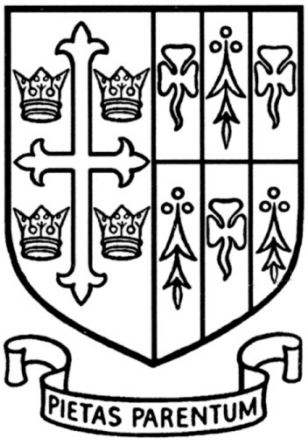
ST EDWARD'S OXFORD



16+ ENTRANCE EXAMINATION
For entry in 2015

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 the opening of a short story by the American writer Annie Proulx. It is taken from *Close Range* (1999), her first collection depicting life in the Western state of Wyoming.

You stand there, braced. Cloud shadows race over the buff rock stacks as a projected film, casting a queasy, mottled ground rash. The air hisses and it is no local breeze but the great harsh sweep of wind from the turning of the earth. The wild country—indigo jags of mountain, grassy plain everlasting, tumbled stones like fallen cities, the flaring roll of sky—provokes a spiritual shudder. It is like a deep note that cannot be heard but is felt, it is like a claw in the gut.

Dangerous and indifferent ground: against its fixed mass the tragedies of people count for nothing although the signs of misadventure are everywhere. No past slaughter nor cruelty, no accident nor murder that occurs on the little ranches or at the isolate crossroads with their bare populations of three or seventeen, or in the reckless trailer courts of mining towns delays the flood of morning light. Fences, cattle, roads, refineries, mines, gravel pits, traffic lights, graffiti'd celebration of athletic victory on bridge overpass, crust of blood on the Wal-Mart loading dock, the sun-faded wreaths of plastic flowers marking death on the highway are ephemeral. Other cultures have camped here a while and disappeared. Only earth and sky matter. Only the endlessly repeated flood of morning light. You begin to see that God does not owe us much beyond that.

In 1908, on the run from Texas drought and dusters, Isaac "Ice" Dunmire arrived in Laramie, Wyoming, at three-thirty in the dark February morning. It was thirty-four degrees below zero, the wind shrieking along the tracks.

"It sure can't get more worse than this," he said. He didn't know anything about it.

He staked a homestead claim on the Laramie plain south of the Big Hollow, a long, wind-gouged depression below the Snowy Range of the Medicine Bows, put up a sod shanty. The boundary didn't signify—what he saw was the beautiful, deep land and he saw it his, aimed to get as much of it as he could. He bought and stole half a hundred cows, and with pride in this three-up outfit, declared himself a rancher.

What the wife thought when she saw the sod hut, ten by fourteen, roofed with planks and more dirt thrown on top, one window and a warped door, can be guessed at but not known. There were two pole beds with belly wool mattresses. The five boys slept in one and in the other Ice quickly begot on Naomi another and another kid as fast as the woman could stand to make them.

Jaxon's most vivid memory of her was watching her pour boiling water on the rattlesnakes he and his brothers caught with loops of barbwire, smiling to see them writhe. By 1913, looking for relief, she went off with a cook-pan tinker and left Ice the nine boys—Jaxon, the twins Ideal and Pet, Kemmy, Marion, Byron, Varn, Ritter and Bliss. They all lived except Byron who was bitten by a mosquito and died of encephalitis. Boys were money in the bank in that country and Ice brought them up to fill his labor needs. They got ropes for Christmas, a handshake each birthday and damn a cake.

What they learned was livestock and ranchwork. When they were still young buttons they could sleep out alone on the plain, knees raftered up in the rain, tarp drawn over their heads listening to the water trickle past their ears. In the autumn, after fall roundup, they went up on Jelm Mountain and hunted, not for sport but for meat. They grew into bone-seasoned, tireless workers accustomed to discomfort, took their pleasure in drink, cigarettes, getting work done. They were brass-nutted boys, sinewy and tall, nothing they liked better than to kick the frost out of a horse in early morning.

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

1. Using your own words as far as possible, describe the impression of Wyoming we are given in the first two paragraphs. [5]

2. What can you deduce from the second section of the extract about the character of Ice and his family? [10]

3. Using specific examples from the text, discuss the key features of Proulx's unusual literary style and how it suits her subject matter. Where is her writing most successful and why? [10]

[Total for Section A: 25 marks]

SECTION B: POETRY

The following poem is from *Dream Work*, a collection published in 1986 by the popular American poet Mary Oliver.

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

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;
- compare Mary Oliver's vision of nature with Annie Proulx's; or
- use the poem as a stimulus for a piece of reflective writing about the pressures of modern life, or the beauty of the natural world.

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

[Total for Section B: 25 marks]