did not know what to do with himself, then turned round and looked at Oliver, and called him by his name. The boy did not answer, and was to all appearances asleep.

After satisfying himself that this was the case, Fagin stepped gently to the door, which he fastened. He then took out (as it seemed to Oliver, from some trap in the floor) a small box, which he placed carefully on the table. His eyes glistened as he raised the lid, and looked in. Dragging an old chair to the table, he sat down and took from it a magnificent gold watch, sparkling with jewels.

"Aha!" said Fagin, shrugging up his shoulders, and distorting every feature with a hideous grin. "Clever fellows! Clever fellows! They kept silent till the end! Never told where the stolen goods were. Never betrayed old Fagin! And why should they? It wouldn't have reduced their punishment. No, no, no! Fine fellows! Fine fellows!"

Fagin then deposited the watch in its place of safety. At least half a dozen more items were drawn forth from the same box, and surveyed with equal pleasure: rings, brooches, bracelets, and other articles of jewellery, of such magnificent materials, and costly workmanship, that Oliver had no idea even what they were.

Next, Fagin took out another, so small that it lay in the palm of his hand. There seemed to be some very minute engraving on it, for Fagin laid it flat upon the table, and shading it with his hand, pored over it, long and earnestly. At last he put it down, as if despairing of success and, leaning back in his chair, muttered:

"What a fine thing the death penalty is! Dead men never ask for forgiveness; dead men never confess. Ah, it's a fine thing for the trade!"

As Fagin uttered these words, his bright dark eyes, which had been staring before him, fell on Oliver's face; the boy's eyes were fixed on his in silent curiosity. Although the recognition was only for an instant - for the briefest space of time that can possibly be conceived - it was enough to show the old man that he had been observed.

He closed the lid of the box with a loud crash and, laying his hand on a bread knife which was on the table, got furiously up. He trembled very much though for, even in his terror, Oliver could see that the knife quivered in the air.

"What's that?" said Fagin. "What do you watch me for? Why are you awake? What have you seen? Speak out, boy! Quick - quick! For your life."

"I wasn't able to sleep any longer, sir," replied Oliver, meekly. "I am very sorry if I have disturbed you, sir."

"You were not awake an hour ago?" said the man, scowling fiercely on the boy.

"No! No, indeed!" replied Oliver.

"Are you sure?" cried Fagin with a still fiercer look than before and a threatening attitude.

"Upon my word I was not, sir," replied Oliver, earnestly. "I was not, indeed, sir."

"Tush, tush, my dear!" said the man, suddenly returning to his old manner, and playing with the knife a little before he laid it down, as if to create the impression that he had picked it up, for fun. "Of course I know that, my dear. I only tried to frighten you. You're a brave boy. Ha! Ha! You're a brave boy, Oliver." Fagin rubbed his hands with a chuckle, but glanced uneasily at the box, nevertheless.

"Did you see any of these pretty things, my dear?" said Fagin, laying his hand upon it after a short pause.

"Yes, sir," replied Oliver.

"Ah!" said Fagin, turning rather pale. "They - they're mine, Oliver, my little property. All I have to live upon, in my old age. People call me a miser*, my dear, that's all."

Oliver thought the old gentleman must indeed be a decided miser to live in such a dirty place, with so many watches. However, he only cast a respectful look at Fagin, and asked if he might get up.

"Certainly, my dear, certainly," replied the old gentleman. "Stay. There's a jug of water in the corner by the door. Bring it here and I'll give you a basin to wash in, my dear."

Oliver got up, walked across the room and stooped for an instant to raise the jug. When he turned his head, the box was gone.

END OF PASSAGE

On lines 58, 59 'A miser is a person who carefully gathers things of value and spends as little money as possible'