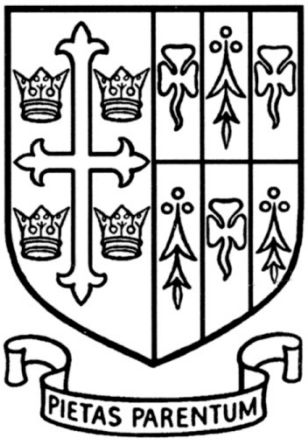
ST EDWARD'S OXFORD



16+ ENTRANCE EXAMINATION
For entry in 2017

ENGLISH

Time: 1 hour

Candidate's name: . . . . . .

Answers should be written on lined paper.

The first **10 minutes** should be spent reading the texts in Section A and Section B.

- Section A asks you to analyse a prose passage.
- Section B asks you to respond to a poem in any way you wish.

You are advised to spend just under **25 minutes** on each section. Use the last few minutes to read over what you have written and correct any mistakes. The quality of your writing will be assessed in both sections.

SECTION A: PROSE

The following passage is from *If This is a Man* by Primo Levi, an account of his imprisonment at Auschwitz during the Second World War.

> The conviction that life has a purpose is rooted in every fibre of man, it is a property of the human substance. Free men give many names to this purpose, and think and talk a lot about its nature. But for us the question is simpler. Today, in this place, our only purpose is to reach the spring. At the moment we care about nothing else. Behind this aim there is not at the moment any other aim. In the morning while we wait endlessly lined up in the roll-call square for the time to leave for work, while every breath of wind penetrates our clothes and runs in violent shivers over our defenceless bodies, and everything is grey around us, and we are grey; in the morning, when it is still dark, we all look at the sky in the east to spot the first signs of a milder season, and the rising of the sun is commented on every day: today a little earlier than yesterday, today a little warmer than yesterday, in two months, in a month, the cold will call a truce and we will have one enemy less. Today the sun rose bright and clear for the first time from the horizon of mud. It is a Polish sun, cold, white and distant, and only warms the skin, but when it dissolved the last mists a murmur ran through our colourless numbers, and when even I felt its lukewarmth through my clothes I understood how men can worship the sun.
>
> Today is a good day. We look around like blind people who have recovered their sight, and we look at each other. We have never seen each other in sunlight: someone smiles. If it was not for the hunger!
>
> For human nature is such that grief and pain—even simultaneously suffered—do not add up as a whole in our consciousness, but hide, the lesser behind the greater, according to a definite law of perspective. It is providential and is our means of surviving in the camp. And this is the reason why so often in free life one hears it said that man is never content. In fact it is not a question of a human incapacity for a state of absolute happiness, but of an ever-insufficient knowledge of the complex nature of the state of unhappiness; so that the single name of the major cause is given to all its causes, which are composite and set out in an order of urgency. And if the most immediate cause of stress comes to an end, you are grievously amazed to see that another one lies behind; and in reality a whole series of others.
>
> So that as soon as the cold, which throughout the winter had seemed our only enemy, had ceased, we became aware of our hunger; and repeating the same error, we now say: 'If it was not for the hunger!...'
>
> But how could one imagine not being hungry? The camp *is* hunger: we ourselves are hunger, living hunger.
>
> On the other side of the road a steam-shovel is working. Its mouth, hanging from its cables, opens wide its steel jaws, balances a moment as if uncertain in its choice, then rushes upon the soft, clayey soil and snaps it up voraciously, while a satisfied snort of thick white smoke rises from the control cabin. Then it rises, turns half around, vomits backwards its mouthful and begins again.
>
> Leaning on our shovels, we stop to watch, fascinated. At every bite of its mouth our mouths also open, our Adam's apples dance up and down, wretchedly visible under the flaccid skin. We are unable to tear ourselves away from the sight of the steam-shovel's meal.
>
> Sigi is seventeen years old and is hungrier than everybody. He had begun to speak of his home in Vienna and of his mother, but then he slipped on to the subject of food and now he talks endlessly about some marriage luncheon and remembers with genuine regret that he failed to finish his third plate of bean soup. And everyone tells him to keep quiet, but within ten minutes Bela is describing his Hungarian countryside and the fields of maize and a recipe to make meat-pies with corncobs and lard and spices and ... and he is cursed, sworn at and a third one begins to describe ...

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

1. Without using quotation, summarise what the author is saying about happiness in the third paragraph. [5]
2. How does the author present the inmates of Auschwitz in the first two paragraphs? [10]
3. What techniques are used to describe the experience of hunger in the last four paragraphs? Give a detailed response to specific examples from the text. [10]

[Total for Section A: 25 marks]

TURN OVER FOR SECTION B ➤

SECTION B: POETRY

The following poem was written in 1971 by the American poet, Charles Simic.

Axe

Whoever swings an axe
Knows the body of man
Will again be covered with fur.
The stench of blood and swamp water
Will return to its old resting place.
They'll spend their winters
Sleeping like the bears.
The skin on the breasts of their women
Will grow coarse. He who cannot
Grow teeth, will not survive.
He who cannot howl
Will not find his pack ...

These dark prophecies were gathered,
Unknown to myself, by my body
Which understands historical probabilities,
Lacking itself, in its essence, a future.

Respond to this poem in any way you wish.

You may, for instance
- write a literary analysis, exploring the poem's thought, character and poetic qualities;
- write a poem on a similar theme; or
- use the poem, or certain lines from the poem, as a stimulus for a piece of reflective writing.

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

[Total for Section B: 25 marks]