KING EDWARD'S SCHOOL, BIRMINGHAM

Admission Paper in English

Section A: Reading a passage and answering questions.

Time: 30 minutes

(This paper will be collected at the end of half an hour, and you will be given a second paper.)

This leaflet contains a passage which you are asked to read carefully.

When you have read it, please answer the questions. Write complete sentences, not short phrases, unless the question simply asks you to list words. So, if the question asks "Where was Humpty Dumpty sitting before his fall?",

- **don't** write "a wall" or "on a wall"

- **do** write "He was sitting on a wall."

It is worth being careful about this: you will score better in the examination if you write in sentences.

Good Luck!

Candidate's Name ....

Candidate's Number ....

"Bandits!"

(In this passage, the writer Truman Capote recalls an adventure he once had while travelling in Spain before the Second World War)

We were going to Algeciras, aboard a very old train. The seats sagged like a bulldog's face, and strips of adhesive tape held together those windows which hadn't lost their glass completely. In the corridor a prowling cat appeared to be hunting mice.

I shared my compartment with a middle-aged Australian wearing a soiled linen suit; he had tobacco-stained teeth and his fingernails were unsanitary. He informed us that he was a ship's doctor. Seated next to him there were two women, a mother and daughter. The mother was an overstuffed, dusty woman with disapproving eyes and a faint moustache. The focus for her disapproval fluctuated: first, she eyed me rather strongly because, as the day grew hotter, waves of heat blew in through the broken windows and I removed my jacket, which she considered discourteous. Later on, she took a dislike to the young soldier who also occupied our compartment. The soldier, and the woman's not very discreet daughter, a buxom girl with the scrappy features of a prizefighter, seemed to have agreed to flirt with each other.

The young soldier was one of many on the train. With their tasselled caps set at snappy angles, they hung about in the corridors smoking sweet black cigarettes and laughing confidentially

The train crawled lazily across a plateau of rough yellow wheat, occasionally plunging into deep ravines where wind from the mountains quivered in strange, thorny trees. It was a landscape for bandits. Earlier that summer, a young Englishman I knew had been motoring through this part of Spain when his car was surrounded by swarthy scoundrels. They robbed him, tied him to a tree and tickled his throat with the blade of a knife. I was thinking of this when, without preface, a rattle of gunfire broke the dozy silence.

It was a machine gun. Bullets rained among the trees like the rattle of castanets, and the train, with a wounded creak, slowed to a halt. For a moment there was no sound except the machine gun. Then, 'Bandits!' I said, in a loud, dreadful voice.

'Bandidos!' screamed the daughter.

'Bandidos!' echoed her mother, and the terrible word swept through the train like something drummed on a tomtom. The result was slapstick in a grim key. We collapsed on the floor, one cringing heap of arms and legs. Only the mother seemed to keep her head; standing up, she began systematically to stash away her treasures. She buried a ring in her bun of hair then, without shame, hiked up her skirts and slipped a pearl-studded comb into her underwear. In the corridor railway officials bumped about yapping orders and crashing into each other.

Suddenly, silence. Outside, there was the murmur of wind in leaves, of voices. Then the outer door of our compartment swung open, and a young man stood there. He did not look clever enough to be a bandit.

'*Hay un medico en el tren?*' he said, smiling.

The Australian, removing his elbow from my stomach, climbed to his feet. 'I'm a doctor,' he admitted, dusting himself. 'Has someone been wounded?'

'Si, Señor. An old man. He is hurt in the head,' said the Spaniard, who was not a bandit: alas, merely another passenger. Settling back in our seats, we listened, expressionless with embarrassment, to what had happened. It seemed that for the last several hours an old man had been stealing a ride by clinging to the rear of the train. Just now he'd lost hold, and a soldier, seeing him fall, had fired off his machine gun as a signal for the engineer to stop the train.

My only hope was that no one remembered who had first mentioned bandits. They did not seem to. After acquiring a clean shirt of mine which he intended to use as a bandage, the doctor went off to his patient, and the mother, turning her back, reclaimed her pearl comb.

The Questions:

1. How many other passengers (not counting the writer) are there in the same compartment of the train as Capote?

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2. Why is the title of this passage printed in inverted commas, do you think?

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3. Was the train travelling among trees or among wheat fields when the machine gun began to fire? Write out ONE phrase from the passage which supports your answer.

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4. List TWO details which Capote notices to suggest that the train was in poor condition.

FIRST...

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SECOND..

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5. Why is it surprising, even shocking, that the Australian man is a doctor? Try to mention TWO things about him, and explain why you have chosen them.

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6. Why does the Spanish mother disapprove of:

a) Capote?..

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b) the young soldier?...

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7. Was the younger Spanish woman beautiful? How can you tell?

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8. When Capote hears the machine gun, he assumes that the train is being attacked by bandits. Why? Give TWO reasons if you can, based on the passage.

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9. What is the Spanish mother most worried about when she thinks that bandits are coming? How can you tell?

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10. Explain in your own words what you think Capote means when he describes the passengers' reactions as "slapstick in a grim key".

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11. Do you think that Capote was impressed by the reaction of the railway officials to the emergency? Give TWO pieces of evidence from the passage which support your answer, and explain why each of them is important.

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12. What do you think *"Hay un medico en el tren?"* means? Explain why you think so.

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13. Why does Capote hope that nobody remembers who first mentioned bandits?

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This is the end of this paper. If you have any time spare, use it to check your answers. You will be given the second English paper soon.

King Edward's School Birmingham

"Bandits!" – Past Comprehension Paper

Because most of the questions in this paper are logically structured, I have provided suggested mark schemes. As always, these are designed to encourage safe, well-structured answers, and may not exactly match KES Birmingham's real marking criteria.

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1. There are four other passengers.

This is an easy question to get wrong. My method was to go through the passage writing "1", "2" etc. above each reference to a person in the compartment, until it became clear that there were no more people still to be listed.

Be aware that the "two women" ARE the "mother and daughter": there are **not** four women in total. The other people are the doctor and the soldier. Don't accidentally include the writer, Capote!

Marking: Correct answer only.	**[1 mark]**

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2. The title quotes the narrator, who cries out "Bandits!" The inverted commas also emphasise that there are not in fact any bandits.

You are likely to need both of these points.

Marking: 1 mark for each of the points in the example.	**[2 marks]**

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3. It was travelling through trees: "Bullets rained among the trees".

This is straightforward, so long as you don't get stuck in the fourth paragraph ("The train crawled lazily …"). It's often necessary to **read on a little** (or look earlier in a passage) in order to find the evidence you are looking for, so long as the question doesn't say that you are limited to certain lines.

Be sure to **quote briefly** and **only give one phrase**. If you write down too much evidence, it implies that you don't know exactly what you need, and have guessed.

The following quote should also be acceptable: "there was the murmur of wind in leaves". It is not *entirely* clear whether this refers literally to the wind, or

metaphorically to the sound of whispering (although I think it is the former), but it ought to be accepted.

Marking: 1 mark for a correct answer with either of the quotes above. Should probably also earn a mark if only the quote is given. **[1 mark]**

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4. **FIRST:** The seats were so tatty that they 'sagged'.

SECOND: The windows were 'completely' broken or stuck together with 'adhesive tape'.

The question says "list", so the extra explanations and quotes in my examples are probably unnecessary. However, they do no harm and are very brief. It's always wise to be safe!

Marking: Any two sensible and different reasons. Full sentences not necessary.
[2 marks]

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5. He wears a "soiled" suit and has "unsanitary" fingernails, suggesting that he doesn't much care about hygiene. His teeth are "tobacco-stained", which implies that he is a heavy smoker.

The question doesn't make it clear whether you need to "explain why you have chosen" each quote **individually**, or whether it's acceptable to discuss them **together**. However, **it is always best practice to discuss quotes separately**.

- Firstly, this ensures that you make a greater number of points, maximising your marks.
- Secondly, explanations of more than one quote are at risk of being general and vague, and therefore not scoring at all.

I'm not convinced that the "tobacco-stained" teeth are "shocking" for a doctor in the 1930s. Before the risks of tobacco smoking were properly understood, some people even believed that it could be good for your health. However, I'm fairly sure that the question wants you to use this evidence.

You do not need to quote here, as long as your refer *specifically* to information from the passage.

> **Marking:** Two relevant pieces of evidence (1 mark for each), clearly explained. One overall explanation of two pieces of evidence (e.g. the dirty suit and fingernails) is acceptable, as long as the explanation is sufficiently developed to earn two marks in its own right. **[4 marks]**

> **6.**   **a)** She thinks that he is rude because he takes his jacket off.

You need to explain why she thinks he is rude, or why it is a problem that he takes his jacket off – in other words, <u>you need both parts of the example</u>. Neither point is enough by itself.

> **b)** She doesn't like the way that he and her daughter flirt with each other.

This is the only point suggested by the passage. I don't find it convincing: in fact, it is not clear that the flirting is the **reason** for her disapproval.

Nonetheless, it's one of those situations where you need to use your common sense to identify what is expected.

> **Marking:** 2 marks available for each part. 1 mark if incomplete or unclear. **[4 marks]**

> **7.**   She is not, because her face is "scrappy" (rough) like a "prizefighter" (boxer): she looks like somebody who has been punched many times.

For full marks, you probably need to explain what the "prizefighter" reference suggests about the woman's face.

Notice how I show that I understand the meaning of each quoted word by **offering a short translation in brackets**. This is often an effective and time-efficient method.

Capote is rather sexist here. Even though he also refers to the doctor's teeth, the way in which he focuses on the young woman's features is particularly unappealing. However, it is important to understand the way in which influential authors express themselves, even if you might have chosen to put things differently, had you been in their place.

> **Marking:** 1 mark for "no". 2 marks for the explanation, the second only available if there is a reasonable explanation of the "prizefighter" reference. **[3 marks]**

> **8.** The landscape is full of "ravines" which would be ideal places for an ambush. Capote also knows somebody who was held at knifepoint and robbed nearby.

You need both these points for full marks, although the first one could refer to the trees, or simply to the variety of the landscape, instead of to "ravines".

When you mention the landscape, it is important to briefly explain **why** the features you refer to would make a bandit attack seem likely to Capote.

> **Marking:** 2 marks for each point, if clearly explained. **[4 marks]**

> **9.** She is concerned that her valuables will be stolen, because she "systematically" hides her "treasures" on her body.

Of course, the passage doesn't explicitly say what the mother is "most" worried about. You are expected to reach a plausible opinion based on the information given, and what the writer focuses on.

It would be wrong to say that she is most scared of violence, even though this *might* in fact have been true, because the writer emphasises that her reaction is <u>different</u> from that of the other passengers, who "collapsed on the floor": you are encouraged to recognise that she is the only character who thinks of something apart from physical danger.

This is a question which doesn't require quotations. However, you do need to support your answer with **clear evidence** from the text ("How can you tell?"), and short quotes are the easiest way to do this.

> **Marking:** 1 mark for referring to valuables/jewellery, 1 mark for a clear explanation, and 1 mark for evidence to support your answer (the explanation and evidence may be blended, as in the example). **[3 marks]**

> **10.** People behave in an exaggerated, foolish manner, as though in a comedy. However, everybody is very afraid, which makes it serious.

You need to explain what "slapstick" means. At the very least, you need to mention that the people's actions are funny ("comedy"), although some reference to *physical comedy* or *exaggerated behaviour* would be even better and might even be required by the examiner.

You're also expected to recognise that "grim key" refers to things being serious/fearful. However, you almost certainly don't have to relate this to music (a minor key), even though is what the metaphor is hinting towards: this is not a music exam.

Marking: Needs to mention comedy/humour and seriousness, and give a reason for each one. Take away marks for significant use of words from the passage (i.e. not "your own"). **[4 marks]**

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11. "Yapping orders" implies that their instructions are over-excited and largely pointless, like small dogs barking. "Crashing into each other" shows that they manage to prevent each other from doing their jobs. Capote is clearly unimpressed.

It's very important to say **whether Capote is impressed or not** – as required by the question – even if the rest of your answer makes this obvious!

The question also makes clear that you must explain why "each" piece of evidence is important: <u>you will not get full marks if you only make an overall comment</u>, even if it is well explained.

The only relevant evidence is in a single sentence at the end of paragraph 7: "In the corridor railway officials bumped about yapping orders and crashing into each other." Nothing else in the passage is directly relevant to "the reaction of the railway officials". The person who fires the machine gun is a soldier, and not (as far as we know) a railway official; meanwhile, the fact that a stowaway managed to ride on the outside of the train may be the officials' fault, but this is not addressed in the text, and we don't know what Capote thinks about it.

Marking: 1 mark for each of two quotes and 1 mark for a clear explanation of why each one is important: award half marks for partial explanations. **[4 marks]**

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12. It means "Is there a doctor on the train?" I know this because "medico" sounds like "medical", "tren" sounds like "train", and there is a question mark to indicate a question.

I'm not sure how well thought out this question is. If you can read Spanish, it really should be acceptable to write "Because I know what it means!" as the reason "why you think so". However, this would be dangerous: you need to answer **as though you have to work the meaning out logically**, even if you don't actually need to.

A better question might have asked how a non-Spanish speaker could work out the meaning of the phrase.

Similar questions have appeared in other KES papers, so it's important to understand this task fully if you are applying to the school.

> **Marking:** 2 marks for a fully correct translation, and 1 mark if it is partially correct Accept "Have you got a doctor on the train?" for 2 marks. Only award 1 mark for "Is there a doctor here?" Give 1 further mark for a reasonable explanation which deals with "medico", "tren", or both. **[3 marks]**

> **13.**   He is embarrassed that it was him, when in fact there were no bandits.

You need to say that it was him who first called "Bandits!" It *might* be enough just to add that he was embarrassed, but you would be wise to explain **why**.

This is a good example of why **you shouldn't repeat the question in your answer**. Doing so here would have consumed all the given answer space, before earning any marks! Repeating the question is a useful technique to help you focus when you are inexperienced at comprehension, but you should discard it once you are preparing for exams, because it is a major waste of time and space.

> **Marking:** 1 mark for recognising that Capote was the first to mention bandits. 1 mark for an explanation (0.5 marks if only partial, e.g. "embarrassed"). **[2 marks]**

TOTAL SUGGESTED MARKS: 37