WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

THE CHALLENGE 2015

ENGLISH

Wednesday 29 April 2015

You have TWO HOURS for this paper.

- **The paper is divided into Sections A, B and C. The amount of time you should spend on each is suggested as you progress through the paper.**
- **Write your answers in full sentences and, where necessary, in paragraphs.**

A

You should spend about 50 minutes on this section:

This excerpt is taken from an American short story, published in 1957. Read it carefully and answer the questions which follow. Make sure you leave sufficient time for Question 5.

All Miss Price had been told about the new boy was that he'd spent most of his life in some kind of orphanage, and that the gray-haired "aunt and uncle" with whom he now lived were really foster parents, paid by the Welfare Department of the city of New York. A less dedicated or less imaginative teacher might have pressed for more details, but Miss Price was content with the rough outline. It was enough, in fact, to fill her with a sense of mission that shone from her eyes, as plain as love, from the first morning he joined the fourth grade.

He arrived early and sat in the back row – his spine was very straight, his ankles crossed precisely under the desk and his hands folded on the very center of its top, as if symmetry might make him less conspicuous – and while the other children were filing in and settling down, he received a long, expressionless stare from each of them.

"We have a new classmate this morning," Miss Price said, labouring the obvious in a way that made everybody want to giggle. "His name is Vincent Sabella and he comes from New York City. I know we'll all do our best to make him feel at home."

This time they all swung around to stare at once, which caused him to duck his head slightly and shift his weight from one buttock to the other. Ordinarily, the fact of someone's coming from New York might have held a certain prestige, for to most of the children the city was an awesome, adult place that swallowed up their fathers every day, and which they themselves were permitted to visit only rarely, in their best clothes, as a treat. But anyone could see at a glance that Vincent Sabella had nothing whatever to do with skyscrapers. Even if you could ignore his tangled black hair and gray skin, his clothes would have given him away: absurdly new corduroys, absurdly old sneakers and a yellow sweatshirt, much too small, with the shredded remains of a Mickey Mouse design stamped on its chest. Clearly he was from the part of New York that you had to pass through on the train to Grand Central – the part where people hung bedding over their windowsills and leaned out on it all day in a trance of boredom, and where you got vistas of straight, deep streets, one after another, all alike in the clutter of their sidewalks and all swarming with gray boys at play in some desperate kind of game.

The girls decided that he wasn't very nice and turned away, but the boys lingered in their scrutiny, looking him up and down with faint smiles. This was the kind of kid they were accustomed to thinking of as "tough", the kind whose stares had made all them uncomfortable at one time or another in unfamiliar neighborhoods; here was a unique chance for retaliation.

"What would you like us to call you, Vincent?" Miss Price inquired. "I mean, do you prefer Vincent, or Vince, or – or what?" (It was purely an academic question; even Miss Price knew that the boys would call him "Sabella" and that the girls wouldn't call him anything at all.)

"Vinny's okay," he said in a strange, croaking voice that had evidently yelled itself hoarse down the ugly streets of his home.

"I'm afraid I didn't hear you," she said, craning her pretty head forward and to one side so that a heavy lock of hair swung free of one shoulder. "Did you say 'Vince'?"

"Vinny, I said," he said again, squirming.

"Vincent, is it? All right, then, Vincent." A few of the class giggled, but nobody bothered to correct her; it would be more fun to let the mistake continue.

"I won't take time to introduce you to everyone by name, Vincent," Miss Price went on, "because I think it would be simpler just to let you learn the names as we go along, don't you? Now, we won't expect you to take any real part in the work for the first day or so; just take your time, and if there's anything you don't understand, why; don't be afraid to ask."

He made an unintelligible croak and smiled fleetingly, just enough to show that the roots of his teeth were green.

Questions:

1. a) What do Vincent's clothes reveal about him? [1]

   b) What does Vincent's body language suggest about the way he is feeling? [2]

2. Look closely at the description of 'the part of New York' where the children suspect Vincent is from, lines 22-26:
   a) Choosing two quotations to explore in detail, explore what the language and description suggests about the lives of people in this area. [4]

   b) What do these lines also tell you about the feelings of Vincent's classmates towards people who live in this area? Explain your thinking. [2]

3. a) What might be the impact of Miss Price not calling Vincent by his preferred name? [2]

   b) To what extent do you agree that she is an "imaginative" and "dedicated" teacher? [3]

4. Looking closely at lines 14-30, and supporting your ideas with quotations, explain what the passage suggests about the other children in the class. [6]

5. You are a visiting school inspector. Having observed Miss Price's first lesson with Vincent Sabella, as described above, you feel compelled to write to her to give her some constructive feedback. In your letter you should:
   - Acknowledge the difficulties of welcoming Vincent Sabella into the class;
   - Suggest why and how her methods were mistaken;
   - Encourage her to question her 'sense of mission'. What do you suspect are her true motivations for wanting to be a teacher?
   - Suggest ways in which she might have helped Vincent to integrate more easily. [10]

Please turn over

B

Spend about 30 minutes on this section.

Read the following poems carefully and answer the questions which follow:

I stepped from Plank to Plank
A slow and cautious way
The Stars about my Head I felt
About my Feet the Sea.

I knew not but the next
Would be my final inch –
This gave me that precarious Gait
Some call Experience.

Emily Dickinson

Gait: a manner of mode of walking

Epilogue

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old one
a new one has sprung

Grace Nichols

I May, I might, I must

If you will tell me why the fen
appears impassable, I then
will tell you why I think that I
can get across it if I try.

Marianne Moore

fen: marshy or flooded land

Come to the edge.
We might fall.
Come to the edge.
It's too high!
COME TO THE EDGE!
And they came,
And he pushed,
And they flew.

Christopher Logue

1. Compare the ways in which all these poems present and discuss the notion of ‘Experience’. You should consider the following:
    - Which experiences do you think are explored in each poem?
    - How and to what effect is metaphor and imagery used in each poem?
    - What makes each poem dramatic?
    - In what way is each poem surprising or thought-provoking? [10]

C

Spend about 30 minutes on this section:

The letter above is from the novelist Evelyn Waugh to his wife, Laura, mother of Auberon Waugh, his son. 'Maimie' is an affectionate nick-name for Lady Mary Lygon, a life-long friend.

Read the letter carefully and then write the story of Evelyn and Auberon's day out from the viewpoint of the boy.

Give your story the title: 'A Day Out with Dad'.

You can choose whether to write in the first person or the third person, but the story must explore Auberon's feeling about the day and about his father. [10]

25th August 1945 *White's*

Darling Laura,

I have regrettably come to the conclusion that the boy Auberon is not yet a suitable companion for me.

Yesterday was a day of supreme self-sacrifice. I fetched him from Highgate, took him up the dome of St Paul's, gave him a packet of triangular stamps, took him to luncheon at the Hyde Park Hotel, took him on the roof of the hotel, took him to Harrods & let him buy vast quantities of toys (down to your account) took him to tea with Maimie who gave him a pound and a box of matches, took him back to Highgate, in a state (myself not the boy) of extreme exhaustion. My mother said, 'Have you had a lovely day?' He replied 'A bit dull.' So that is the last time for some years I inconvenience myself for my children. You might rub that in to him.

I had a very enjoyable evening getting drunk at the House of Commons with Hollis & Fraser and the widow Hartington (who is in love with me I think) & Driberg & Nigel Birch & Lord Morris and Anthony Head & my communist cousin Claud Cockburn.

Last night I dined with Maimie. Vsevolode kept going to bed and coming down again.

London is fuller & noisier than ever.

All my love, Evelyn

Now spend 10 minutes checking your paper, or use the time to finish off any questions you may have rushed.