



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS
General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Paper 2 Comprehension

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INSERT

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This insert contains the passage for comprehension.

This document consists of **3** printed pages and **1** blank page.



The First Day

- 1 Emma climbed into the car beside her mother with an unusual reluctance. She was on the brink of a frightening experience: she was that day, aged only 15, starting at a new school.
- 2 During the long school holiday her father had been moved 200km to a larger branch of the bank for which he worked and, obviously, that meant that the whole family – her father, her mother, Emma and her baby sister, Maria – had to re-locate. From the beginning Emma's feelings had been mixed: she was delighted that her father had been promoted, but she was far from sure that she could re-capture the blissful existence she had known for the past 15 years. 5
- 3 What a rush had ensued! There had been a hasty weekend trip to find a new house, and then a succession of crises as they prepared for the move, with nostalgic trips to treasured places and, finally, tearful farewells, the latter accompanied by promises to write and to visit, undertakings sincerely made but already seeming possibilities rather than probabilities. 10
- 4 Very soon, they were casting a last look back at their former home and, in the family car, following the vast furniture lorry which held most of their possessions. Mother maintained a fixed smile; Emma allowed the tears to run down her cheeks; Maria simply howled to indicate that she was hungry; father indulged in the tuneless whistling he reserved for those unhappy occasions when he needed to show that he was a tough male unaffected by emotion. 15
- 5 The journey seemed endless; at times Emma felt they were all actors in some science-fiction film, suspended in their time capsule forever, on a journey to some distant planet. Eventually, however, they arrived at the town which was to be their new home; it was set on the floor of a steep-sided valley, with a small river gently meandering towards the distant sea. 20
- 6 The first few weeks of novelty were pleasant enough. The local schools were still on holiday; there was a certain excitement in discovering new places and strange faces. The hills on both sides of the valley were at times extremely beautiful, especially at the end of the day when trees and fields assumed a reddish-golden hue. 25
- 7 An important advantage over their previous location was the multiplicity of shops, most of them quite small and specialised. The whole family – oddly enough, even Maria – was enthralled by one such shop, a store-house of wonder and delight run by an elderly man who seemed to love his books far too much to contemplate selling them. He would chatter happily about his stock – he appeared to have read all the books – and there was a children's section where young people could browse as long as they wished, without being expected to buy. 30
- 8 Several times Emma and her family walked past a big, featureless building in the town centre – and outside there was a large, simple sign: The Valley Secondary School. Mother had written to the Headteacher and been told just to bring Emma to the General Office on the first day of the new term. An eerie stillness and silence enveloped the buildings, though the flower-beds were well tended and the green, carefully mown playing-fields leading down to the river looked very inviting. The gates, however, remained forbiddingly closed, understandably perhaps, but Emma felt neither welcome nor comfortable. She was full of questions, but neither she nor her mother had any answers; they must wait for the first day of term, a somewhat daunting prospect. 35 40
- 9 Now that day had arrived. All too soon they were in the car and then in the School Office; a grey-haired middle-aged secretary dismissed Emma's mother – who gave her daughter a guilty hug as she left – and then led the new pupil, without giving her a backward glance, through a maze of corridors before introducing her to her new class teacher and then departing briskly. 45

- 10 The teacher, Miss Nassam, greeted the new pupil with a warm, friendly smile. Emma guessed that she was quite inexperienced, but she did not know then that her teacher was also new to the school that day. She introduced Emma to the class and asked everyone to make her welcome.
- 11 Inevitably, the first part of the morning was devoted to administration, marking attendance registers, issuing timetables and reminding everyone about school procedures – all very dull and routine – but Emma was grateful for the careful, individual explanation to her of details obviously already familiar to the rest of the class. The teacher's little joke about there being two new girls in the class that morning made her feel less isolated. 50
- 12 Morning break came and her momentary feeling of insecurity and uncertainty was dispelled by a dark-haired girl called Tanya, who offered quite casually to show her to the outdoor recreation area. This was a very pleasant stretch of grass and paved sections, with seats and flower-beds interspersed. Her companion sat with her and asked her about her family and her previous school; she seemed genuinely interested. 55
- 13 After the break, normal lessons began, and she faced the ordeal of meeting the various specialist teachers, beginning with the science teacher. However, Emma felt his enthusiasm for the subject dispel her tension; he was a tall stooping man who peered short-sightedly through rimless spectacles, as if endlessly scanning some test tube full of chemicals in fascinating interaction. Furthermore, his lesson was on global warming, a subject close to her heart, so that, for the time being at least, Emma forgot her anxiety about being a new student at the school. 60 65
- 14 After science came a potential social minefield – lunch – always a difficult time for the lonely and unattached, but she found herself swept along by her classmates and she was soon sitting among them with her chosen food and drink. The talk focused on holiday activities; someone asked her about her holidays, whether in real or simulated interest she knew not, but at least she was not ignored. 70
- 15 The next lesson was drama, in a hall rather like a small, informal theatre; she felt nervous because this was a subject not taught in her previous school, but the teacher gently introduced her to the class activity. This turned out to be role-playing and Emma was surprised at how much she enjoyed imagining herself in various situations and reacting appropriately. Moreover, this challenging activity had the added advantage of distracting Emma from her own perceived problems as a newcomer. 75
- 16 For the last lesson of the day, the class returned to Miss Nassam, for English. They read some poetry about tigers – beautiful, graceful but, of course, dangerous creatures – and Emma was particularly intrigued by one short poem focused on the imminent extinction of tigers in many parts of the world. She mentioned that near her former home the species had once been abundant, but was no longer, owing to ever-encroaching human activities. This provoked a lively discussion which inevitably focused on Emma, since she had largely instigated it. She told herself that she was beginning to belong. 80
- 17 On her way out to the car park to meet her mother, Emma once again met the grey-haired secretary from the school office. "Well, how did you get on then?" she beamed. Reeling from the shock, Emma collapsed into the car beside her mother, who asked hesitantly, "How was your first day then?" Emma smiled quietly and replied, "Quite good, I think..." 85

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