

WITHINGTON GIRLS' SCHOOL

ENGLISH

ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

2018

COMPREHENSION

TIME: 45 MINUTES

Read the story below very carefully. Then answer the questions on the separate question sheet.

5 Alina woke up late on the day of the Maths test and had to rush to get ready. Quickly, she ate the toast her dad thrust in her direction and swallowed a glass of milk in one gulp. She had travelled the same route to school every day for two years now and she knew she could do it in exactly ten minutes: down Ennerdale Road, left onto Windermere Road, left again onto Maitland Street, past the café where they sold the delicious hot chocolate, past the hairdressers, past the sweet shop and down the narrow passageway which led to the school playground.

10 Still struggling to cram everything into her bag, she ran down Ennerdale Road; stopping only to fasten her shoelace, she sprinted onto Windermere Road; pulling her hair into an untidy ponytail she... oh no, she had forgotten her pencil case! Should she go back and risk being late? Or should she go on and hope someone would lend her a pen and a ruler? She scrabbled in the bottom of her bag and found a stub of
15 blunt pencil – well, that would do she supposed; better to go on than risk being told off for being late. She was nearly at the end of Maitland Street now, where the shops were: past the café, past the hairdressers...suddenly she stopped abruptly.

20 The three shops stood in a block of their own: café, hairdressers, sweet shop. At least that is what Alina thought they were like – she was beginning to doubt her own memory because today there were four shops, not three: between the hairdressers and the sweet shop, where previously had been nothing, was a fourth shop: a dark, old-fashioned shop with grimy windows. Alina peered in to see if she could tell what it
25 sold.

30 All Alina could see through the dirty, small-paned windows was an **enticing** glow of rich, jewel-like colours. Suddenly all thoughts of being late and all her fear of the **impending** Maths test disappeared and, although she couldn't remember going through the dark door with the little bell, she found herself standing in the mysterious shop, staring at a dark, glossy wooden counter behind which stood rows of glass bottles, different shapes and sizes and all filled with liquids which glowed red and purple and green. How she longed to stretch over and take one! She leant over the counter and then recoiled in shock. Was that a face
35 in one of the bottles? An anguished, miserable face?

40 'Good morning.' Alina nearly fainted with shock at the sound of the dry, whispery voice behind her. She turned around and found herself staring at a small woman with a lined, leathery face and sharp, black eyes. Her clothes, hair and skin were all brown – the same colour as the panelled walls of the shop – and she seemed almost to be part of the shop, to have suddenly sprung from the walls.

45 'G-good morning,' stammered Alina, wondering what she was going to say next. After all, this was a shop and people usually went into shops because they wanted to buy something; Alina didn't have the faintest idea what this shop sold, and she had no money anyway.

50 'Alina, isn't it?' said the woman. 'I think I have what you are looking for.' She reached under the counter and pulled out a pencil – an ordinary, boring black pencil. Alina preferred sparkly pink ones, but she couldn't deny that this was better than the blunt pencil she had found in her bag. She took the pencil, wondering how she was going to pay for it.

'That's perfect,' she said, examining the pencil. 'But there's no price on it...'

55 The woman gave a **wry** smile. 'Oh, there is a price,' she said, taking the pencil from Alina and dropping it in her bag. 'There is always a price. Now, hurry along, child. You don't want to be late, do you?'

Suddenly Alina was outside the shop again, almost **colliding** with her friend Jenna who had just erupted out of the sweet shop, dragging her annoying little brother by the elbow.

'Hiya, Alina! We're late – get a move on!'

60 Alina looked back to point out the strange new shop to Jenna, but it had gone – the sweet shop was next to the hairdressers, and Jenna began to wonder if she had imagined the shop with the glass bottles and the strangely unsettling encounter with the woman who gave her the pencil.

65 Everyone in class 6A was slightly subdued as they filed into the classroom. This was an important test for which they had been practising for weeks. Alina wished she could be like Jenna, who just seemed to be able to do Maths without trying very hard – any problem made her eyes light up with the challenge of solving it and she had soon worked out the correct answer. Alina just tended to get into a muddle.

70 She sighed. Whatever happened it would soon be over and then she could tell Jenna about the strange shop and maybe they would find it again on the way home. She turned over the paper and took the boring black pencil out of her bag – and then dropped it with a squeal. The pencil had somehow moved in her grip – sort of *squirmed* as if it was

75 alive! Mrs Norton looked at her sternly and Alina picked up the pencil again – more **tentatively** this time. To her relief it behaved just like a normal pencil and she settled down to work. To her surprise, she raced through the first five questions, confidently writing down numbers and solving the problems. Her work was beautifully neat and she just knew

80 that the answers were correct. Maybe this pencil was lucky.

She was about to embark on the second section of the test, which had more difficult questions, when she heard a sound. To her left, Jenna

was quietly sobbing. Mrs Norton had rushed over to see what the problem was and Alina could hear snatches of their conversation.

85 'I just can't do any of them...'

'...easy... you were doing problems like this in year 3...'

'But I can't do them now...'

'Maybe... just nerves?'

90 Jenna sobbed more loudly. Alina wished she could help her friend; Jenna was a mathematical genius – why couldn't she do these simple questions?

95 She turned back to the exam paper and flew through the next two questions easily, trying to ignore the sound of her friend crying on the other side of the room. It was very odd that Jenna, who was normally so good at Maths, couldn't do any of the questions whereas she was finding them all strangely easy. What had changed? She looked over at Jenna and caught a glimpse of her face, her mouth stretched into an 'O' of despair. Where had she seen that face before? Suddenly she remembered! The face she thought she saw in the mysterious bottle of
100 coloured liquid! Jenna looked trapped, just like the face in the bottle. The shopkeeper's words came back to her: 'There is always a price.' Was this the price? Had the pencil somehow made her able to do Maths whilst taking away the ability from her friend? Quickly she picked up the pencil, recoiling at its slimy, **unwholesome** feel, and put it in her bag;
105 she would throw it away later – somewhere where nobody would ever find it. She found her familiar blunt stump of pencil and turned back to the question paper. To her relief she found that the next question made no sense at all and she felt positively happy when she discovered that she had made a black smudge on the paper. Jenna was crying less
110 noisily now and Alina could see that she was settling down to complete the questions. Mrs Norton patted her gently on the shoulder: 'There. I told you you would be able to do it if you just calmed down.'

115 Happily, Alina got back to making a mess of the exam paper, her cheerful mood only slightly spoiled by her inability to forget the thing that lay in her bag and her impatience to be rid of it forever.