St Mary's School
CAMBRIDGE

Lower Sixth English Language Sample Entrance Examination

Time allowed: 60 minutes

Name: _____

INSTRUCTIONS :

- **Dictionaries or reference materials are forbidden**

There are two sections: in Section A you are asked to read and analyse a media text and in Section B you need to produce a piece of writing, connected with the passage. Spend about 30 minutes on each section.

Section A

How does the writer make the following article interesting and enjoyable? You may wish to consider some of the following as well as other aspects of the article:

- the use of examples and anecdotes
- the particular choice of vocabulary
- the use of quotation and reference
- the use of humour.

To Watch or Not to Watch

One of my least favourite programmes of the 1980s was **Why Don't You Just Switch Off Your Television Set and Go Out and Do Something Less Boring Instead?** I watched it anyway, of course. It was on.

It was presented by gangs of children with different regional accents, which I suppose was meant to make it feel more inclusive. It didn't work on me. I found the accents alienating. They made me worry that because I was different from them they would despise me if they ever met me and would call me 'posh twit'. I was also jealous: how did they get to be on the television when I never would?

The content of the show was the familiar series of tedious tasks – in order to do something 'less boring' than watching television you had to have all sorts of stationery I never possessed or they wanted me to embark on physical activities I was too weedy for. But my main complaint was its title: **Why Don't You Just Switch Off Your Television Set and Go Out and Do Something Less Boring Instead?** It's like the warning on a pack of cigarettes, spoiling any enjoyment I might have had.

I was already aware that my predilection for watching hours of television very day was a terrible failing. The concerted censure of every authority figure – parents and teachers especially – left me in no doubt of what a betrayal of the opportunities of childhood it was to be watching television. I should have been reading books or getting fresh air, bicycling around in crime-solving gangs and fishing in streams. Our bit of suburban Oxford seemed a bit lacking in streams or caves full of thieves or forgers – but then I never really looked: I was too busy watching television.

Adults' sentences beginning, "When I was your age …" never ended with, "I'd have given anything to be left alone to watch Fresh Prince of Bel Air or Friends or CSI." What I was doing by spending hours watching television was an insult to children of the past and children in fiction – the children you read about on desert islands or as evacuees in the war or poor children having adventures in dangerously collapsing warehouses. I should have been going to Cubs or Scouts or training for swimming badges. Most worryingly, according to the view of adults and of the programme, I was

putting my imagination in jeopardy. Because, as surely as carrots help you see in the dark and as surely as you'll regret giving up the piano when you're older, television rots the mind. Or so they said.

Among the advantages of becoming an adult are that people stop admonishing you and you're allowed the illusion of declaring that what you did was right: "I spent most of the Eighties (1980s) watching TV and it never did me any harm," I can safely say, knowing that there's actually no way of testing whether I'd have been better in some way – fitter or with a greater imagination or more knowledgeable or even, somehow, happier – if I had not watched television but had gone out climbing trees and exploring woods with a cheese sandwich in my pocket and a dog at my side. But at least as an adult one is free from being told by wiser and older people that one should not be watching television.

So it came as a shock when Jeremy Paxman (a journalist and TV presenter) stormed into my living room, well, onto the screen of my television in my living room, where I thought I was nice and safe, and declared that we all watch too much television. Not just kids. All of us. Apparently we're mentally and physically lazy and we need to get out, walk, read books, talk to each other more, go to art galleries. There's no escape: the guilt of my childhood watching television has now resurfaced and I feel guilt as an adult watching television. But I still watch it.

Section B

Either

(a) Write an article for a magazine about an issue you feel strongly about.

Or

(b) Write a short, humorous script where a mother is trying to motivate her two lazy teenagers.