

0860/401

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2010

THURSDAY, 29 APRIL
10.35 AM – 11.25 AM

ENGLISH
STANDARD GRADE
Foundation Level
Reading
Text

Read carefully the passage overleaf. It will help if you read it twice. When you have done so, answer the questions. Use the spaces provided in the Question/Answer booklet.



In the following passage, the main character Theo has a frightening experience.

- 1 About the time that Theo Dove turned thirteen, he became ill, and had to spend several weeks in bed. The holidays were due, so he did not miss much school. This pleased Theo, as he enjoyed school, but it was a boring, disagreeable time. After the first two weeks he was not exactly ill, and not exactly well. The fever and aches and wobbliness were bad enough, but worse was the way he felt, as if a damp grey curtain had been dropped between him and the world.
- 2 This way of feeling was not Theo's line at all. He was a sharp, stringy person, always on the go, interested in most things, and ready to do something about them. When he was small he had overheard his mother telling someone that he was a fearless little boy. At the time he hadn't been quite sure how to think of himself, and he had been much taken by the description. It had been no sweat living up to it ever since. But after the illness, he didn't much care for anything. Not even the house-moving, that had happened in his fourth week of being sick. Then the Doves left Parramatta, and moved to a brand-new housing development east of the Nepean River. It was a giant leap forward for the family because Cheapies, the supermarket people for whom Mr Dove worked, had opened a branch there, and Mr Dove was to be manager.
- 3 Feebly Theo lay in bed and listened to his mother being rapturous about Dad moving up the ladder. Flabbily he sat on the sofa wrapped in a blanket while his bed was being carted off to the removal van. Totteringly he was helped into the car, and carried away into the sunset to the new flat.
- 4 He felt as if someone had slipped his backbone out, but he refused to go to bed.
- 5 "No way, Mum," he said. "Not on our first day here."
- 6 He sat in a chair near the kitchen door, with a smile forced on his face to match the one that flitted like sunshine across his mother's, as she cooked their first dinner. She kept interrupting the process every three minutes by running to the window and blissfully crying: "I can see the river. Oh, Ted, I can see the lovely hills. I've always wanted hills. And the smell of everything in here, Ted—all new and clean and painty!"
- 7 Ted was Mr Dove. Naturally there were plenty of things about his father that set Theo's teeth on edge. There was the way he held a fork, like a pencil, and the back of his neck, wrinkled exactly like a second forehead. Theo hated himself for finding anything at all about his father that he didn't like. But he was honest, and he had to admit these things.
- 8 But now, seeing his parents so happy, he was happy too. Whether that were the reason, or the new home was, or whatever, he began to feel steadily better.
- 9 It was great to wake up in the morning and not wish he was still asleep. Still, a week or so passed before he was fit enough to go downstairs and look around the place.
- 10 The flat was on the fifth floor of a ten-storey building. Theo walked slowly down the stairs, legs rickety, an odd sensation in his stomach. However, he reached the bottom and surveyed what was going to be the garden—a wasteland of raw soil, with a circle of trembling infant willows sticking up out of it, and a funny-shaped area of round river stones arranged around two bushes of dry sabre leaves edged in yellow. There was a fan of concrete which spread under the building to become the parking yard.
- 11 Theo shivered as he stepped outside, not because everything looked so stark, for time would fix that, but because the wind was like a knife. It smelled of burning leaves and a sweetish dampness, and he remembered that he had been indoors more than a month, the year had moved on, and very soon it would be winter. But he couldn't help liking everything, the serene clouds gliding over the huge sky, the smell of the river, the fact that he wouldn't have to change schools, but would continue to travel to Parramatta every day.

- 12 He felt that he'd be fine to walk up the stairs again, but he had promised his mother he'd go up in the lift. So he stepped into it. It, too, smelled of varnish, and new rubber flooring, and had golden lattice doors in an Oriental pattern, rather classy. He punched the button, and the lift moaned upwards.
- 13 It was then that Theo noticed he was not alone in the lift. There was something crouched in the back corner against the wall. For the first three seconds Theo thought it was some weird bundle of yuk that someone had left there. Then he saw it pulsing slowly, like a sea anemone, and he realised it was alive.
- 14 He was stunned. There was no other word for it. He couldn't even move away from it, just stood there, freezing, staring. It was about the size of a medium dog, formless, as if it were made of three-quarters set jelly. It looked rather like jelly, too, with a faint sheen, almost like a slug. It was pearly grey, with darker, wet-looking areas.
- 15 The bottom of it spread out, as if it had melted a little, and near where its chest might have been were two half-formed blobs like hands or paws. It was rounded on top, as if for a head, but this bit was turned away towards the corner.
- 16 It gave off an unmistakable feeling of misery and helplessness. A long shudder passed over it, and two semi-circular bulges on the front of what Theo thought was its head began to quiver, like eyelids about to open.
- 17 Involuntarily Theo's mouth opened to let loose the kind of yell only heard in monster films, but all that came out was a croak. At that moment the lift stopped, the door wheezed open, and Theo stumbled out into the passage.
- 18 The world turned spangly black. Dimly he heard the lift moaning downwards, his mother speaking to him. He managed to walk, leaning on her, his eyes still shut because he was afraid to open them. He found himself on the living-room sofa, a cold wind blowing in from the balcony, a smell of cooking, everything normal. His mother clucked around.
- 19 "Too much for you. Shouldn't have let you go downstairs. Are you all right, darling? I wonder if I should call the doctor?"
- 20 Theo managed to say, "No, Mum. Silly. Okay now. Sorry," and sat up straight. It was true that his body was beginning to feel right, but his mind was going round and round, yelling desperately that he couldn't have seen that thing in the corner of the lift. He must have imagined it.

Adapted from a short story by Ruth Park

[END OF PASSAGE]

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