Independent Schools Examinations Board

COMMON ENTRANCE EXAMINATION AT 13+

ENGLISH

LEVEL 2

PAPER 1: READING

Monday 23 January 2012

Please read this information before the examination starts.

- You have 1 hour 10 minutes which includes reading and note-making time.
- The paper is divided into two sections.
- Answer **all** the questions.
- Remember to write **Level 2** at the top of your answer paper.
- Vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation and presentation are all important and will be taken into account.

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LEVEL 2

SECTION A: NON-FICTION

The Crossing

The following extract is taken from The Crossing, *by Kathy Watson. The events it describes took place in 1875.*

The morning of Thursday 24th August broke gloriously. The barometer signalled calm weather, the sky was overcast but not threatening, there was no wind and the sea was 65 degrees and as smooth as glass. That day Toms had good news: it was his considered opinion that Webb should start that day around one o'clock. It would be about two hours after high tide and Webb could pick up the stream of water speeding into the Straits of Dover from the Atlantic, which would drive him east up the Channel. After that, there would be almost an hour of fairly slack water when he could make good progress. Then, a stream powered by the North Sea would sweep him south-west. Toms thought this Z-shaped route would make the best use of the Channel's tides; he reckoned Webb would be able to do it in 14 hours. On the other hand, the captain of the *Castalia* passenger boat, thought to be the man most knowledgeable about Channel conditions in England, said he thought 20 hours was nearer the mark. The truth was, nobody really knew – and Webb was about to find out.

At a quarter to one, the lugger bearing the men, a large piece of bacon, a basket of eggs, a keg of beer and a frying pan left the harbour, sailing south to the Admiralty Pier. On deck, Webb undressed and oiled himself and then got into a smaller boat and was rowed to the pier. The Admiralty Pier was not designed for pleasure. This long, plain, straight walkway was built from stern Portland stone and concrete; its sole purpose was to provide landing stages for cross-Channel steamers. Still standing, it has none of that air of bloomers and gaslight and kisses that Brighton's Palace Pier evokes, even in its current amusement arcade incarnation. The Admiralty Pier is grim and grey and has hard work written all over it.

However large and encouraging your support team, nothing can change the fact that swimming the Channel is a solo endeavour. It's you who has to do it. You're the only one who strips, shivering in the cold air, who dips a hand into the jar of thick grease and rubs it over your body and who has to get into that uncompromisingly cold water and start swimming.

The momentary hesitation at the end of the pier was Webb's alone; so too was the view into the greenish-black water 10 feet below. The water would be piercingly cold; that was certain. And the waves would slap his face and the salt water sting his eyes and make his tongue sore and so swollen it would feel too large for his mouth. On a clear day you can see the coast of France from Dover, but that day it was hazy and, before he reached the other shore, there would be hard work and an aching body and frozen limbs and a tiredness that goes right through to the bone and perhaps, after all that, failure again. But still he had to dive in.

He waited. For what? He played to the gallery by pointing significantly in the direction of the opposite coast and, perhaps, bought himself just another second. Then, at precisely four minutes to one o'clock, Webb dived into the Channel. The watching crowd gave three cheers but the sounds were blurred because his ears were full of water and soon the noise stopped and it was just him alone, in the silence of the sea.

LEVEL 2

SECTION A: NON-FICTION

Read the passage opposite entitled* The Crossing *and then answer all the questions below, using complete sentences. The marks at the end of each question are a guide as to how much you should write in your answers.

1. What is Webb preparing to do? (2)

2. Which factors suggest that this day is a promising one for Webb's attempt? (4)

3. In paragraph 1, how does the writer create doubt about whether Webb will succeed? (5)

4. Why is the Admiralty Pier a fitting place for Webb to start his swim? Refer to the details in paragraph 2. (6)

5. How does the writer help the reader to sympathise with Webb's situation in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5? (8)

(Total marks for this section: 25)

LEVEL 2

SECTION B: POETRY

Blessing

The skin cracks like a pod.
There never is enough water.

Imagine the drip of it,
the small splash, echo
in a tin mug,
the voice of a kindly god.

Sometimes, the sudden rush
of fortune. The municipal pipe bursts,
silver crashes to the ground
and the flow has found
a roar of tongues. From the huts,
a congregation: every man woman
child for streets around
butts in, with pots,
brass, copper, aluminium,
plastic buckets,
frantic hands,

and naked children
screaming in the liquid sun,
their highlights polished to perfection,
flashing light,
as the blessing sings
over their small bones.

Imtiaz Dharker

LEVEL 2

SECTION B: POETRY

Read the poem opposite entitled* Blessing *and answer the questions which follow, using complete sentences. The marks at the end of each question are a guide as to how much you should write in your answers.

1. What blessing is being referred to? (2)

2. How does the poet suggest the significance of water in stanza 2? (4)

3. How does the pace of the poem in stanza 3 convey the excitement? Give examples. (6)

4. How does the poet use sounds to bring the poem alive? (6)

5. How do you respond to the poem?
   Support your ideas by referring closely to the poem. (7)

(Total marks for this section: 25)

(Total marks: 50)

The passage is from *The Crossing* by Kathy Watson, published by Headline.

The poem by Imtiaz Dharker is from *Postcards from God*, published by Bloodaxe Books, 1997.