



Independent Schools  
Examinations Board

## COMMON ENTRANCE EXAMINATION AT 11+

# ENGLISH

## PAPER 1: READING

**Monday 2 November 2015**

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 and punctuation.



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**Read the passage below and answer all the questions which follow it.**

*This is the start of a book about a girl called Sophie.*

On the morning of its first birthday, a baby was found floating in a cello case in the middle of the English Channel. It was the only living thing for miles. Just the baby, and some dining room chairs, and the tip of a ship disappearing into the ocean. The baby was found wrapped for warmth in the sheet music of a Beethoven symphony. It had drifted very far from the ship and was the last to be rescued. The man who lifted it into the rescue boat was a scholar. It is a scholar's job to notice things. He noticed that it was a girl, with hair the colour of lightning, and the smile of a shy person.

What was her rescuer like? Well, think of night time with a speaking voice. Or think how moonlight might talk, or think of ink, if ink had vocal chords. Give those things a narrow, aristocratic face with hooked eyebrows, and long arms and legs, and that is what the baby heard and saw as she was lifted out of her cello case and up into safety. His name was Charles Maxim, and he determined, as he held her in his large hands – at arm's length, as he would a leaky flowerpot – that he would keep her.

The baby was certainly one year old. They knew this because of the red rosette pinned to her front, which read, '1!' 'Or rather,' said Charles Maxim, 'the child is either one year old or she has come first in a competition. As I believe babies are rarely keen participants in competitive sport, happy birthday, my child.'

Charles did not only give the baby a birthday. He also gave her a name. He chose Sophie on the grounds that nobody could possibly object to it. 'Your day has been dramatic and extraordinary enough, child,' he said. 'It might be best to have the most ordinary name available. You can be Mary, or Betty, or Sophie. Or, at a stretch, Mildred. Your choice.' Sophie had smiled when he said 'Sophie', so Sophie it was.

Charles had never really known a child before. He told Sophie as much on the way home: 'I do, I'm afraid, understand books far more readily than I understand people. Books are so easy to get along with.' Charles held Sophie on the very edge of his knee, and told her about himself, as though she were an acquaintance at a tea party. He was thirty-six years old, and six foot three. He spoke English to people, and French to cats and Latin to the birds. He had once nearly killed himself trying to read and ride a horse at the same time. 'But I will be more careful,' he said, 'now that there is you, little cello child.' Charles's home was beautiful but it was not safe; it was all staircases and slippery floorboards and sharp corners. 'I'll buy some smaller chairs,' he said. 'And we'll have thick red carpets!'

At home, after a hot bath in front of the stove, Sophie looked very white and fragile. Charles had not known that a baby was so terrifyingly tiny a thing. She felt too small in his arms. When Miss Eliot, from the National Childcare Agency, came round and asked what he meant to do with Sophie, Charles looked bewildered. 'I am going to love her. That should be enough, if the poetry I've read is anything to go by.' Charles set the baby on his knee, handed her an apple and began to read out loud to her from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

It was not, perhaps, the perfect way to begin a new life, but it showed potential.

1. What two things are in the cello case? (2)
2. The second paragraph is all about Charles Maxim.  
List three facts you learn about him in this paragraph. (3)
3. Why might the baby be compared to 'a leaky flowerpot' (line 14)? (2)
4. Why does Charles think the baby is one year old? (2)
5. (a) Why does Charles choose the name 'Sophie' for the baby? (2)  
(b) How does Sophie choose her own name? (1)
6. Reread lines 26–35. Write down one example of Charles showing himself to be someone who thinks carefully.  
Explain your choice. (1 + 2)
7. Do you think Charles will be a good father?  
Give reasons both for and against. (4 + 4)
8. Explain in your own words what the last sentence of the passage means. (2)

(Total marks: 25)

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