

WITHINGTON GIRLS' SCHOOL

ENGLISH

ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

2019

COMPREHENSION

TIME: 45 MINUTES

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

5 The bell rang for the end of afternoon playtime and Ebony quickly buried her crisp packet and sweet wrappers under a pile of leaves and ran towards the school. She threw her plastic water bottle in the general direction of the bin and skidded to a halt at the back of a line of chattering children.

10 This was the time of the school day that Ebony liked the best: story time. The story that Miss Bennett was reading to them this week was called 'A Christmas Carol' and was about a man called Ebenezer Scrooge who was unkind to everyone until he was visited by three spirits who showed him that what he was doing was bad and made him into a better person. It was a **macabre** story, full of suspense, and Ebony loved it!

15 Miss Bennett finished the story and closed the book. Everyone was smiling because the story turned out to have a happy ending after all. 'Right,' said Miss Bennett, 'There's one more thing I need to tell you before the bell goes. On Saturday, members of the school's eco society have volunteered to help pick up litter in Buttercup Park. We need more people to help – it's a big park and there is a lot of litter - so I'm going to give you all a letter to take home to your parents. If you can come on Saturday, ask your parents to sign the letter and bring it back tomorrow.'

25 Ebony stuffed the letter in the bottom of her bag. Of course, she cared about the environment but she was far too busy on Saturday to spend it picking up litter: there was her dancing lesson in the morning, Maisie's party in the afternoon and that new game her brother had promised she could play on his X-Box. Forgetting all about the letter, she ran home excitedly to see if the present her mum had ordered for Maisie had arrived yet.

30 The present hadn't arrived, and Ebony went to bed disappointed. She tossed and turned, unable to sleep, and when she did eventually fall asleep it seemed as if something woke her almost immediately. There was a strange green light in the corner of her bedroom. Ebony was more puzzled than afraid, and she sat up, trying to work out what the light could be. Suddenly a figure stepped from the light and Ebony almost jumped out of her skin. 'Who are you?' she shouted. 'What are you doing in my house?'

35 'I am the Spirit of Nature Past,' said the strange figure in a light, laughing twinkling voice, 'and I have something to show you. Come with me.'

40 I will not!' shouted Ebony. She knew very well that she should never go anywhere with strangers and she had no intention of accompanying a green, glowing figure on a walk in the middle of the night.

'Very well,' said the figure. 'Watch.'

45 To Ebony's surprise, her computer screen glowed into life, even though the computer was turned off and unplugged. The figure seemed to want her to watch the screen, so Ebony did, and soon a familiar scene appeared. She recognised the iron gates and the pond. It was Buttercup Park! Or was it? As she watched, she noticed that, although this place looked familiar, it was definitely not the Buttercup Park she knew: it looked so **verdant** and fresh!

50 There were so many flowers, for one thing. Buttercups, obviously, but also bluebells, cowslips, ragged robin, harebells and lady's smock: old names for old flowers, which Ebony knew only because she had done a project on plants last term. As she watched, a woman and a girl came into view. 'That's me!' shouted Ebony. But then she looked closer and
55 she saw that, although the girl had the same black hair that she had, she was dressed differently, in a red, old-fashioned dress that looked strangely familiar. The girl turned round and Ebony realised why she looked familiar and where she had seen the old fashioned, red dress before. There was a picture of her mum as a child in her parents'
60 bedroom – wearing the same dress. That meant the woman, who had the same black hair, must be her grandmother, who had died before Ebony was born. Tears prickled Ebony's eyes as the woman and the girl ran into the distance and the picture faded.

65 'Buttercup Park in 1984,' said the Spirit, 'full of flowers and birds and life. I must go now; another will come to continue your journey.'

'Wait!' shouted Ebony. 'Why are you showing me this?'

70 The room went dark as the green Spirit faded. Ebony decided it had probably been a dream and had just decided to try to go back to sleep when the corner of the room started to glow again, although not as brightly this time, and the Spirit which appeared was dimmer and spoke in a deeper, sadder voice. 'I am the Spirit of Nature Present', said the sombre spirit. I have something to show you.' Again, the computer screen glowed mysteriously into life and Ebony watched intently. This
75 time the scene was more familiar: Buttercup Park again, but exactly as she remembered it. A few weedy buttercups sprang up between the rubbish and the grass was worn off in places. Dogs had fouled the footpath and plastic bottles floated in the stream, along with a rusty supermarket trolley. A blackbird sang **disconsolately** in the stunted trees and then flew off, knowing that he would find nothing to eat here.
80 A group of children stood up from their picnic, leaving plastic packaging and empty drink cans behind them. 'Hey, that's me...' Ebony started to say, but one look at the sad, wise face of the Spirit made her stop. She

85 remembered the visit shown on the screen from last week; she had known at the time that she should have collected the rubbish, but her friends had laughed at her, so she had left it. She blushed in embarrassment.

‘Buttercup Park in 2019,’ said the Spirit. ‘Nature is being killed by rubbish and carelessness. I must go now. A third will come to continue your journey.’

90 Ebony didn’t even try to go back to sleep. She watched the corner of the room until it began to glow, feebly this time. There was barely enough light to see the Spirit, which was pale and **cadaverous** and spoke in a whisper. ‘I am the Spirit of Nature Future,’ said the **muted** voice. ‘I am dying but I have enough energy left to show you what you need to see.’

95 This time Ebony hardly recognised Buttercup Park. The ground was covered in concrete, no birds sang, there were no flowers, no trees, no life. As she watched, a woman and a girl came into view. The woman wore a necklace with an ‘E’ on it. Ebony felt the identical necklace around her own neck and knew that this woman was herself in the future. Grown-up Ebony held her daughter’s hand and present-day
100 Ebony could see that she was crying.

‘Buttercup Park in 2040,’ said the Spirit, in its sad, dying voice. ‘It is too late now.’

105 The Spirit faded, and Ebony knew that no more would appear. Wiping the tears from her eyes, she crawled into bed and eventually fell into an uneasy sleep.

The next morning her mum came to wake her and was startled by her daughter’s pallor and heavy, red eyes. ‘You’d better stay at home today,’ she said. ‘It looks as if you are coming down with something.’

110 ‘I’m fine,’ replied Ebony, rubbing her eyes. ‘I’m going to school. Oh, there’s a letter you need to sign.’ She pulled the crumpled letter from her bag and gave it to her mum. ‘I’m going to pick up litter in the park on Saturday,’ she said, ‘and I’m joining the school eco society. I might need a new pair of wellies.’