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NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2014

WEDNESDAY, 30 APRIL
1.00 PM – 2.00 PM

ENGLISH
INTERMEDIATE 2
Close Reading—Text

Read the passage carefully and then answer all the questions, which are printed in a separate booklet.

The questions will ask you to show that:

you understand the main ideas and important details in the passage—in other words, **what** the writer has said (**Understanding—U**);

you can identify, using appropriate terms, the techniques the writer has used to get across these ideas—in other words, **how** he/she has said it (**Analysis—A**);

you can, using appropriate evidence, comment on how effective the writer has been—in other words, **how well** he/she has said it (**Evaluation—E**).

A code letter (U, A, E) is used alongside each question to identify its purpose for you. The number of marks attached to each question will give some indication of the length of answer required.



TEENAGE BEDROOM

In this passage, the writer explores the reasons behind teenage untidiness.

The untrained eye might just see some discarded clothes and mugs – but teenage mess is an emotional issue.

The other morning, I found myself on my knees in my son’s bedroom, sobbing into a rather iffy smelling sock. All around me was the detritus of 16-year-old male life: piles of discarded clothes of indeterminate cleanliness, BB gun pellets, shards of glass from the mirror shattered by said BB gun. I counted five towels, all damp and heaped on the floor. One smelt as if it might have started sprouting its own fungal lifeform. On the plus side, there were also plenty of books, mostly school textbooks, which had been put to ingenious uses: a handy breakfast tray (with bowl and spoon virtually welded to the front cover), a prop to jam open the window. At first I’d been cautiously optimistic to see that the dirty washing basket actually contained some items of clothing. I was considerably less thrilled to find it filled mostly with the clean laundry that had gone up, freshly folded, to his room earlier in the week. Clearly the effort required to put it away in drawers was too great when it could just as easily be recycled straight into the wash basket, thus cutting out the middle man. Underneath the bed, on top of the mantelpiece and balancing precariously on the mattress, were 13 (count ‘em) mugs featuring dregs of tea in various stages of decay. The bedding had mostly come off the bed and was trailing on the floor, and everywhere the eye could see were single socks. Lots and lots of socks. Like the one into which I wept.

Let me make one thing clear. I’m not a tidy person. Ours is the type of home where visitors try to make “lived in” into a compliment. But there is something about the particular mess of the teenager’s room that goes beyond untidiness into something far deeper. Once, after we were burgled a few years back, a tutting CID officer looked into my daughter’s bedroom and said, “Disgusting! Who’d do that to a little girl’s room?” It was the one part of the house that had been left untouched.

As parents, our response to a messy room is often similarly emotional.

Years ago, when my own children still went to bed neatly scrubbed in fresh Thomas the Tank Engine pyjamas and sheets scented with fabric conditioner rather than stale sweat, I watched a documentary on the late, great John Peel, in which the famously easy-going DJ was reduced almost to tears when talking about the state of his teenage son’s bedroom—the arguments it triggered and the feelings it evoked in him. I was astounded. What a disproportionate reaction! How bizarrely out of character!

Now, of course, I understand only too well where those feelings came from. The powerlessness, the sense of failing in your parental duties, the feeling of not being considered, not respected.

The fact is that even the most laidback parents can find that children’s bedrooms become emotional battlefields within the family home. According to Professor Tanya Byron, a clinical psychologist, this could be because the mess plays right into our deep-seated fears as parents.

“On one level, seeing your child surrounded by squalor and chaos makes you worry about the future. Will he be able to cope with life and look after himself or will he end up in a flea-ridden squat?

On another level, it’s yet more evidence of your child asserting independence. And on a different level still, it can feel like total disrespect, as if your child is sticking two fingers up at you.”

One mother says that her 13-year-old daughter regards it as an invasion of her human rights if she goes into her room or tells her to tidy up. “She has the best room in the house, in the loft, and regards the shower room next door as ‘her bathroom’. But there are pressing reasons why I have to go up there: she leaves the windows open in all
50 weathers, she uses my expensive hair products and hides them, she takes a fancy to certain items of clothing that don’t belong to her, which I otherwise might never see again and she drops her hated school uniform in a heap on the floor so if I didn’t pick it up, she’d go to school looking like a tramp. Now there’s a new one: I’ve been used to finding apple cores in various states of putrefaction in her room for years, but since
55 having fixed braces fitted, she can no longer bite into them, so guess where I have to go looking for my chopping boards and sharp knives?”

This mother has more arguments with her daughter over the state of her room than anything else, something that doesn’t surprise a clinical psychologist specialising in children, adolescents and families.

60 “Your teenager’s job in life is to pull on the rope that’s joining them to you as they prepare to step out and be adults. Sometimes the bedroom mess is their way of saying ‘this is my room. It’s different from the rest of the house’.

“Sometimes our reaction is about recognising that they are growing up and moving away and that we won’t always be able to tidy up for them. They’re going to have to
65 look after themselves. Adolescence is a very chaotic time emotionally. The trivia of life—the towels on the floor, the washing not put away—can be a safe area for parents to vent worry and tension.”

Part of the problem is that as our children grow up, we expect them to show the same consideration and empathy as adults. Wrong, says Professor Byron.

70 “Adolescence is about making the transition from dependent child to independent adult. There are all these changes happening. The biological, psychological and social elements are thrown into a big washing machine and whirled about. It’s all part of the process, but it’s confusing.”

75 But that doesn’t mean we have to accept that one room in our home will look permanently as if it has had an encounter with Hurricane Katrina.

“It’s still OK to set boundaries for adolescents, just different boundaries,” says Professor Byron. “It’s OK for there to be family contracts that say these are the rules.

“Teenagers need to understand that life isn’t all about their needs. A family is like a team. You all work together and pull your weight.”

80 However you deal with it, experts and parents who’ve already been through it and out the other side all agree it’s important not to lose perspective. You haven’t failed as a parent because your son can’t remember the colour of his bedroom carpet. Your daughter won’t go off the rails just because you once found half a fossilised Arctic Roll under her bed.

85 Look at it in context. Is this part of a wider pattern of worrying behaviour, or is it just a messy room? If she’s getting her work done and she’s got a nice group of mates, you’re just going to have to grit your teeth and get through it.

Tammy Cohen, in *The Times* (slightly adapted)

[END OF TEXT]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Article is adapted from “*I looked at my son’s room and wept*” by Tammy Cohen, taken from *The Times*, 21 November 2011. Reproduced by permission of News Syndication.
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