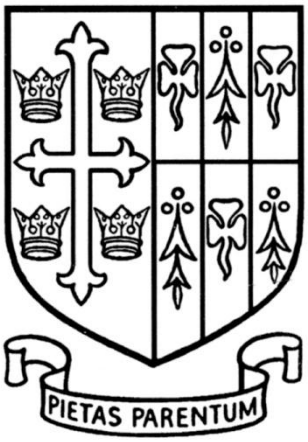
# ST EDWARD'S OXFORD




## 13+ SCHOLARSHIP EXAMINATION 2013

## ENGLISH

## 1 hour, 15 minutes

Answers should be written on lined paper. The exam is in **two sections:**

**SECTION A** mainly tests your reading.

- The first **15 minutes** of the exam must be spent reading. You can make notes on the exam paper if you wish.
- The next **40 minutes** should be spent reading and answering the questions.

**SECTION B** mainly tests the quality of your writing.

- You are advised to spend just under **20 minutes** writing your answer.
- Use the last few minutes to read over your work and correct any mistakes.

## **SECTION A**: PROSE

The following passage is from **Ward Number Six** by Anton Chekhov (1892).

In the hospital courtyard stands a small building surrounded by a jungle of burdock, nettle and wild hemp. The roof is rusty, the chimney half collapsed. The porch steps have rotted and are overgrown with grass, and only a few traces of plaster are left. The front faces the hospital and the rear looks into open country, cut off from it by a grey hospital fence with nails on top. Those nails with spikes uppermost, the fence, the hut itself ... all have the melancholy, doomed air peculiar to hospital and prison buildings.

Unless you are afraid of nettle stings, let us take the narrow path to this shack and see what goes on inside. Opening the first door we enter the lobby, where great stacks of hospital rubbish are piled by walls and stove. Mattresses, tattered old smocks, trousers, blue-striped shirts and useless, dilapidated footwear … all this junk is dumped around any old how, mouldering and giving off an acrid stench.

On the rubbish, a pipe always clenched between his teeth, lies the warder Nikita, an old soldier with faded uniform. He has a red nose and a stern, haggard face to which pendulous eyebrows give the look of a prairie sheepdog. Short of stature, he appears gaunt and sinewy, but has an air of authority and knows how to use his fists. He is one of those dull, self-assured, punctilious simpletons who believe in discipline above all things and who are therefore convinced that people need hitting. He hits them on face, chest, back or anywhere handy, being firmly convinced that this is the only way to keep order.

Next you enter a large, capacious room which is all the hut consists of, apart from the lobby. Its walls are daubed with dirty blue paint, the ceiling is caked with soot as in a chimneyless peasant hut, and you can tell that these stoves smoke and fill the place with fumes in winter. The windows are disfigured by iron bars on the inside, the floor is grey and splintery, and there is such a stink of sour cabbage, burnt wicks, bed- bugs and ammonia that your first impression is of entering a zoo.

The room contains beds which are screwed to the floor. Sitting or lying on them are people in navy-blue hospital smocks and old-fashioned nightcaps: the lunatics.

There are five in all. Only one is a gentleman, the rest being of the lower orders. The nearest to the door is a tall, lean working-class fellow with a glistening ginger moustache, tear-filled eyes and a fixed stare, who sits resting his head in his hands. He grieves all day and night, shaking his head, sighing, smiling a bitter smile. He seldom joins in any conversation and does not usually answer questions. At feeding time he eats and drinks like an automaton. His excruciatingly racking cough, emaciation and cheeks with red spots seem to be symptoms of incipient tuberculosis.

Next comes a small, lively, very nimble old man with a pointed little beard and black curly hair. He ambles about the ward from one window to another in daytime, or squats on his bed Turkish-fashion, whistling irrepressibly like a bullfinch, humming and giggling. At night-time too he evinces the same infantile gaiety and liveliness, getting up to pray: to beat his breast with his fists and pluck at the door with his finger, in other words. This is Moses, a loon who lost his reason twenty years ago when his workshop burnt down.

Moses likes to be helpful. He brings his ward-mates water, tucks them up when they are asleep. He also spoon-feeds his left-hand neighbour, who is paralysed. This is not done through pity or from humanitarian considerations, but in imitation of—and in automatic deference to—his right-hand neighbour Gromov.

Thirty-three years of age, a gentleman, a former court usher and official, Ivan Gromov has persecution mania. He either lies curled up on his bed or paces from corner to corner as if taking a constitutional. He very seldom sits. He is always excited, agitated and tense with some dim, vague premonition. The merest rustle in the lobby, a shout outside, is enough to make him lift his head and cock an ear. Someone has come for him, haven't they? It is him they're after, isn't it? At these times his face expresses extreme alarm and disgust.

I like his broad face with its high cheek-bones, always pale and unhappy, mirroring a soul racked by struggle and ever-present terror. His grimaces are weird and neurotic, but there is reason and intelligence in the subtle traits carved on his face by deeply felt suffering, and his eyes have a warm, healthy glint. I like him as a person polite, helpful and outstandingly delicate in his manner towards all except Nikita. If someone drops a button or spoon he leaps from his bed to pick it up. Every morning he wishes his fellow-inmates good day, and he bids them good night when he goes to bed.

Besides grimaces and unrelieved tension, his insanity also finds the following outlet. Some evenings he wraps himself in his smock, and starts, pacing rapidly from corner to corner and between the beds, trembling all over, his teeth chattering. He acts as if he had a high temperature. His way of suddenly stopping to look at the others shows that he has something extremely important to say, but then he shakes his head impatiently and resumes his pacing, evidently considering that no one will heed or understand him. But soon an urge to speak swamps all other considerations and he unleashes an eager, passionate harangue. His speech is jumbled, feverish, delirious, jerky, not always comprehensible, but there is a fine ring about it, about his words and his voice. As he speaks you recognize both the lunatic and the man in him. It is hard to convey his insane babble on paper. He talks of human viciousness, of brutality trampling on justice, of the heaven on earth which will come to pass in time, of the bars on the windows which constantly remind him of the obtuseness and cruelty of his oppressors. The result is like a chaotic, untidy, miscellany of old songs.

Answer the following questions in full sentences written in clear, precise English. Spend about **25 minutes** altogether on this section.

1. Which of the four mental patients described in this passage appears to be the least mad? Use brief quotations to support your view. [5]

2. Judging from the tone and detail of the language he uses, what appears to be the narrator's attitude towards the mental patients? [10]

3. What makes the first five paragraphs of 'Ward Number Six' such an effective story opening? Discuss Chekhov's literary technique, giving a detailed response to specific examples from the text. [10]

[Total for Section A: 25 marks]

## **SECTION B**: POETRY

In the following poem, Thomas Hardy thinks back sixty years to his childhood in rural Dorset.

### Childhood Among the Ferns

I sat one sprinkling day upon the lea,[1]
Where tall-stemmed ferns spread out luxuriantly,
And nothing but those tall ferns sheltered me.

The rain gained strength, and damped each lopping frond,[2]
Ran down their stalks beside me and beyond,
And shaped slow-creeping rivulets as I conned,[3]

With pride, my spray-roofed house. And though anon
Some drops pierced its green rafters, I sat on,
Making pretence I was not rained upon.

The sun then burst, and brought forth a sweet breath
From the limp ferns as they dried underneath;
I said: "I could live on here thus till death;"

And queried in the green rays as I sate:
'Why should I have to grow to man's estate,
And this afar-noised World perambulate?'[4]

Respond to this poem in any way you wish. You may, for instance, write a literary analysis of the poem, exploring its poetic qualities; or you may use it as a stimulus for a piece of reflective writing about closeness to nature, or the simple pleasure of life.

Spend about **25 minutes** on this task.

[Total for Section B: 25 marks]

[1] A "lea" is a meadow or overgrown pasture.
[2] "Lopping" here means drooping, and "frond" means leaf.
[3] To "con" is to study.
[4] To "perambulate" is to walk about (hence the modern word "pram", which is short for "perambulator").