
CE AT 13+

ENGLISH

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Examinations Board

Paper 1 – Reading (Specimen Prose Insert)

Date

Specimen

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Read this passage from *Walking Home*, by Simon Armitage, and then answer the questions on the question paper.

The writer has embarked on a two-week-long walk along the Pennines Way. It is a remote and challenging walk famous for its bad weather. At the start of this extract, which occurs on day four of the walk, he has just escaped from a rain storm into the shelter of a wood.

Pine resin is the first thing I've smelt for hours. Except at the very top where their tips bend and flex like fishing rods in some mad struggle, the evergreens absorb the bruising gusts and deafening surges of wind, so there's nothing but static and stable air at ground level where I walk. And somewhere above me, where their coats are
5 thickest and fullest, the trees have absorbed all suggestion of rain, so down here it's dry and cushioned, every footfall received and relaunched by a thick mattress of spongy, brown needles. A form of twilight gathers under the canopy, a cloistered¹ stillness, and sometimes the patterns of upright timbers form alleyways or avenues, heading off through the forest towards an open glade or sunlit grove. I imagine deer,
10 furlongs² away, ears tuned already to the clumsy juggernauts³ of my boots and the heavy industry of my breathing, safe in the knowledge that at any moment they can simply melt away.

Then without warning the trees stand aside and a small wooden gate opens onto the wide, wind-blasted expanse of Haughton Common, and as I emerge into its
15 tremendous emptiness, I'm surprised by how quickly my mood can change on this walk. Half an hour ago I was saturated and glum, chunnering to myself about the pointlessness of the whole project, dreaming up an excuse to quit. Then came the tranquillity of the woods, and now this plain, this prairie of papery bleached grass, each blade like a palm cross, shaking and zithering in the air-storm. In fact the wind
20 is so powerful and so absolutely and directly against me that I have to almost cycle into it, lifting my knees then pushing back against imaginary pedals, dropping into the lowest gear. And the further I climb the more adamant it gets in its opposition, as if a whole North Atlantic weather front has come bursting through, pouring through
25 the gap, so that any progress is like progress upstream, against the flood, into the rapids, with boulders and logs of hard air piling into me and knocking me sideways.

¹ cloistered = kept safe and apart, like a monk in an Abbey

² furlongs = an old-fashioned measurement of distance

³ juggernauts = large, heavy vehicles; usually a large truck or lorry

It should be torture, but it's exhilarating, ecstatic, a frenzied initiation⁴ or hysterical reacquaintance with the great outdoors.

And I think: this is why I came, to stumble into the unexpected, to feel the world in its raw state. I open my mouth to shout MORE, but the force of air just rams the word
30 back into my mouth and down my throat. Halfway up the hill there's a four-sided sheepfold⁵ housing a handful of stunted trees that appear to have endured this sort of thrashing and flaying for hundreds of years. Pilloried⁶, they are, and lashed, twisted into knots and bent out of shape, yet in spite of the scorn and the punishment, or possibly because of it, they cling on, alive. I push past them, shouldering through
35 the torrent of air, and notice now that my clothes and boots are completely dry, and see how the sun has rived open a gap in the sky, and that other cracks are opening up in the cloud base, and tears roll down my face, and not just because of the wind blasting against my eyes, or even the sudden light.

⁴ initiation: ceremony of introduction

⁵ sheepfold: a large, fenced area designed to contain sheep

⁶ pilloried: to be put in the stocks, a medieval instrument of punishment