

English Entrance Exam 2019

Section A: Reading Passage Insert



The following passage is taken from Malorie Blackman’s novel *Pig Heart Boy*. The main character, Cam, is not supposed to be swimming, as he is ill, but he doesn’t want to miss out on spending time with his friends.

Shouting, screaming, laughing, shrieking – it was so thunderous. I thought my head was about to explode. I took a deep breath, breathed out, inhaled again, then dipped down until my head was completely under water.

5 It was like a radio being switched off. I sat down at the bottom of the swimming pool and opened my eyes. I would’ve liked to stay down there for ever, but within seconds my lungs were aching and there came a sharp, stabbing sting in my chest. My blood roared like some kind of
10 angry monster in my ears. I closed my eyes and stood up slowly. If I had to emerge, it would be at my own pace and in my own time. I was the one in control. Not my lungs. Not my blood. Not my heart.

‘Cam, are you all right?’

I opened my eyes. Marlon stood in front of me, his eyes huge with concern. I inhaled sharply, waiting for the roaring in my ears to subside.
15 The pain in my chest took a little longer.

‘Course! I’m fine,’ I replied a little breathlessly. ‘Just sitting down.’

Marlon frowned. ‘Is that smart?’

‘Don’t fuss. Sometimes you’re worse than Mum and Dad,’ I said.

‘If your parents find out that you’re here every Tuesday instead of at my
20 house, I’m the one who’ll get it in the neck,’ Marlon pointed out.

I smiled. ‘If you don’t tell them, I won’t.’

‘How can you be so calm about it? Every time we come here, I’m terrified some grown-up who knows your family is going to spot you and tell your parents.’

25 Marlon looked around the pool anxiously, as if expecting his words to come true at that precise moment.

‘Marlon, you worry too much.’ My smile broadened as the pain in my chest lessened.

‘How long were you under water?’

30 I’d had enough. ‘Marlon!’ I snapped. ‘You’re getting on my last nerve now!’

‘I was just . . .’

‘I know what you were doing, and you can stop it,’ I said firmly.

35 Marlon clamped his lips together tight and looked away. He was hurt and we both knew it. I fought down the urge to apologize. Why should I say I was sorry? Marlon knew how much I hated to be clucked over. But, as always, I caved in.

‘Look, Marlon—’ I got no further.

‘Marlon! You on for Daredevil Dive?’ Rashid called out.

40 ‘Yeah. Coming!’ Marlon replied. He turned to me. ‘See you in a minute.’

And with that he swam off towards the middle of the pool. I waded over to the stairs, the water sloshing around my thighs. I turned to where Rashid, Nathan and Andrew were all splashing about. Marlon had just
45 accosted them. I didn’t want to watch but I couldn’t help it. I couldn’t bring myself to look away.

I sat down at the edge of the pool, my legs dangling in the water as I watched my friends. I sidled a bit closer until I could hear them as well. Kicking out leisurely with my legs, I looked straight ahead, although I
50 was listening to every word Marlon and the others said.

‘Everyone ready?’ asked Rashid. ‘OK, let’s do it. First one to dive and touch the bottom, then come back and touch the side of the pool wins. GO!’

55 In an instant all four boys disappeared under the water. I held my breath as I watched, until my lungs started to ache and my heart started to pound. And still none of my friends had emerged from the water. I gasped, my whole body screaming in pained protest as I concentrated on filling my lungs. I’ve stopped holding my breath now, I told my heart. Just slow down.

60 I knew that within the next few weeks I’d no longer be able to come swimming with Marlon and my other friends. I knew it as surely as I knew my own name.

Because my heart was getting worse.