

X270/10/01

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2013

FRIDAY, 17 MAY
9.00 AM – 10.00 AM

ENGLISH
INTERMEDIATE 1
Close Reading

Answer all questions.

30 marks are allocated to this paper.

Read the passage carefully and then answer **all** the questions, **using your own words where asked to do so**.

The questions will ask you to show that:

you understand **what** the writer has said (main ideas and supporting details) (**Understanding—U**);

you can identify **how** the writer has said it (techniques of structure and style) (**Analysis—A**);

you can comment on **how well** the writer has achieved his/her purpose (using appropriate evidence) (**Evaluation—E**).

A code letter (U, A, E) is used alongside each question to identify its purpose for you.



PLEASE DON'T KILL OFF OUR NURSERY RHYMES

Studies suggest that learning nursery rhymes builds children's confidence and can help with reading skills.

Coming home from nursery, my daughter Ava, 3, recites *Humpty Dumpty*. “Daddy,” she says. “Did you know, Humpty Dumpty is an egg?” She ponders for a moment, her brow furrowed: “But Daddy, eggs don’t have legs! And eggs don’t have bums. So how can he sit on a wall?” This leads to a lengthy discussion about other things eggs don’t possess—such as eyebrows, nostrils and bicycles.

Nursery rhymes have always been part of Ava’s life. But a recent survey has shown that nursery rhymes are falling out of favour, with parents claiming they are too old-fashioned to interest children. According to the survey, only 36 per cent of parents in the UK regularly use nursery rhymes, while almost a quarter admit they have never sung one with their child.

It’s sad that so many parents don’t even think about nursery rhymes. Our goal is to encourage children to have a love of books but, before that, it’s about living in a language-rich environment—and rhymes are part of that. They’re also tremendously valuable as a confidence-builder. What you find out about yourself when you learn a rhyme and then get a round of applause is really important.

More than 20 per cent of young parents claimed not to use rhymes because they don’t consider them “educational”. Yet numerous studies report a significant relationship between nursery rhyme knowledge at the age of 3 and success in reading and spelling at 5 and 6. The reasons are complex, but the theory is this: the better children are at detecting syllables and rhymes at an early age, the quicker and more successful their progress with reading. Familiarity with nursery rhymes appears to help. They have an educational value we still don’t entirely understand. They enable children to become interested in the rhythm and patterns of language in a way that listening to stories doesn’t provide.

I arranged to sit in on the “music” sessions at Ava’s nursery to see what role nursery rhymes have in the education of preschool children, and if children have the foggiest idea what they mean.

The singalongs usually consist of half traditional nursery rhymes and half original compositions, where the appeal lies in repetitive melody and strong rhythmic element. Rhymes with actions, such as *Incey Wincey Spider*, are especially good for early learning. Some kids can’t sit still for long, so these rhymes help them to focus.

The group start with *Ring a Ring o’ Roses*, with its much-loved cue to “all fall down”. The children love it. Next, *The Grand Old Duke of York*. Afterwards, the class discusses the words. The teacher asks, “Where does the Grand Old Duke march up to?” Blank expressions. It’s clear that they just sing along with the sounds.

Next, it’s *Baa Baa Black Sheep*. Out of 12 children, ten claim that this is their favourite. Ask them what it’s about and once again they haven’t a clue. “Who does the sheep give some wool to?” asks the teacher. Silence. She gives them a hint: “He gives some to the master, and some to . . .

“The Dane!” exclaims one two-year-old.

At this point a little girl breaks into a rendition of “I’m a Barbie girl, in a Barbie world.” Which neatly brings us on to adverts. If we’re looking to point a finger of blame for the death of nursery rhymes, we could look at toys and clothes companies with jingles that worm into our brains.

45 The Simpsons portrayed this in an episode where the family celebrates Maggie’s first birthday. “Let’s all sing a song,” suggests Marge. There are blank looks, then the family circuits the dining table, flapping their arms and singing “I feel like chicken tonight”. TV theme tunes are nearly as bad. I ask one little girl in the group what her favourite nursery rhyme is and she replies: “Postman Pat.”

50 The session is drawing to a close and the teacher opens a bag of teddy bears and passes them round. “We’re going to sing *Rock-a-Bye Baby* to help our teddies get to sleep.” Millie, 3, suddenly pipes up. “I don’t like *Rock-a-Bye Baby*,” she says firmly.

Why not? “Because the baby falls.”

55 The others have never considered these lines, said to originate from Native American mothers placing their babies in hammocks suspended from the low branches of a tree.

The nursery manager rejects the idea that nursery rhymes are not educational: “The more obscure ones are almost better because they open up the children’s imagination. It doesn’t matter if they understand the meaning or not—rhymes introduce them to new words and give them different ideas.”

60 It’s certainly true that, while most of the entertainment to which children are exposed reflects things which are familiar to them, nursery rhymes conjure up a world that is out of time. Some argue that rhymes stimulate the imagination in unwanted ways. There’s no question that they often contain unsettling imagery. *Oranges and Lemons*, for example, ends with the lines “Here comes a candle to light you to bed/Here comes a
65 chopper to chop off your head”.

I still remember being shocked, as a child, by the farmer’s wife in *Three Blind Mice* chopping off their tails with a carving knife. Indeed, whipping, chopping and beating are all part of your average rhyme. Yet there is no evidence of children being upset by the brutal imagery in nursery rhymes. It is possible that this is because it is “distanced”
70 through the experience of play, like the violence of cartoons like *Tom and Jerry* seems to be.

Nursery rhymes are a free resource—something that involves language and action and a handover of learning. They’re a springboard into the world of books, because if children know rhymes, they can open a book, see them there and match their memory
75 to what they see on the page. Educationally they’re a wonderfully flexible tool. It would be a tragedy if they disappeared.

Damon Syson, in *The Times*

QUESTIONS

Marks Code

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. What does “her brow furrowed” (lines 2–3) suggest about the writer’s little girl? | 1 | U |
| 2. (a) Look at lines 6–10 and then explain in your own words what has happened because parents think nursery rhymes are “too old-fashioned to interest children”. | 1 | U |
| (b) How does the writer try to prove this point? | 1 | A |
| 3. Look at lines 11–15, and then explain in your own words two reasons why “It’s sad that so many parents don’t even think about nursery rhymes”. | 2 | U |

QUESTIONS (continued)

Marks Code

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| 4. Explain fully why it is appropriate for the writer to use “Yet” (line 17) at this point in his argument. | 3 | U/A |
| 5. Explain why the writer uses a colon (:) in line 19. | 2 | A |
| 6. Look at lines 25–27, and then explain why this paragraph works well as a link between sections of the writer’s account. | 2 | A |
| 7. Look at lines 28–39. | | |
| (a) Explain in your own words why <i>Incey Wincey Spider</i> is “especially good for early learning”. | 2 | U |
| (b) What do the children’s responses to the teacher’s questions about the words of rhymes confirm? | 1 | U |
| (c) What is noticeable about the structure of the sentences in which these responses are indicated? | 1 | A |
| 8. How effective do you find the writer’s use of the sentence which begins “At this point” (line 41)? | 2 | E |
| 9. How effective do you find the expression “jingles that worm into our brains” (lines 43–44) as an image or metaphor ? | 2 | E |
| 10. Show how one example of the word choice in lines 50–53 suggests something about the little girl’s character. | 2 | A |
| 11. The writer acknowledges that “rhymes stimulate the imagination in unwanted ways” (line 62), and goes on to illustrate what he means by this.
Explain in your own words what his point is. | 2 | U |
| 12. (a) Explain why the writer uses inverted commas round “distanced” in line 69. | 1 | A |
| (b) How does the reference to <i>Tom and Jerry</i> cartoons help the writer’s argument here? | 2 | A |
| 13. Think about the passage as a whole . | | |
| (a) Explain how effective you find any part of the final paragraph as a conclusion to the passage. | 2 | E |
| (b) Explain briefly to what extent the writer has persuaded you that “It would be a tragedy” (lines 75–76) if nursery rhymes disappeared. | 1 | E |

Total (30)

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

[Open out for Questions]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Close Reading Text—Article is adapted from “Please don’t kill poor Baa Baa Black Sheep” by Damon Syson, taken from *The Times*, Tuesday 8 December 2009. Permission is being sought from News Corp UK & Ireland Ltd.