

English Paper 2

Stage 7



Section A: Reading

Read this passage from *The Extincts* by Veronica Cossanteli and then answer the questions in the question paper.

George Drake, an 11 year-old boy, finds some money.

* * *

The weird stuff all began with £3.72.

I didn't know it was £3.72, of course, until I picked it up – a scattering of coins on a wet pavement – and counted it.

George Drake, it's your lucky day! Three strikes at Bumper Bowl with Josh and Matt – and now FREE MONEY! I let the coins trickle out of my hand, into my pocket, and got back on my bike. 5

What do you do with £3.72? Easy. If you're me, you buy sweets.

I was in the shop for about a minute. When I came out, my bike had gone. I had a paper bag full of gummy caterpillars and strawberry laces and foam bananas – but no bike. And it was raining. And it was a long walk home. 10

Sorry, George Drake, just kidding. Not your lucky day after all.

Great. Just great. I bit the head of a gummy caterpillar, and started walking.

By the time I got home, I was feeling a bit sick. I'm not totally sure that I like foam bananas. Mum was upside down in the garden. Other people don't do yoga in the garden in the rain, just Mum. 15

'Electricity bill's come,' she said, from between her knees. 'Even bigger than last time. Huge. Seriously, George – it's MONSTROUS!'

Mum only does yoga when she's worried about something. Bills. The washing machine breaking down. Parents' evening. Dad. She unfolded herself, balancing on one leg, like a flamingo – except flamingos can do it without wobbling. Then she noticed. 20

'Where's your bike?'

I told her, then wished that I hadn't. A good mother would have agreed that all bike thieves should be nibbled to death by flesh-eating cockroaches, or lowered head first into barrels of boiling custard, or shot into space out of giant cannons. But no – apparently, it was all *my* fault. 25

'You left your bike outside the shop without locking it? George, that was stupid. What were you thinking?'

Then I had to listen to a whole load of yabber-yabber-blah-blah parent stuff about Being More Careful. It went on and on for ages, until she lost her balance and fell into the rose bush. 30

I pulled her out, scratched and bleeding.

'You were saying? About being *careful*?'

'Oh. Yes. Well...' Mum sucked the blood from her fingers. 'We'll say no more about it. Stuff happens.'

Half an hour later, I was taking my mind off my lost bike when I heard Mum calling my name. 'George? George?' 35

'Just a minute. Wait –'

Mum was outside the back door.

'Look!' she said, proudly. 'It was right at the back of the shed. A perfectly good bike.' She brushed a cobweb off the rusting handlebars. 'Nothing wrong with it.' 40

Except it was pink.

Typical Mum. She's famous for forgetting things, but you'd think she'd remember...

'Mum, I'm a *boy*.'

'Oh, that! That's all poppycock.' Mum flapped her hands. 'Real men aren't afraid of pink.'

What does Mum know about Real Men? She married Dad. 45

I looked at the bike. No gears. No suspension. No anything, unless you counted a rusty bell and a little wicker basket. I tried to imagine riding that around town on a Saturday afternoon. I could picture Josh and Matt's faces...

'No! No, Mum, I can't!'

She looked hurt, which made me feel bad. Why do grown-ups never see things? Things that are perfectly obvious? Is there a part of the brain that stops working when you get to twenty-one or something? That's a bit scary. It means I have ten years left of being normal... 50

'If you want a new bike, you'll have to save up for it.' Now she was in a mood. 'I don't know how I'm going to pay that electricity bill as it is.'

Mum has a shop. It's called The Mermaid's Cave. She burns incense and plays whale music and never has any customers. I think people already have as many smelly candles and bead curtains and wind chimes as they want. 55

'You can earn some money,' she suggested, a bit less grumpily. 'You can wash the car. I'll give you 50p.'

'Mum, we haven't *got* a car.' 60

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