



BlackStone
T U T O R S

Past Paper Answers & Explanations

**St Paul's Girl's
English Exam Paper 1**

2016

Section 1

1

The school is described as being gloomy and having a threatening aura, whereas my school is uniformly brightly lit.

The teachers have to use a jelly tray to produce copies of papers, whereas nowadays they can just print them using a computer.

The teachers have to wear aprons as otherwise the chalk and dirt that the children accumulate will ruin their clothes, whereas nowadays schools are tidy and whiteboards have replaced chalkboards.

2

We get a real sense of foreboding as Ursula approaches the school. This begins with the fact that the yard 'shone black with rain' - it seems a dark day. The building is not just dirty but plain 'horrible' and the plants appear to be looking out of the windows at her with a sort of suspicion - they are described as looking out 'shadowily.' The 'threatening expression' is seen as a gesture of 'vulgar authority' and it becomes clear that Ursula is as afraid of this school as any pupil would be on their first day. It seems overwhelming.

3

Dominus in Latin means lord or master. The school building being domineering therefore means that it is dominating. It is overpowering, intimidating, and designed to make individuals - like Ursula - feel small in comparison to it. It is compared to a church, buildings which in some branches of Christianity are designed to be overwhelming, to remind their congregation of the power of God.

4

I like the phrase 'the gas was lighted naked and raw.' It provides a clear illustration of the brutal, Spartan simplicity of this room. There appears to be no luxury here. We immediately see in our mind's eye a simple, bright gas light with no adornment. Through its brightness we see a contrast with the room around it, and thus imagine the surroundings as even darker and gloomier.

5

It becomes clear as we read through this section that Ursula seems through the man's initial aggressive attitude and believes him to be far kinder than he at first appears. It is therefore unsurprising, in my view, that she likes him - she simply sees someone who is perhaps harassed and stressed, working hard to prepare for the day, unable to make small talk - but not someone who is mean or belittling. Instead, the teacher is blunt - perhaps to the point of rudeness - but Ursula sees something fascinating within him, and somehow perceives his true nature through this outer shield.

6

I would imagine that this would be a spelling or grammar exercise, in which the pupils need to repeatedly write answers to questions or decline or conjugate words (it seems likely they might be learning Latin, for example).

7

This immediately puts Miss Harby in stark contrast to the male teacher, who has been heavily characterised. Instead, Miss Harby is bland in the extreme. She is short, and neutral-tinted. She begins with a friendly yet matter-of-fact greeting that suits the idea of her being neutral. Neutrality, in this situation, seems almost friendly when juxtaposed with the dark and foreboding school into which she has entered.

8

No, it is made clear that Ms Harby would not make a good teacher. Interestingly, we might consider the male teacher to have the makings of a good teacher - he gives so little away that we do not know whether he is an inspirational figure to his pupils or not, or what his true views on them might be. Ms Harby, on the other hand, shows an obvious dislike of her pupils. She described how a 'pack of kids' will come trailing in on a Monday morning, and emphasises that the kids' feet will be dirty. Ursula further describes Ms Harby as cocksure and bossy. We can imagine that she would carry this attitude into her class, and perhaps is not motivated by a true desire to help the children that she teaches.

9

To achieve high marks, consider the following:

How did she behave?

This is your chance to show an understanding of the character and expand upon it. You could go about this in two ways that are more immediately obvious.

Option 1: You take Ursula's dread and fear and turn it into an overwhelming sense of anxiety, where she feels like she is drowning under the pressure of the school. You might use references to the building, and provide further details which seem relevant. You could map the descriptions of the building across to the classroom, and then have this affect her behaviour. You could have the children be as loud and bossy as she feels that Ms Harby is, and then see this affect her behaviour.

Option 2: Ursula is able to overcome her fear and finds the classroom itself to be a different environment to the rest of the school. You could express brightness and light, and hope and joy overcoming darkness.

What happened?

What happens will depend on how Ursula behaves, as her behaviour will be impacted by what happens. Consider whether she controls the class and bonds with them, or whether the class turns against her and shows the same darkness that she has experienced in the rest of the school.

What vocabulary is of use?

- If you take Option 1:
- dread
- foreboding
- anxiety
- pressure

- gloom
- darkness
- suffocating
- relentless

If you take Option 2:

- kindness
- warmth
- bright
- island
- hope
- youthful
- joyousness
- resilience
- strength

What imagery could we use?

Make sure to include descriptive words (adjectives and adverbs) and to include some metaphors and similes as well. Try to paint a clear picture of the classroom.

Examples could include:

'Miss Ursula seemed very nervous when she walked into the classroom, but as she emerged from the darkness of the corridor her face slowly changed. It was like seeing a prisoner leave their cell. The warmth of our classroom seemed to refresh her and give her confidence.'

'I knew that our classroom was never a pleasant place for a new teacher. We are a tough class, and part of a tough school. The darkness in the corridors and in the common rooms has seeped into the classes, and perhaps into each pupil in turn. As soon as we saw the new teacher, I think each of us knew that she was weak. She was as a freshly schooled matador would be when put in a ring with an old, experienced bull. Woefully unprepared, and with the fear smell upon her.'

What pitfalls should we avoid?

You need to write in the first person, as a pupil. This is vital, as it is stated explicitly in the prompt.

Example

Well, we had a new teacher today. Miss Ursula, that's what she was called. She came into the classroom a bit like a new pupil, and certainly nothing like I'd expect a new teacher to. She seemed very nervous. I suppose I felt a bit sorry for her, but at the same time, we as a class have to take opportunities when they arise. Miss Ursula, I would say, was an opportunity for a class like us. She was a teacher that we could have an easy time with. We could make sure she knew that we were to be let off easy, and not worked too hard.

Our school is a dark place, in many ways. The corridors are barely lit by the flickering of the gas lamps, and sometimes the shadows dance across them like the Greeks that we learn about would have flickered in their hell, Hades. I've never understood the children that have those nice, happy, warm, schools. I've never known anything other than my own.

Where was I? Miss Ursula. She seemed nervous, that's where I was.

She came in and she introduced herself alright, although her voice was quiet. She kept looking down at her shoes. I remember Jimmy Pritchett shouted up from the back of the class, 'you won't find the register on your shoes Miss!' We all had a good laugh at that. She said that she was new to teaching, and I could see it in her eyes that she was. She wasn't nervous so much as scared. Some part of me wanted to reach out to her and help her - we aren't an evil bunch, after all - but I knew that I couldn't do that. She would need to help herself.

Our first lesson was on Arithmetic, and on our times tables. It was boring, and besides we all knew it already. I wonder if she had chosen to teach that because she thought it would be easy, or if one of the others like Harby had told her to. We decided to pretend to not know anything beyond multiplying by 4, which caused a great deal of merriment at first. She looked mighty confused when she realised we could do all of our maths perfectly, just not beyond that number. I wonder if she believed us. She had to pretend to.

After a while we grew tired of this little game. I think it was at this point that young Johnny decided he'd had enough of class for the day, and walked out. Her trying to stop him was like a puppy playing with the sea, trying to hold back a tide. She had no chance. As soon as Johnny walked out, so did Pete. Anyway, I followed soon after. I figured I had better things to do than learn my times tables again.