

N5

National Qualifications

2026

English

Reading for Understanding,
Analysis and Evaluation
(Text)

Thursday, 30 April

Instructions to Candidates

Candidates should enter their surname, forename(s), date of birth, Scottish candidate number and the name and level of the subject at the top of their first answer sheet.

Total marks — 30

Read the passage carefully and then attempt ALL questions, which are printed on a separate sheet.

[Braille page 2] Love and affection

across the ages

Lily, aged four, is clear on the process of ageing. "How old is very old?" she is asked. "Thirty-seven," she replies firmly. Scarlett, also four, knows what to expect when she reaches this creaky age. "You get wobbly-wobbly on your knees when you bend

down," she says. The consolation is that "you get to play with little people like me". But not often enough.

In the television series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*, Lily, Scarlett and eight other four-year-olds go on a charming journey of discovery with 10 residents, aged between 82 and 102, of Lark Hill retirement village in Nottingham. Over five episodes, the very young and those in "late old age" are brought together over three months to play, have fun, and, perhaps most important of all, forge bonds.

Lark Hill is home to 400 older people. Its facilities include a gym, restaurant, beauty parlour and bowling green. So, why does Victor, 97, sit isolated for **[Braille page 3]** hours at a time in his room at the window — viewing from a distance a world in which he once played a very active part?

Victor, a veteran of the Second World War, is amazed that his courage is seen as anything other than a job. "We discovered we were part of history," he says. Recently widowed, he was married to Margaret for 66 years. They enjoyed ballroom dancing. In the series, when a waltz is organised, initially he prefers to dance alone, his embrace still reserved only for Margaret.

Comfort abounds at Lark Hill but Victor smiles as he says: "It's like being in prison. 'What are you in here for, mate?'" He is waiting for the "Lark Hill taxi" (the ambulance) to call for his final journey. Until, that is, we see him partnered with four-year-old Renee. In their first encounter, they are tasked with drawing portraits of each other. She says Victor's drawing doesn't look anything like her. "It will do when you grow up," he replies smartly.

The series bills itself as "an experiment to see if it is **[Braille page 4]** possible to halt or reduce some of the physical and mental decline that can be associated with older people." The memory, mood and mobility of the residents are measured periodically over the three months. The impact on the children's sociability, confidence and language is also noted. A battery of experts lectures us on what we already know — stimulation, positive challenges and rewarding relationships, at any age, are the spark plugs of life. It is a treat for viewers to watch as the magic unfolds.

Lavinia, 81, a retired library assistant and mother of two, who has had Parkinson's disease for 20 years, is resilience personified. She finds it impossible to take a step unaided because her degenerative illness and lack of confidence affect her sense of balance. Then she strikes up a friendship with the extraordinary Phoenix, who loves anything on wheels.

Several days later, Phoenix and the other children are playing outside on the wet grass. Lavinia, determined to join in, has several tries unaided to raise herself from her mobility **[Braille page 5]** scooter. She eventually succeeds. Gradually, helped by a walking frame, she makes it across the treacherous lawn. "It's like the Sahara Desert," she says, triumphantly reaching her goal.

In a previous series of *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*, young children and older people from Bristol were brought together. By the end, depression in the older people had lifted; the children had brought "great joy".

In 1900, older people were less common — only 4% of the population were aged 60 and over, but they tended to be a central part of an extended family. Now, as the percentage of over-60s climbs towards 25% and there are many more likely to reach a century, the segregation of the generations is accelerating, ageism is rife and innovation in how we treat the later stages is sadly lacking.

The stereotypes and stigma attached to old age are too easily internalised. "Old age," said writer Simone de Beauvoir, "kept catching my eye from the depths of the mirror ... I saw itself making **[Braille page 6]** its way forward so steadily when nothing inside me was ready for it."

Not all older people have such insight but, as the television series reminds us, no one should find themselves excluded from society. Ironically, what hits most at the heart in this series is not how the older people blossom as their capabilities are encouraged, but what allows the four-year-olds to flourish. They grow in the company of those who generously invest time and interest, undistracted by social media, mobile phones and iPads, crafting old-fashioned friendships.

How can this model spread? The charity United for All Ages is currently crowdfunding to raise £25,000 to campaign for the establishment of 500 "centres for all ages". Meanwhile, back at Lark Hill, Scarlett is making an invitation to a party. Beryl, 86, suggests they address the card to her mum and dad.

Tim, Scarlett's dad, explains gently that his wife, Sally, is no longer with them. "I loved her utterly," he says of Sally — just as Victor loved **[Braille page 7]** Margaret. Victor is at the top of a hill that Scarlett and Tim have yet to climb, but what they have in common is an experience of loss and the unpredictability of life, its richness and the value of loving. Whether aged four, 37 or 97, these are universal and valuable lessons to learn. Adapted from an article by Yvonne Roberts, The Observer

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