



# 11+ Reading

---

What you can do at home  
to support what we do at  
school



# The reading element of the 11+ exam

- 11+ exams begin around November of Year 6
- The reading element is usually one or two extracts of literature followed by a number of questions
- Extracts are usually taken from a novel
  - Very occasionally, extracts are poems or non-fiction texts
- The most academically selective schools often use extracts from challenging classic literature
- Exams could be multiple choice, short answer or long answer
- Long answer format requires the most practice
- Most reading comprehension exams are around 45 minutes long



# What does an 11+ paper look like?

---



**COMMON ENTRANCE EXAMINATION AT 11+**

**ENGLISH**

**PAPER 1: READING**

**Monday 15 January 2018**

Please read this information before the examination starts.

- You have 5 minutes for reading the passage and questions.
- After that, you may start writing your answers when you are ready to do so. You have 40 minutes for writing.
- Answer all the questions, using full sentences.
- Use your best handwriting and take care with spelling, grammar and punctuation.



The extract is  
introduced  
with a blurb  
at the top

---

Read the passage below and answer the questions opposite.

This is the start of a story about a circus. It is told by a ten-year-old girl called Louie.

The bigger the danger, the bigger the crowd. One look at tonight's audience said it all. With just minutes till showtime, the big top was almost full and I was ready to burn with excitement. Every last ticket was sold. And still the queue snaked out of the field and down the lane until all you could see were people's hats bobbing above the hedgerows.

First thing this morning, the posters had gone up all over town. 'MORE DARING THAN EVER!' they'd said in blue and gold letters. 'WATCH MONSIEUR MERCURY DEFY GRAVITY ON HIS TRAPEZE!' To me, Monsieur Mercury was good old Jasper, who I lived with in a tiny trailer, and who drank lapsang tea out of dainty cups and let me have the best bits of every piecrust. Which was more than could be said for my mam. When I was just a baby she left me at the circus, the way most people forget an umbrella.

Inside the ticket booth where I worked there wasn't space to swing a cat. I felt it specially tonight, jiggling from foot to foot, impatient to get finished so I'd be free to watch the show. My dog Pip sensed it too; sitting close beside me, he watched my every move. At last, the final punters filed past to claim their tickets. They were a noisy bunch, laughing and nattering, their breath like smoke in the evening air. They'd be quiet soon enough. Once they were inside the big top, they'd squeeze onto a bench and look upwards. And what they'd see would leave them speechless.

A little shiver went down my neck. *Imagine if I was about to perform. All those eyes gazing up at me. Just imagine it!* *— exclamation*  
I came back to earth with a bump. The circus owner, Mr Leo Chipchase, was in the doorway. He'd put on his best tartan waistcoat and was smiling, which made a change.

'Think of all those backsides on seats, Louie,' he said as he squeezed in beside me to count the takings. 'The bigger the danger...'  
'...the bigger the crowd,' I finished for him.

He did have a point. There were grander circuses than ours, with more animals, more curiosities, more sparkle. Backsides on seats mattered. So, what better way to draw the crowds than a thrilling new routine? And tonight that's exactly what they'd get. Jasper would perform not a double but a TRIPLE somersault from his trapeze. No other circus boasted such a stunt. It was genius.

But it was dangerous too. Now I'd reminded myself of this fact, it grew like a little worm inside my head. Tonight's show had that *whiff of death* all right. How anyone could hang mid-air for so long I didn't know. Jasper made it look easy. And I thought of Charles Blondin – the GREAT Blondin – who'd crossed Niagara Falls on a *tightrope*. One hundred *thousand* people had turned up to watch him. They placed bets that he'd fall and die. He didn't, of course, but I still felt sick thinking about it.

At last the queue ended.

'Can I go now?' I asked, for my fidgeting had got worse.

If I was quick, I'd get to wish Jasper luck. And be sure of a good viewing spot at the back of the big top.

Mr Chipchase waved me away. 'Go.'

There are  
usually 6-10  
questions.

Questions  
range in value.

---

1. Why is there a big crowd in the circus tent tonight? (1)
2. (a) Write down two ways in which the posters are made to look exciting. (2)  
(b) Louie calls him 'good old Jasper' (line 9), so why do you think he is called 'Monsieur Mercury' on the posters? (3)
3. 'the way most people forget an umbrella' (lines 11–12)  
What is the effect of Louie saying this about her mother? (4)
4. What is Louie's job?  
Write down a brief quotation as evidence for your answer. (2)
5. Do you think Louie has a dream of her future?  
What might it be? (1)
6. Do you think Louie likes Jasper?  
Write down as many reasons as you can to support your opinion. (4)
7. 'whiff of death' (line 34)  
What does this mean, and is it a good thing or a bad thing as it is used in this passage? (2)
8. Circus acts can be both exciting and dangerous.  
How does the author show these two sides of the circus in this passage?  
Use brief quotations to help you explain. (6)

(Total marks: 25)

The passage is taken from *The Girl Who Walked on Air* by Emma Carroll, published by Faber and Faber, 2014©.

# Pupil answers are detailed and packed with quotes

2

7/10/2022

Date:

LO: To provide detailed and specific answers to these comprehension questions.

Success Criteria:	Me	Teacher
I have used PEE* wherever possible. I always start my answer with a general comment before I provide a quote to back up my comment.	1/2	✓
I have embedded my quotes into a meaningful sentence that reads fluidly and sensibly.	1/2	✓
I have used quotation marks when presenting my quotes.	✓	✓
My quotes are usually very short and very specific.	✓	✓
I have referenced literary techniques used wherever possible.	✓	✓
I have counted up the number of points I have made, to ensure that they match or exceed the number of marks available.	1/2	0
I have written A LOT. My answers are well developed and detailed.	1/2	0
Other:		

\*PEE: Point, Evidence, Explanation

MORE QUOTES NEEDED

1. Because there is a dangerous act at the circus and many people want to see it. (1)
2. They are making the event sound as exciting as they can and printing it in blue and gold letters which makes them seem important. (1)
3. Because Mercury is a god messenger and can fly, the connection is that when he is on the ground he is up in the air, which is a bit like Jasper. Putting him to someone that can fly makes people think that it's more dangerous. (2)
4. The fact that her mother forgot her 'piston wrench' shows that her mother didn't care about her that much. This shows that her mother didn't care about

1. her that much because the mother didn't seem to be looking after Louie very well and didn't seem to care for her safety. It shows her mother was careless with her. Repetitive. Can't have many different points you have made.
4. She works selling tickets. We know this because it says 'Inside the ticket booth where I worked'. (2)
5. I think that she wants to work as an entertainer for the circus, not as a person in the ticket booth. I think this because she seems to like the idea of having all the eyes on her. (1)
6. I think that Louie does like Jasper. She says he is 'Good old Jasper' and 'Good old' is an old expression that you only use for people you like. She also seems keen to see him like know this because she says 'I'd get to wish Jasper luck' which also shows he wants him to have luck which signals that they are friends. Another could be the fact that when she is thinking about how people used to put bets on the death of Charles Baldwin, she feels sick thinking about it. This shows that she doesn't want anything bad to happen to Jasper. All of these things show that they are good friends and that Louie likes Jasper. SUFF. (4)
7. A 'whiff of death' means that she can almost smell that someone is going to die and that something bad is going to happen. This is bad because Jasper is about to perform and that he may die or get injured. (1)

8. It portrays danger by making the dangerous act. We know it is dangerous because it says that 'No other circus dared such a stunt'. This shows that no-one has been daring enough to perform it. It is exciting because if Jasper manages to do the trick then it will be one of a kind because they will be the only circus that does it. (2)

MUCH MORE NEEDED FOR 6 MARKS. What about exciting? If you are short of time, resort to bullet points:

Exciting	Dangerous
•	•
•	•
•	•
•	•

= 6 marks

15/25



# What kinds of questions are asked?

- A wide range of question types, including
  - Questions on the meanings of words
  - Questions that require the child to read between the lines or gather clues as to what is going on
  - Questions that ask a child to summarise everything they have learned about a character
  - Questions that ask a child to compare two characters
  - Questions that ask the child to predict what will happen next
  - Questions on the effect a specific word, simile, or other technique has on the reader. What does that word make you picture in your mind? How does that word make you feel?
- Children are required to justify their answers with evidence from the text:

*I think this because...*



# How do we prepare for the exam in school?

- By fostering a whole-school culture of reading and talking about books
- By studying literature in class
  - Novels, short stories, plays, poetry and non-fiction texts
  - Combination of whole texts and extracts
  - Whole class discussions of literature
  - Focused paired or individual study
- By practising exam technique
  - Written responses as part of regular teaching and learning
  - Practising how to answer different types of question
  - Practice tests and termly assessments
  - **Weekly, timed 11+ exam practice** from February of Year 5 until February of Year 6
  - Importance of going through the paper after it has been marked
- Through reading comprehension homework
- Through one to one reading with a teacher: higher level discussion of personal reading texts





# How can you support your child at home?

- Establish a nightly reading routine of at least 20 minutes per night
- Listen to your child read
- Take turns reading with your child
- Ask your child questions about the text
  - Do you think Amy is telling the truth?
    - *Why do you think that?*
  - What do you think is going to happen while their mother is away?
    - *Why do you think that?*
  - Encourage your child to justify their answers with evidence from the text: *Because it says here that...*
  - It's not your job to *test* your child on the text: that's not what this is about. This should be a relaxed and enjoyable discussion of what's happening in the story.
- Discuss new vocabulary, unfamiliar expressions or anything else that jumps off the page.
- You don't need to have all the answers! Asking questions together is a valuable exercise.



“Reading without  
reflecting is like  
eating without  
digesting.”

-Edmund Burke

---





# The impact of reading on learning

---

## Why read for 20 minutes a day?

CHILD A	CHILD B	CHILD C
reads 20 minutes per day	reads 5 minutes per day	reads 1 minute per day
hears 1,800,000 words per year	hears 282,000 words per year	hears 8,000 words per year
scores in the 90th percentile on standardized tests	scores in the 50th percentile on standardized tests	scores in the 10th percentile on standardized tests



# Words they don't understand

---

- If the text is at the right level, there should be a new word every few pages. Multiple unfamiliar words on a single page means the text is too tricky and the child will become discouraged.
- There should be *some* unfamiliar words, otherwise the text is too easy.
- Don't interrupt the flow and pleasure of reading to look up every word in the dictionary there and then.
- Children reading alone should highlight the unfamiliar word or make a note and move on.
- Children can ask parents what those words mean later; they can ask a smart speaker for the definition; or they can look up the meaning in the dictionary or online.
- Only stop reading if that unfamiliar word is a barrier to understanding what happens next.





## What are the 'right' books to read at home?

---

- Books should be high quality literature that is suitably challenging for the individual child
- The hardest books are not necessarily the best books
- We can recommend high quality literature for children of all abilities

# School reading lists

- Find them on the school website
- Diverse range of challenging texts, new and classic
- Covers a range of places, eras, cultures, voices
- Includes autobiographies, graphic novels, short stories, poetry and more
  - [Year 4 Reading List](#)
  - [Year 5 Reading List](#)
  - [Year 6 Reading List](#)



The screenshot displays the 'Reading-List-Year-5-2020.pdf' document on a web browser. The list features four books with their covers and descriptions:

- Artemis Fowl** by Eoin Colfer: Twelve-year-old Artemis Fowl is a millionaire, a genius—and, above all, a criminal mastermind. But even Artemis doesn't know what he's taken on when he kidnaps a fairy, Captain Holly Short of the LEPrecon Unit. These aren't the fairies of bedtime stories—they're dangerous! Full of unexpected twists and turns, *Artemis Fowl* is a riveting, magical adventure.
- Ballet Shoes** by Noel Streatfield: *Ballet Shoes* tells the story of three adopted orphans – Pauline, Petrova and Posy Fossil. Brought to 1930s London as babies by an eccentric explorer (Great Uncle Matthew, otherwise known as Gum), the girls have a comfortable life until the family begin to run out of money. Luckily they are all given places at the Children's Academy of Dancing and Stage Training and soon start to earn their own way as child performers on the stage.
- The Demon Headmaster** by Gillian Cross: Dinah moves in with a new family and begins to go to school with her foster brothers Lloyd and Harvey. Dinah thinks that the school is rather strange and out-of-the-ordinary: pupils suddenly talk like robots and do weird things. She's sure the headmaster has some kind of power over them, and is determined to find out more. But the Demon Headmaster is equally determined to stop her.
- Aquila** by Andrew Norriss: On a boring school trip, Tom and Geoff discover an ancient fly-

Below the reading list, the website header for 'The Roche School' is visible, including the tagline 'Leading co-ed prep school ages 2-11 in Wandsworth, London' and a navigation menu with links: Home, About Us, Admissions, Daily Life, Curriculum, Early Years, Safeguarding, and Roche TV.

The bottom section of the image shows a photograph of a teacher with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue shirt, sitting at a desk and writing in a notebook. A young girl with long brown hair, wearing a red sweater, is sitting next to him, also writing. The text 'Literacy and Language' is overlaid in large white letters on the photograph.

Our dynamic English curriculum provides pupils with transferable skills and fosters a love of literature from an early age.



Award-winning literature:  
visit a bookshop and look for the  
stickers



You can also look for  
online recommendations  
from reading  
organisations:

[Good Reads](#)

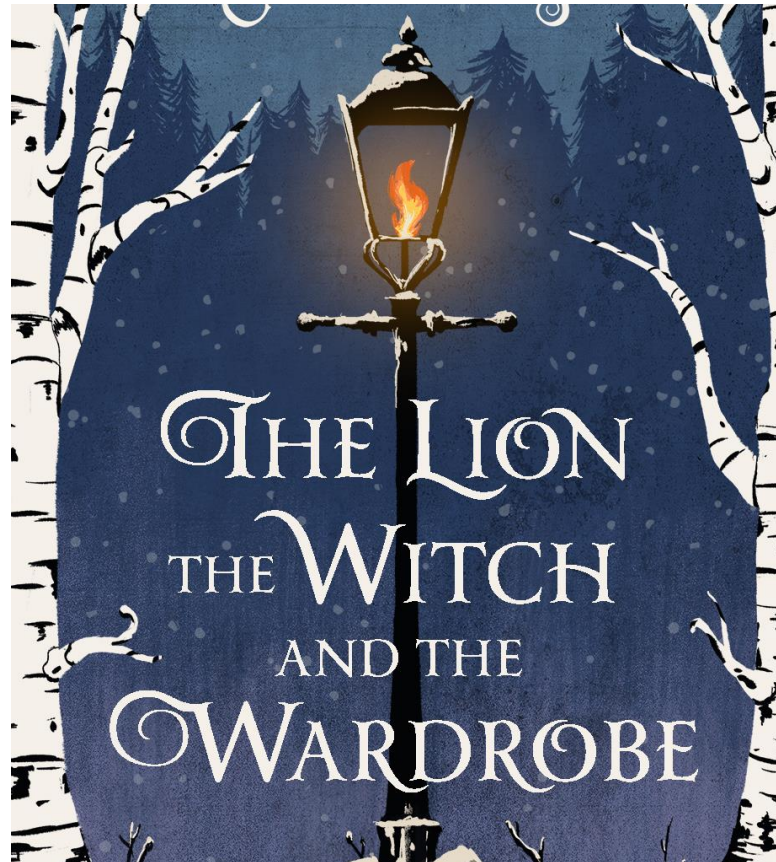
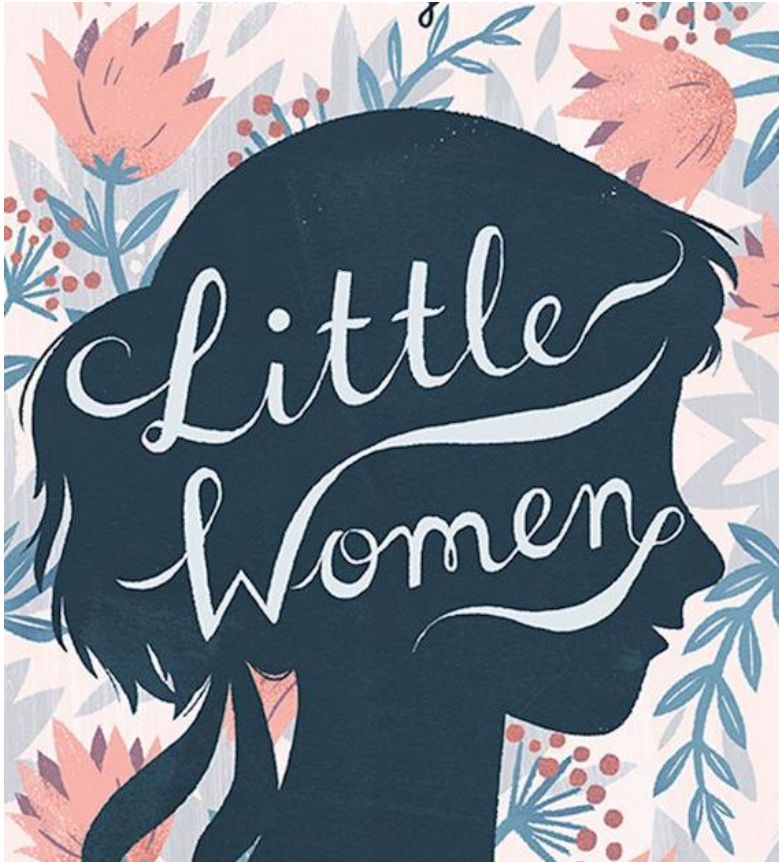
[Book Trust](#)

[CLPE](#)





# Classic texts





# Our libraries, librarian and reading specialists

- We have a comprehensive library in each of our three buildings.
- Year 5 have their own library in Hilden House
- Year 6 have their own library in Point Pleasant
- Reading list books are prominently displayed in Year 5 and 6 libraries
- Support and guidance are always available from Ms Lorna, our librarian, and Mrs Melanie, our Reading Co-Ordinator, and of course class teachers







## Why do we want children to read at home?

---

- Because reading:
  - broadens a child's understanding of the world, of people, of relationships
  - fires the imagination
  - is a means of relaxation and escapism
  - supports a child in developing empathy for others
  - feeds into their own creative writing
  - helps children to learn to articulate their opinions and refine their analytical skills
  - builds vocabulary
  - supports spelling
  - helps children to prepare for 11+ exams, including Verbal Reasoning and Maths
- Because good readers make good learners

# Talking about books in 11+ interviews

- What is your favourite book? Tell me why it's your favourite.
- What are you reading right now? Are you enjoying it? Why/why not?
- What the best book you have studied at school? Tell me why you loved it.
- Is reading important to you? Why?
- What if there was no such thing as books? How would the world be different?
- Should every child be forced to read the Harry Potter books? Why/why not?





\_\_\_\_\_



## Stories help.

Stream hundreds of kids' audiobooks for free.





# What if your child finds reading especially challenging?

- Dyslexia and related challenges
  - Using a Kindle can be helpful: dyslexia-friendly font
  - Barrington Stoke accessible books for older children
  - 'Toe by Toe' reading support in school if needed
  - Support from the SEN department
- English as an additional language (EAL)
  - Books with illustrations are particularly useful
  - Read along with an audiobook playing on a smart speaker
  - If possible, use chapter summaries found online
  - Support from EAL specialists in school
- Future exam arrangements for those with additional needs
  - Importance of clarifying those needs well ahead of Year 6
  - Speak to your class teacher if you have any concerns: he or she will liaise with our Special Needs Co-ordinators



Christian Boer is a graphic designer with dyslexia. Dyslexics think in pictures. Because of the fact that the forms in the typeface we use in the west are so alike, they get mixed up easily by dyslexics. This leads to problems with learning in school as soon as children start to read.

The University of Twente did research on the typeface. Hereby a part of their conclusion:

“The dyslexics made fewer errors, than the normal readers, on the EMT with the font “dyslexie”. This is an indication that reading with the font “dyslexie” decreases the amount of reading errors.”




# What if your child is reluctant to read?

---

- Encourage them to explore a range of books that tap into their interests
  - If they like Star Wars, recommend Science Fiction books. If they like football, consider Marcus Rashford's autobiography
- Don't impose a book on your child: let them choose the book
- Take turns reading, with the parent reading a good chunk of the text aloud each night. This is what we mean when we talk about **shared reading**.
- Alternative formats such as graphic novel versions of classic texts may be less daunting and they are equally rich in terms of scope for discussion of character, making predictions, etc
- Add perks: *Bedtime is 7pm, unless you want to do even more reading, in which case you can stay up til 7.30...*
- Make use of audiobooks
- Ask your class teacher for support.
- The reading co-ordinator can offer support.





“To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.”

–Victor Hugo

**Any questions?**

---

