

# Year 8 English



RIVERSIDE SCHOOL  
'EXCELLENCE FOR ALL'

## Home Learning Summer Term



- Read the extracts and answer the questions in the spaces below.
- There is one extract per week.
- For the final week, plan and write an analytical piece (three paragraphs).



# Travels with Charley

John Steinbeck, a highly respected, award-winning American author who died in 1968, drove through most American states in a camper van with his dog in 1960. His book *Travels with Charley* was the result.

I had never been to Wisconsin, but all my life I had heard about it, had eaten its cheeses, some of them as good as any in the world. And I must have seen pictures. Everyone must have. Why then was I unprepared for the beauty of this region, for its variety of field and hill, forest, lake? I think now I must have considered it one big level cow pasture because of the state's enormous yield of milk products. I never saw a country that changed so rapidly, and because I had not expected it everything I saw brought a delight. I don't know how it is in other seasons, the summer may reek and rock with heat, the winters may groan with dismal cold, but when I saw it for the first and only time in early October, the air was rich with butter-colored sunlight, not fuzzy but crisp and clear so that every frost-gay tree was set off, the rising hills were not compounded, but alone and separate. There was a penetration of the light into solid substance so that I seemed to see into things, deep in, and I've seen that kind of light elsewhere only in Greece. I remembered now that I had been told Wisconsin is a lovely state, but the telling had not prepared me. It was a magic day. The land dripped with richness, the fat cows and pigs gleaming against green, and, in the smaller holdings, corn standing in little tents as corn should, and pumpkins all about.

I don't know whether or not Wisconsin has a cheese-tasting festival, but I who am a lover of cheese believe it should. Cheese was everywhere, cheese centers, cheese cooperatives, cheese stores and stands, perhaps even cheese ice cream. I can believe anything, since I saw a score of signs advertising Swiss Cheese Candy. Now I can't persuade anyone that it exists, that I did not make it up.

*From Travels with Charley by John Steinbeck (1980)*

## Exercise

1 What is Wisconsin's main farming activity and product?

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**2** List three words or phrases that indicate the author's positive reaction to Wisconsin.

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(1)

**3** What do you learn about the climate of Wisconsin from this passage?

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(5)

**4** What does the author mean by

**(a)** 'corn standing in little tents as corn should'

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(3)

**(b)** 'perhaps even cheese ice cream'?

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(3)





# A Street Cat Named Bob

In *A Street Cat Named Bob* James Bowen, a former drug addict now working as a busker, describes his friendship with Bob, a cat who teams up with him.

As darkness was beginning to descend, one middle-aged lady stopped for a chat.

'How long have you had him?' she asked, bending down to stroke Bob.

'Oh, only a few weeks,' I said. 'We sort of found each other.'

'Found each other? Sounds interesting.'

At first I was a bit suspicious. I wondered whether she was some kind of animal welfare person and might tell me I had no right to keep him or something. But she turned out simply to be a real cat lover.

She smiled as I explained the story of how we'd met and how I'd spent a fortnight nursing him back to health.

'I had a ginger tom very much like this one a few years ago,' she said, looking a bit emotional. For a moment I thought she was going to burst into tears. 'You are lucky to have found him. They are just the best companions, they are so quiet and docile. You've found yourself a real friend there,' she said.

'I think you are right,' I smiled.

She placed a fiver into the guitar case before leaving.

He was definitely a lady puller, I realised. I estimated that something like 70 per cent of the people who had stopped so far had been females.

After just over an hour, I had as much as what I'd normally make in a good day, just over twenty pounds.

*This is brilliant*, I thought to myself.

But something inside me was saying that I shouldn't call it quits, that I should carry on for tonight.

The truth was that I was still torn about Bob. Despite the gut feeling I had that this cat and I were somehow destined to be together, a large part of me still figured that he'd eventually go off and make his own way. It was only logical. He'd wandered into my life and he was going to wander back out again at some point. This couldn't carry on. So as the passers-by continued to slow down and make a fuss of him, I figured I might as well make the most of it. Make hay while the sun shines and all that.

'If he wants to come out and have fun with me, that's great,' I said to myself. 'And if I'm making a bit of cash as well, then that's great too.'

*From A Street cat Named Bob by James Bowen (2012)*

## Exercise

1 What sort of cat is Bob?

2 What instrument do you deduce that the narrator plays?

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(1)

3 What problem did the narrator face when he first met Bob?

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(3)

4 Why is the narrator initially wary of the lady and what changes his mind?

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(6)

5 What financial advantage is Bob bringing the narrator?

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(6)

6 What does the narrator expect to happen in the future and how does that affect his decisions now?

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(8)

There are very few absolute right and wrong answers in English comprehension work. Your opinion is as 'right' as anyone else's as long as you can support what you say by referring to the passage you are working on.





# Tinder

This is the opening of Sally Gardner's 2013 novel *Tinder*, which is set in the seventeenth century.

Once in a time of war, when I was a soldier in the Imperial Army, I saw Death walking. He wore upon his skull a withered crown of white bone twisted with green hawthorn. His skeleton was shrouded with a tattered cloak of gold and in his wake stood the ghosts of my comrades newly plucked, half-lived, from life. Many I knew by name.

It was on the second day of November 1642, in the midst of the battle of Breitenfeld, when our regiment had been trapped in the great forest, caught between the criss-cross of trees and the oncoming guns of the enemy. Cannon blast sent fire into the woods and in the smoke I couldn't tell which way the fight ran. In the distance, the sound of horses, bridles and harnesses. I'd been in battle since dawn. Like many of my comrades I'd fought for all I was worth, though I knew ours was a hopeless cause. About me lay the dead and the dying, their blood – our blood – made the carpet of leaves more crimson than autumn had intended.

That was when I saw Death.

He seemed neither surprised nor impressed by the number of souls he had gathered that day. He simply asked me if I was with him.

I looked upon the ghostly army and wondered if it wouldn't be best to follow for, in truth, I'd had enough of war, had seen too much of man's inhumane heart.

'I wait for no one,' said Death.

'You've feasted well today,' I said. 'What difference would my soul make?'

It was then that Death and his ghostly army vanished. In their place a thick mist rose and through the mist a horseman came charging, sword in hand. Without another thought, I turned and ran. I ran until every muscle, every sinew strained to the edge of breaking. I ran until I had no breath left, my boots giving out before my legs fell away beneath me. I ran until the ground and I became one. I lay unable to move, only stare at the canopy of leaves all golden, all falling in spirals of colour. I listened for the sound of hooves, for the howl of a wolf, for the growl of a bear. I knew well that if the battle did not kill me then the forest would, for the smell of blood brings beasts out to feed. I lay injured, a bullet in my side, a sword wound in my shoulder, watching night creep through the trees. Maybe I should have gone with Death when he offered me his bony finger.

*From Tinder by Sally Gardner (2013)*

**Exercise**

- 1 List the weapons and resources used in this battle.

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(1)

- 2 What does the figure of Death look like?

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(2)

- 3 Quote two sentences which show that the narrator is close to losing the will to live.

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(4)

- 4 What accompanies Death and why is this significant?

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(5)

5 Explain in your own words what the narrator really means by seeing Death.

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6 For the narrator's side it was 'a hopeless cause'. Why?

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7 How is the narrator injured and where does he go?

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Think of the passage as being like a lemon from which you have to squeeze as much juice as possible. That means close attention to every word you read and 'juicy' detailed answers.



# Alone on a Wide Wide Sea

This extract comes from Michael Morpurgo's 2006 novel *Alone on a Wide Wide Sea*. The narrator, a 1940s British orphan, has been sent to an appalling children's slave camp in Australia. He and Marty have escaped and are being helped by Australian aboriginal people.

And the longer we were with them the more sure we became that these people were absolutely no threat to us. They might not talk to us. They might keep their distance. They might still stare at us more than we liked, but there was never the slightest hint of hostility towards us. On the contrary they seemed very protective of us, and as fascinated by us as we were by them. And the children found us endlessly funny, particularly when we smiled, so we smiled a lot. But then we felt like smiling. They shared their food with us: berries, roots, fruit and baked wallaby once. We had all the water we needed.

Marty did try once or twice to ask where we were going, but was simply given more fruit or berries as an answer. So he gave up. But up on Big Black Jack, as we rode through the night, or resting in the shade, the two of us speculated at length. Maybe we weren't being taken anywhere. I mean, they never looked as if they were going anywhere in particular. They just looked as if they were quite happy simply going, simply being. Or maybe they were adopting us into their tribe and we'd wander the bush with them for the rest of our lives. Maybe they were still making up their minds what to do with us. Perhaps we'd just wake up one day and find them gone. We really didn't mind. All we could be sure of was that we were a long, long way from Cooper's Station now, and further every day. Where we were going wasn't important. Sometimes at night we'd see lights in the distance, more settlements probably, but we never thought of running off. We were safe with them. We had no reason to leave them.

I can't say exactly how many days and nights our journey lasted – it could have been five or six days perhaps. I do know that it lasted long enough for Marty and I to begin to believe it might be permanent, that we had indeed been adopted in some way. I certainly was beginning to feel comfortable among them, not because they became any less reserved – they didn't. Distance seemed to be important to them. The children though were a different story. We very soon got beyond just smiling and laughing. We splashed each other in the pools. We skimmed stones, threw sticks, ambushed one another. One took to riding piggyback on Marty's back, and the smallest of them would often ride up with us on Big Black Jack loving every moment of it. We were finding our place among them, beginning to feel accepted. That's why, when our journey finally ended, we felt all the more abandoned, even rejected.

*From Alone on a Wide Wide Sea by Michael Morpurgo (2006)*



4 In what ways are the children different from the adults?

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5 What were the boys' theories about the tribe's plans for them?

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(4)

6 Explain in your own words how the journey ends.

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# The Child's Elephant

This is the opening of Rachel Campbell-Johnston's 2013 novel *The Child's Elephant*. It tells the story of an African village boy who raises an elephant calf whose mother has been killed. Later the boy becomes a boy soldier.

The sound of the rifle shot rang through the air. For a few moments it seemed as if the whole world had stopped. The cicadas fell silent, a bush rat dived for its burrow, the cattle paused in their chewing and looked upwards with empty stares; and Bat, the lone herd-boy who up till then had been dreaming, swishing at bushes with a long whippy branch, let the switch fall and dropped suddenly on his haunches. His head was quite hidden by the tall, yellow grass.

He felt the slow, rolling shudder through the soles of his feet. It rumbled his bones like the beat of the big tribal drum. Something that mattered had just happened out there on the savannah. He could feel it: something momentous that he didn't want to know about and yet knew at the same time he would have to find out. But not now, he thought, as he ducked even lower in the grasses. He let his breath leak through fingers clamped hard to his mouth. A lizard clung spellbound to a stalk right beside him. He gazed into the rapt gold-ringed bead of its eye. It stared back, unblinking, as if it had been stunned.

It seemed like for ever before the last fading echoes were finally quieted, before the waiting cicadas picked up their old song and the lizard, as if some bewitchment had suddenly been broken, darted off with a whisk of its skinny brown tail. In the shade of the thorn trees, the cattle returned to their grazing. They pulled at the grasses with long, curling tongues. But Bat, still as a sandgrouse that keeps low in the cover, hugged his arms around his knees and stayed down where he was.

He listened. Somewhere not so very far away he could hear people talking. The sound drifted like wood-smoke upon a slack wing: murmuring voices ... then a clatter of laughter ... the silence that followed it ... then a sudden angry shout ... then nothing again ... then the bark of an order. The air carried the fragments in faint tattered snippets. They sent flurries of nerves stirring across his bare flesh.

Who was it? He could feel his pulse racing. His heart jumped in his throat. Every shift of the breeze could have been someone approaching; every glint of the light could have been a stranger's glance. Was someone even now stealing up upon him? Unable to bear the uncertainty, he rose to his feet.

Nothing looked very different. The cattle were peaceable; a new calf was suckling; the scrublands that stretched all about him looked quite undisturbed. It was funny how hiding played tricks with your imagination. He shouldn't have allowed himself to get so scared, he thought. He was seven after all: far too old to be behaving like some panicky chicken.

*From The Child's Elephant by Rachel Campbell-Johnston (2013)*

## Exercise

1 What details in the first paragraph make it clear that the story is set in *Africa*?

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(2)

2 How old is Bat and what does his job seem to be?

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(2)

3 Explain in your own words why Bat 'stayed down where he was'.

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(4)

4 What makes him emerge from hiding?

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(5)



5 What do you learn about the cattle Bat is guarding?

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(3)

6 (a) List the different wild creatures mentioned in the passage.

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(2)

(b) Why does the author include them?

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(7)

Vary your verbs when you refer in your answers to an author's writing. He or she might hint, argue, declare, state, imply, include, describe, dismiss ... for example. Make your own list.

# Read the extract and complete the work below

- This extract is taken from the novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon.
- At this stage in the text the narrator Christopher, who has Asperger's Syndrome, has been taken to the police station for hitting a police officer.
- Asperger's Syndrome affects the way information is processed in the brain and causes people with the condition to behave in ways others may find unusual.

When I got to the police station they made me take the laces out of my shoes and empty my pockets at the front desk in case I had anything in them that I could use to kill myself or escape or attack a policeman with.

The sergeant behind the desk had very hairy hands and he had bitten his nails so much that they had bled.

This is what I had in my pockets:

1. A Swiss Army Knife with 13 attachments including a wire-stripper and a saw and a toothpick and tweezers.
2. A piece of string.
3. A piece of a wooden puzzle which looked like this
4. 3 pellets of rat food for Toby, my rat.
5. £1.47 (this was made up of a £1 coin, a 20p coin, two 10p coins, a 5p coin and a 2p coin)
6. A red paperclip
7. A key for the front door.

I was also wearing my watch and they wanted me to leave this at the desk as well but I said that I needed to keep my watch on because I needed to know exactly what time it was. And when they tried to take it off me I screamed, so they let me keep it on.

They asked me if I had any family. I said I did. They asked me who my family was. I said it was Father, but Mother was dead. And I said it was also Uncle Terry but he was in Sunderland and he was Father's brother, and it was my grandparents, too, but three of them were dead and Grandma Burton was in a home because she had senile dementia and thought that I was someone on television.

Then they asked me for Father's phone number.

I told them that he had two numbers, one for at home and one which was a mobile phone and I said both of them.

It was nice in the police cell. It was almost a perfect cube, 2 metres long by 2 metres wide by 2 metres high. It contained approximately 8 cubic metres of air. It had a small window with bars and, on the opposite side, a metal door with a long, thin hatch near the floor for sliding trays of food into the cell and a sliding hatch higher up so that policemen could look in and check that prisoners hadn't escaped or committed suicide. There was also a padded bench.

I wondered how I would escape if I was in a story. It would be difficult because the only things I had were my clothes and my shoes which had no laces in them.

I decided that my best plan would be to wait for a really sunny day and then use my glasses to focus the sunlight on a piece of my clothing and start a fire. I would then make my escape when they saw the smoke and took me out of the cell. And if they didn't notice I would be able to wee on the clothes and put them out.

I wondered whether Mrs Shears had told the police that I had killed Wellington and whether, when the police found out that she had lied, she would go to prison. Because telling lies about people is called Slander.

How is the character Christopher (the narrator) presented in the text?

Use the planning table below:

Point	Evidence	Explanation	Language analysis	Effect on the reader
<i>Christopher is presented as a character who values order and organisation</i>	<i>"It was nice in the police cell. It was almost a perfect cube, 2 meters long..."</i>			



