

**ENTRANCE EXAMINATION 2010
PART 2 ENGLISH EXAMINATION
COMPREHENSION PASSAGE**

Read through the passage very carefully. We recommend that you spend at least five minutes reading and re-reading the following material before you begin to answer the questions.

A Pick-pocket

This extract, from a novel, is set in Victorian London, about one hundred and fifty years ago.

He was called Smith and was twelve years old.

Smith had a turn of speed that was remarkable, and a skill in nipping down an alley or vanishing in a court that had to be seen to be believed. He inhabited the tumbledown mazes about St Paul's. A rat was like a snail beside Smith, and the most his thousand victims ever knew of him was a cold draught in their skilfully emptied pockets.

His favourite spot was Ludgate Hill, where the world's coaches, chairs and carriages came and went from morning till night in a horrible, noisy confusion. And here, in one or other of the ancient doorways, he leaned and grinned while the shouting and cursing and scraping and raging went endlessly, hopelessly on – till, sooner or later, some wealthy victim would come his way.

At about half past ten of a cold December morning an old gentleman got furiously out of his carriage, shook his red fist at his helpless coachman and the roaring confusion around him, and began to stump up Ludgate Hill.

He was a country gentleman, judging by his complexion, his clean old-fashioned coat and his broad-legged lumbering walk. His pockets bulged out in a most provoking manner.

Smith twitched his nose and followed his target neatly along like a shadow ...

The old man's pace was variable: sometimes it was brisk for his years, then he'd slow down, hesitate, look about him – as if the town had changed much since last he'd visited and he was now no longer confident of his way. He took one turning, then another; stopped, scratched the crisp edge of his wig, then eyed the sallow, seedy city gentry as if to ask the way, till he spied another turn, nodded, briskly took it.

The houses reared and clustered as if to shut out the sky. The old gentleman was now in the deepest heart of Smith's forest, hidden even from the cathedral birds. He paused many a time to peer down the shambling lanes and alleys. Then he'd shake his head

vaguely and touch at his coat pocket – as if some strange sense had warned him of a pair of sharp eyes cutting into his pocket like scissors.

Suddenly, with a cry of success, the old gentleman turned down a narrow alley. As his steps echoed between the houses, a solitary dusty raven flew up out of the court with a bitter croak.

Out of a doorway on the left of the court came Smith. This was the first time the old man had ever laid eyes on him; though all the way from Ludgate Hill there'd never been more than two yards between them.

Smith headed straight for the old man, who stopped, flustered. Which way was the damned urchin going? Angrily, he shifted, and Smith brushed against him, and – it was done! In an instant! Smith had emptied the old gentleman's pocket.

But Smith's smile of success suddenly disappeared. Footsteps in the alley! It would be blocked! He changed direction and vanished back into a doorway.

Into the alley came two men in brown. Smith knew them well. He shivered uneasily and wished he might vanish through the crumbling bricks.

The old gentleman had recovered himself. He stared round angrily.

The newcomers glanced quickly down the empty alley, and grinned.

They moved very neatly, and with no commotion. They were experts in their trade. The taller came at the old man from the front; the other went behind his back – and slid a knife into it.

The old gentleman's face was fatefully staring towards a certain dark doorway. He seemed to peer very anxiously round the heavy shoulder of the man who was holding him. His eyes flickered with pain at the knife's quick prick. Then he looked surprised, amazed even – as he felt the cold blade slip into his warm heart.

He murmured, gave a long sigh – and died.

His last sight on this earth had been of a small, wild and despairing face, whose flooded eyes shone out of the shadows with all the dread and pity they were capable of.