

## Section A: 40 marks

Read carefully the passage below. Then answer **all** the questions which follow it.

5 During the night after his first day at secondary school Marcus woke up every half-hour or so. He couldn't believe he was going to have to go back there the next morning, and the morning after that and more or less every morning for the rest of his life. Every time he woke up his first thought was that there must be some way past, or round, this horrible feeling. Whenever he had been upset about anything before, the answer usually involved telling mum. But there wasn't anything she could do this time. She wasn't going to move him to another school, and, even if she did, it wouldn't make any difference. He'd still be who he was and that, it seemed to him, was the basic problem. He was going to have to go to school tomorrow, and all the time it got nearer and nearer to the morning.

10 He was quiet at breakfast. 'You'll get used to it,' his mum said, probably because he was looking so miserable. He just nodded and smiled. There had been times when he knew that he would get used to it, whatever it was, because he had learnt that some hard things became easier after a while. But this was only going to get worse. That first terrible, horrible, frightening day was going to be as good as it got.

15 He got to school early and went to his form room. He was safe enough there. The kids who had given him a hard time yesterday were not the sort to arrive early. There were a couple of girls in the room but they ignored him, unless the snort of laughter he heard had anything to do with him.

20 What was there to laugh at? Not much, really, unless you were on permanent lookout for something to laugh at. Unfortunately, most kids were, in his experience. They patrolled school corridors like sharks, looking for the wrong trousers or the wrong shoes or the wrong haircut. As he was usually wearing the wrong trousers or the wrong shoes and as his haircut was wrong all the time, he didn't have to do much to send them all demented.

25 Marcus knew he was weird and he knew that partly it was because his mum was weird. She just didn't get this, any of it. She was always telling him that only shallow people made judgements on the basis of clothes or hair. She didn't want him to watch rubbish television, or listen to rubbish music or play rubbish computer games. She could explain why it was better to listen to Joni Mitchell or Bob Marley (who happened to be her two favourite singers) than Snoop Doggy Dogg, and why it was better to read books than to play on the Gameboy. But he couldn't pass any of this on to the kids at school. Lee Hartley – the biggest, loudest and nastiest of the kids he'd met yesterday – would thump him if he tried to explain that he didn't approve of Snoop Doggy Dogg because he had a bad attitude to women.

It wasn't all his mum's fault. Sometimes he was weird just because of who he was, rather than what she did.

30 Like the singing.... When was he going to learn about the singing? He always had a tune in his head, but when he was nervous the tune sort of slipped out. A song had slipped out yesterday in English, while the teacher was reading. If you wanted to make people laugh at you, really, really laugh, then the best way, better even than to have a bad haircut, was to sing out loud when everyone else in the room was quiet and bored.

35 This morning he was quiet during registration, he avoided people in the corridors and then it was double maths, which he was good at and enjoyed. At break he told Mr Brooks that he wanted to join his computer cub. His instinct was to stay in the form room and read but he toughed it out. He even had to cross the playground.

But then in English things went bad again. They were looking at a book called 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest'. He knew the story, because he'd seen the film with his mum, and so he could see really clearly what was going to happen, so clearly that he wanted to run from the room.

40 When it happened it was worse than he thought it would be. Ms Maguire got one of the girls to read a passage and then tried to start a discussion.

'Now, one of the things this book is about is...How do we know who's mad and who isn't? And if someone decides we're a bit mad, how do we.... how do we show them we're sane?'

45 Silence. A couple of the kids sighed and rolled their eyes at each other. One of the things Marcus had learned was that when you came to a new school you could tell straight away how well the teachers got on with a class. Ms Maguire was young and nervous and she was struggling, he reckoned. This class could go either way.

'Well, let's put it another way. How can we tell if people are mad?'

Here it comes, Marcus thought. Here it comes. This is it.

'If they sing for no reason in class, miss.'

50 Laughter. But then it all got worse than he'd expected. Everyone turned round and looked at him: he looked at Ms Maguire, but she had this big forced grin on and she wouldn't catch his eye.

'That's one way of telling, yes. You'd think that someone who does that would be a little potty. But leaving Marcus out of it for a moment...'

More laughter.

He knew what she was doing, and why, and he hated her.

*(Adapted from 'About a Boy' by Nick Hornby)*

**Read lines 1-9**

**A1.** List 5 things that you learn about Marcus. (5)

**Read lines 10-20**

**A2.** How does the writer present Marcus' experience of school? (5)

*You must refer to the language used in the text to support your answer.*

**Read lines 21-28**

**A3.** What impressions do you get of Marcus' mother and her influence on Marcus? How does the writer create those impressions? (10)

*You must refer to the language used in the text to support your answer, using relevant subject terminology.*

**Read lines 36-52**

**A4.** How does the writer present Mrs Maguire in these lines? (10)

*You must refer to the language used in the text to support your answer.*

**Now consider the passage as a whole**

**A5.** 'Throughout the passage, the writer encourages the reader to feel sympathy for Marcus.'

To what extent do you agree with this view? (10)

You should write about:

- your own thoughts and feelings about how Marcus and his situation are presented in the passage as a whole
- how the writer has created these thoughts and feelings