BENENDEN

Lower School Entrance Exam 2015

ENGLISH

13+

1 Hour

Name:	……..……..……
School:	……..……..……
Date:	……..……..……

Instructions to Candidates:

- Answer **both** questions
- Total points for exam = 100

Read the passage below and then answer the two questions that follow it.

The questions carry **equal** marks and we suggest you **divide your time equally** between the two.

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The passage is the opening of a short story, 'Snapshots of a Wedding', written by the South African writer, Bessie Head (1937-1986). She left South Africa to live in neighbouring Botswana, where this story is set.

Wedding days always started at the haunting, magical hour of early dawn when there was only a pale crack of light on the horizon. For those who were awake, it took the earth hours to adjust to daylight. The cool and damp of the night slowly arose in shimmering waves like water and even the forms of the people who bestirred themselves at this unearthly hour were distorted in the haze; they appeared to be dancers in slow motion, with fluid, watery forms. In the dim light, four men, the relatives of the bridegroom, Kegoletile, slowly herded an ox before them towards the yard of MmaKhudu's yard, where the bride, Neo, lived. People were already astir in MmaKhudu's yard, yet for a while they all came and peered closely at the distorted fluid forms that approached, to ascertain if it were indeed the relatives of the bridegroom. Then the ox, who was a rather stupid fellow and unaware of his sudden and impending end as meat for the wedding feast, bellowed casually his early morning yawn. At this, the beautiful ululating of the women rose and swelled over the air like water bubbling rapidly and melodiously over the stones of a clear, sparkling stream. In between ululating all the while, the women began to weave about the yard in the wedding dance; now and then they bent over and shook their buttocks in the air.

As they handed over the ox, one of the bridegroom's relatives joked: "This is going to be a modern wedding." He meant that a lot of the traditional courtesies had been left out of the planning for the wedding day; no one had been awake all night preparing diphiri or the traditional wedding breakfast of pounded meat and samp; the bridegroom said he had no church and did not care about such things; the bride was six months pregnant and showing it, so there was just going to be a quick marriage ceremony at the police camp.

"Oh, we have all our own ways," one of the bride's relatives joked back. "If the times are changing, we keep up with them." And she weaved away ululating joyously.

Whenever there was a wedding the talk and gossip that preceded it were appalling, except that this time the relatives of the bride, Neo, kept their talk a strict secret among themselves. They were anxious to be rid of her; she was an impossible girl with haughty, arrogant ways. Of all her family and relatives, she was the only one who had completed her 'O' levels and she never failed to rub in this fact. She walked

around with her nose in the air; illiterate relatives were beneath her greeting – it was done in a clever way, she just turned her head to one side and smiled to herself or when she greeted it was like an insult; she stretched her hand out, palm outspread, swung it down laughing with a gesture that plainly said: “Oh, that’s you!” Only her mother seemed bemused by her education. At her own home Neo was waited on hand and foot. Outside her home nasty remarks were passed. People bitterly disliked conceit and pride.

ululating: a long, wavering, high-pitched vocal sound

‘O’ levels: old version of GCSE examinations

bemused: bewildered or confused

Question 1

Consider how the writer sets the scene for the wedding.

We are interested in your ideas about **how** Bessie Head uses **language for effect**, rather than an explanation or summary of **what** the passage is about, so you might want to think, for example, about

- her use of vocabulary
- her use of sentence-structure
- her use of imagery (metaphors and similes)
- the themes of this story
- anything else that you think is effective for a reader of this passage.

(50 marks)

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Question 2

Write a story, or the start of a story, centred on a significant occasion or event.

This can be **fiction** (a story, or a piece of creative writing) or **non-fiction** (an essay, or a report, a letter, a diary entry, etc): you choose!

(50 marks)

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END OF EXAM