

Paper Reference(s)

7161/01

**London Examinations
GCE**

English Language

Ordinary Level

Friday 9 January 2009 – Morning

Extracts Booklet

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PASSAGE ONE

The following passage is the opening of a short story.

In this passage the children are allowed out of the house and play a hiding and finding game. The person who has to find the others first is called 'It'.

Games at Twilight

It was still too hot to play outdoors. They had had their tea, they had been washed and had their hair brushed and, after the long day of confinement in the house that was not cool but at least a protection from the sun, the children strained to get out. Their faces were red and bloated with the effort, but their mother would not open the door. Everything was still curtained and shuttered in a way that stifled the children, made them feel that their lungs were stuffed with cotton wool and their noses with dust and, if they didn't burst out into the light and see the sun and feel the air, they would choke.

'Please, ma, please,' they begged. 'We'll play on the veranda – we won't go more than a few metres from the house.'

10 'You will, I know you will, and then—'

'No – we won't, we won't,' they wailed so horrendously that she actually let down the bolt of the front door so that they burst out like seeds from a crackling, over-ripe pod onto the veranda, with such wild, maniacal yells that she retreated to her bath and the shower of talcum powder and the fresh sari that were to help her face the summer evening.

15 They faced the afternoon. It was too hot. Too bright. The white walls of the veranda glared stridently in the sun. The bougainvillea hung about it, purple and magenta, in livid balloons. The garden beyond the veranda was like a tray made of beaten brass, flattened out on the red gravel and the stony soil in all shades of metal – aluminium, tin, copper and brass. No life stirred at this arid time of day – the birds still drooped, like dead fruit, in the papery tents of the trees; some squirrels lay limp on the red earth under the garden tap. The outdoor dog lay stretched as if dead on the veranda mat, his paws and ears and tail all reaching out like dying travellers in search of water. He rolled his eyes at the children – two white marbles rolling in the purple sockets, begging for sympathy – and attempted to lift his tail in a wag but could not. It only twitched and lay still.

25 Then, perhaps roused by the shrieks of the children, a band of parrots suddenly fell out of the eucalyptus tree, tumbled frantically in the still, sizzling air, then sorted themselves out into battle formation and streaked away across the white sky.

The children, too, felt released. They too began tumbling, shoving, pushing against each other, frantic to start. Start what? Start their business. The business of the children's day which is – play.

30 'Let's play hide-and-peek.'

'Who'll be It?'

'You be It.'

'Why should I? You be—'

'You're the eldest—'

35 'That doesn't mean—'

The shoves became harder. Some kicked out. The motherly Mira intervened. She pulled the boys roughly apart. There was a tearing sound of cloth but it was lost in the heavy panting and angry grumbling and no one paid attention to the small sleeve hanging loosely off a shoulder.

40 ‘Make a circle, make a circle!’ she shouted, firmly pulling and pushing until a kind of vague
circle was formed. ‘Now clap!’ she roared and, clapping, they all chanted in melancholy unison:
1 ‘Dip, dip, dip – my blue ship–’ and every now and then one or the other saw he was safe by the
way his hands fell at the crucial moment – palm on palm, or back of hand on palm – and dropped
out of the circle with a yell and a jump of relief and jubilation.

45 Raghu was It. He started to protest, calling out ‘You cheated – Mira cheated – Anu cheated–’
but it was too late, the others had all already streaked away. There was no one to hear when he
called out, ‘Only on the veranda – the veranda – Ma said – Ma said to stay on the veranda!’ No one
had stopped to listen, all he saw was their brown legs flashing through the dusty shrubs, scrambling
up brick walls, leaping over compost heaps and hedges, and then the veranda stood empty in the
purple shade of the bougainvillea and the garden was as empty as before; even the limp squirrels
50 had whisked away, leaving everything gleaming, brassy and bare.

¹ ‘Dip, dip, dip’ is a method of deciding who should be ‘It’, by singing and clapping hands.

PASSAGE TWO

The following passage is an online article from an English newspaper.

Daily Mail Online: Children banned from playing ²‘tag’ in school playground



Danger? Headmistress has outlawed ‘physical’ games

In an age when childhood innocence is under threat from every direction, the traditional game of tag would not seem to be a problem.

But one headmistress thinks it is. She has banned it – along with all other games which involve physical contact – as “inappropriate behaviour”.

- 5 Youngsters aged five to 11 at her school have been told that even linking arms with each other will not be allowed.

The only time any of the 400 pupils can touch each other is if they need to help a classmate who has fallen over.

- 10 The Headmistress became concerned that playground games were becoming too rough after a number of instances of bumped heads.

She said the next move would be slowly to reintroduce “supervised and appropriate physical contact between pupils.

A minority of pupils persistently offended on the playground,” she said. “That needed to be dealt with.

- 15 I told the children we should start by having no physical contact at all to make things fair.

I couldn’t say to the boys that they couldn’t play certain games and then allow the girls to go around linking arms.

I think on the first day the children thought, ‘How is this going to work?’ Now I have spoken to some of them and they think the playground has become a lot calmer.

- 20 Pupils are more creative, playing games such as shadow tag to replace the real thing. Rather than shoving each other roughly on the back you try to jump on their shadow.”

² ‘tag’: a game where children chase and tap each other to decide who is ‘It’.

The school's move is the latest in a series of instances across Britain where traditional games have been deemed dangerous. Even football is among those which have paid the price of caution.

25 On its website, the school states: "Our children thrive in an environment in which every child is made to feel happy and secure."

But parents at the school appeared bemused over the ban.

One said, "I can't say I'm happy with it. I can't see it does much for children learning to play together."

30 Another said, "Children have been playing games like this for centuries. To ban them from touching each other is just ridiculous."

A spokesman for the local education department said, "It is up to individual schools and governors to decide what the children do in their playtimes."

A spokeswoman for 'Stop Bullying' said, "Parents these days are very quick to complain if a child does get hurt at school so maybe the school is just trying to cover this eventuality.

35 But I don't think this will stop bullying as it will never stop namecalling. Supervised games with an older child or a teacher watching is perhaps the answer."

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