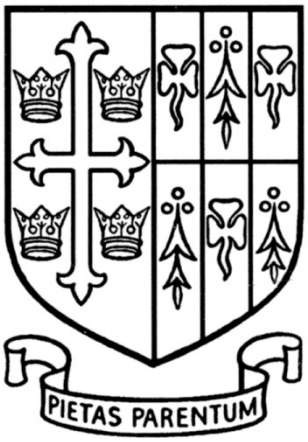
ST EDWARD'S OXFORD



16+ ENTRANCE EXAMINATION
For entry in 2016

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 *Far From the Madding Crowd*, a Victorian novel describing events on a farm in rural England. In this scene Gabriel Oak attempts to protect the hayricks from being destroyed by an approaching storm.

A light flapped over the scene, as if reflected from phosphorescent wings crossing the sky, and a rumble filled the air. It was the first move of the approaching storm.

The second peal was noisy, with comparatively little visible lightning. Gabriel saw a candle shining in the bedroom of the farmhouse, and soon a shadow swept to and fro upon the blind.

Then there came a third flash. Manoeuvres of a most extraordinary kind were going on in the vast firmamental hollows overhead. The lightning now was the colour of silver, and gleamed in the heavens like a mailed army. Rumbles became rattles. Gabriel from his elevated position could see over the landscape at least half-a-dozen miles in front. Every hedge, bush, and tree was distinct as in a line engraving. In a paddock in the same direction was a herd of heifers, and the forms of these were visible at this moment in the act of galloping about in the wildest and maddest confusion, flinging their heels and tails high into the air, their heads to earth. A poplar in the immediate foreground was like an ink stroke on burnished tin. Then the picture vanished, leaving the darkness so intense that Gabriel worked entirely by feeling with his hands.

He had stuck his ricking-rod—a long iron lance—into the stack. A blue light appeared in the zenith, and in some indescribable manner flickered down near the top of the rod. It was the fourth of the larger flashes. A moment later and there was a smack—smart, clear, and short. Gabriel felt his position to be anything but a safe one, and he resolved to descend.

Not a drop of rain had fallen as yet. He wiped his weary brow, and looked again at the black forms of the unprotected stacks. Was his life so valuable to him after all? What were his prospects that he should be so chary of running risk, when important and urgent labour could not be carried on without such risk? He resolved to stick to the stack. Before Oak had laid his hands upon his tools again out leapt the fifth flash, with the spring of a serpent and the shout of a fiend. It was green as an emerald, and the reverberation was stunning.

The next flare came. There was then a silence everywhere for four or five minutes, and the crunch of the spars, as Gabriel hastily drove them in, could again be distinctly heard. He thought the crisis of the storm had passed. But there came a burst of light.

Heaven opened then, indeed. The flash was almost too novel for its inexpressibly dangerous nature to be at once realized, and he could only comprehend the magnificence of its beauty. It sprang from east, west, north, south, and was a perfect dance of death. The forms of skeletons appeared in the air, shaped with blue fire for bones—dancing, leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in unparalleled confusion. With these were intertwined undulating snakes of green, and behind these was a broad mass of lesser light. Simultaneously came from every part of the tumbling sky what may be called a shout; since, though no shout ever came near it, it was more of the nature of a shout than of anything else earthly. In the meantime one of the grisly forms had alighted upon the point of Gabriel's rod, to run invisibly down it, down the chain, and into the earth. Gabriel was almost blinded, and he could feel Bathsheba's warm arm tremble in his hand—a sensation novel and thrilling enough; but love, life, everything human, seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe.

NOTE
- Hayricks are large stacks of hay (dried grass used for feeding cattle during the winter).
- Heifers (paragraph 3) are young female cows.
- Spars (paragraph 6) are wooden poles.

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

1. Without using quotation, explain precisely what happens in the final paragraph. [5]
2. From this passage, what can you deduce about the character of Gabriel Oak and the place where he lives? [10]
3. Where, in your view, does the writer convey Gabriel's experience of the storm most successfully? Discuss the techniques he uses, giving 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 2006 by Simon Armitage, who was recently appointed Oxford Professor of Poetry.

Horses, M62

Sprung from a field,
a team
of a dozen or so

is suddenly here and amongst,
silhouettes
in the butterscotch dusk.

One ghosts
between vans,
traverses three lanes,

its chess-piece head
fording the river of fumes;
one jumps the barricades

between carriageways;
a third slows
to a halt

then bends, nosing
the road, tonguing the surface
for salt.

Standstill.
Motor oil pulses.
Black blood.

Some trucker
swings down from his cab
to muster and drove; but

unbiddable, crossbred nags
they scatter
through ginnels

of coachwork and chrome,
and are distant, gone,
then a dunch

and here alongside
is a horse,
the writhing mat of its hide

pressed on the glass—
a tank of worms—
a flank

of actual horse ...
It bolts,
all arse and tail

through a valley
of fleet saloons.
Regrouped they clatter away,

then spooked by a horn
double back,
a riderless charge,

a flack of horsehoe and hoof
into the idling cars,
now eyeball, nostril, tooth

under the sodium glow,
biblical, eastbound,
against the flow.

NOTES
· The M62 is a motorway in the North of England.
· A "ginnel" is a narrow passage (usually between houses).
· To be given a "dunch" is to be shoved by the elbow.

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]