



CE.E30 Reading and Comprehension (Prose) Set 8

ISEB COMMON ENTRANCE CE.E30 · Calculators not allowed · about 75 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Show all your working.

The Last Move

An original short story written for Revision Library.

[1] The Trentbridge Schools' Chess Championship final had come down to a single board, in a hall that still smelled faintly of floor polish from the summer holidays, and the two players sitting opposite each other were, for once, not strangers at all. Dominic Asante had known Yusuf Rahman since Year 3, when they had swapped their first careful moves across a battered chess set in the school library at lunchtime, and in six years of matches neither boy had ever managed to beat the other more than twice in a row. Now, with the county trophy propped on a table by the door and thirty spectators pressed into rows of creaking plastic chairs, Dominic stared down at the board and felt something twist uncomfortably in his chest that had nothing to do with the position of the pieces. On the table between them, the digital clock ticked its red numbers downward like a small, patient countdown to something neither of them was ready for.

[2] He had wanted this, hadn't he? For three years Dominic had watched older pupils lift that same trophy at the end-of-year assembly, and he had promised himself, quietly and more than once, that one day it would be his turn to walk up onto that stage. Yet sitting here now, with Yusuf's knight hovering uncertainly over a square, Dominic found that the wanting had curdled into something heavier, something closer to dread. Winning would mean watching his best friend lose in front of the whole school, in the hall where they had eaten lunch together nearly every day since they were seven. Losing would mean six years of near-misses ending exactly where they had always ended: one place short, forever the second name on the runners-up list.

[3] It happened on Yusuf's thirty-first move. Reaching across the board to steady his water bottle, his sleeve brushed the head of his bishop, tipping it half an inch sideways before he snatched his hand back, horrified. Under the strict tournament rules pinned to the wall behind them, any piece a player touched had to be moved, if a legal move existed, whether the touch had been deliberate or not. Dominic saw immediately what Yusuf, still flustered, had not yet worked out: that bishop had exactly one legal move available, and it would fatally weaken the wall of pawns protecting Yusuf's king. He could call the arbiter over right now. He could win, cleanly, by the letter of the rules, and nobody watching would think any less of him for it.

[4] For a long moment Dominic simply looked at his friend across the board. Yusuf's ears had gone faintly pink, the way they always did when something embarrassed him, and his eyes were fixed on the clock rather than on Dominic, as though he already knew what was coming and had decided to face it without flinching. Dominic thought of every lunchtime in the library, every game that had ended in a handshake and an argument about whose turn it was to put the pieces away, and he understood, with a small, uncomfortable jolt, that some kinds of winning were not actually worth having. The silence between them stretched thin as wire, and somewhere behind him a chair creaked as a spectator leaned forward, waiting.

[5] 'Take your time,' Dominic said eventually, nodding at Yusuf's water bottle rather than at the board. 'I didn't see anything.' It was, strictly speaking, a lie, and both of them knew it, but Yusuf's shoulders dropped half an inch in relief, and he settled back into his chair and began, properly this time, to think. What followed was not a gift, and Dominic was careful to make sure of that: he played every remaining move as sharply as he knew how, hunting for every advantage the position honestly offered him. In the end it was Yusuf's own quiet, careful defending, not Dominic's mercy, that turned the game around fourteen moves later, and when Yusuf's knight finally forked Dominic's king and rook, the win belonged entirely to him.

[6] Dominic shook his friend's hand across the board, and found, to his own surprise, that the twisting feeling in his chest had finally loosened into something almost like relief. He watched Yusuf walk up to collect the trophy, hands still faintly trembling, and thought of the battered library chess set, missing one white pawn and half a knight's ear, that had started all of this back in Year 3. Somewhere between that first careless game and this one, Dominic realised, he had stopped needing to be the name at the top of the list, and had started needing, instead, to still recognise his own reflection in the mirror on the way home. It was not, he decided, walking out into the cool evening air, a bad trade to have made.

- 1** Give three details from paragraph [1] that show this is an important, high-pressure occasion.

(Total for Question 1 is 3 marks)

- 2** According to paragraph [1], how long had Dominic and Yusuf known each other?

- ☐ A) since Year 3
- ☐ B) since Reception
- ☐ C) since Year 6
- ☐ D) they had just met

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

3 State the name of the competition mentioned in paragraph [1].

(Total for Question 3 is 1 mark)

4 Explain the effect of the simile describing the clock ticking 'like a small, patient countdown to something neither of them was ready for' (paragraph [1]).

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

5 Explain the effect of the description of Dominic's feeling as something that 'twist[ed] uncomfortably in his chest' (paragraph [1]).

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

6 According to paragraph [2], what had Dominic promised himself for three years?

- ☐ A) that he would give up chess
- ☐ B) that one day it would be his turn to walk up onto the stage
- ☐ C) that he would let Yusuf win
- ☐ D) that he would stop playing against Yusuf

(Total for Question 6 is 1 mark)

7 Give two details from paragraph [2] that show Dominic's feelings about winning had become complicated.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 Explain the effect of the word 'curdled' to describe how Dominic's wanting to win had changed (paragraph [2]).

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Using evidence from paragraph [3], explain in your own words what happens and why it creates a dilemma for Dominic.

(Total for Question 9 is 3 marks)

- 10** According to paragraph [3], on which move number does Yusuf accidentally touch his bishop?

- ☐ A) the 13th move
- ☐ B) the 31st move
- ☐ C) the 3rd move
- ☐ D) the 41st move

(Total for Question 10 is 1 mark)

- 11** Which phrase from paragraph [3] emphasises that the touch-move rule applies no matter the player's intentions?

- ☐ A) 'reaching across the board to steady his water bottle'
- ☐ B) 'whether the touch had been deliberate or not'
- ☐ C) 'that bishop had exactly one legal move available'
- ☐ D) 'nobody watching would think any less of him'

(Total for Question 11 is 1 mark)

- 12** Explain the effect of describing the silence between the boys as stretching 'thin as wire' (paragraph [4]).

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

- 13** Explain the effect of the detail that Yusuf's 'ears had gone faintly pink, the way they always did when something embarrassed him' (paragraph [4]).

(Total for Question 13 is 2 marks)

- 14** Using evidence from paragraph [4], explain what this paragraph reveals about Dominic's character.

(Total for Question 14 is 3 marks)

- 15** State, in Dominic's own words, what he tells Yusuf about the touched bishop (paragraph [5]).

(Total for Question 15 is 1 mark)

- 16** Explain the effect of the writer stating directly that Dominic's words were, 'strictly speaking, a lie' (paragraph [5]).

(Total for Question 16 is 2 marks)

- 17** Explain how, having stayed silent about the mistake, Dominic makes sure he does not simply let Yusuf win the game (paragraph [5]).

(Total for Question 17 is 3 marks)

- 18** Explain how the writer structures paragraphs [3] to [5] to build tension around Dominic's dilemma. Support your answer with reference to the language and structure the writer uses.

(Total for Question 18 is 6 marks)

- 19** Explain how the writer structures the whole passage to show a change in what Dominic values by the end of the story. Refer to at least two points in the story in your answer.

(Total for Question 19 is 5 marks)

- 20** Using your own words as far as possible, summarise what happens in the story and how Dominic's feelings change. Write no more than 60 words.

(Total for Question 20 is 5 marks)

- 21** In your opinion, how does the writer make the ending of the passage (paragraph [6]) effective? You should refer to the whole passage in your answer.

(Total for Question 21 is 8 marks)

Mark scheme · CE.E30 Reading and Comprehension (Prose) Set 8

Question 1

- **B1** One relevant detail, e.g. it was the final of the Trentbridge Schools' Chess Championship (oe)
- **B1** A second relevant detail, e.g. the county trophy was propped on a table by the door (oe)
- **B1** A third relevant detail, e.g. thirty spectators were pressed into rows of creaking plastic chairs / the digital clock ticked down (oe)
- **Answer: Any three of: it was the final of the Trentbridge Schools' Chess Championship; the county trophy was propped on a table by the door; thirty spectators were pressed into rows of creaking plastic chairs; the digital clock ticked its red numbers downward.**

Question 2

- **B1** A only, cao
- **Answer: A) since Year 3.**

Question 3

- **B1** The Trentbridge Schools' Chess Championship, cao
- **Answer: The Trentbridge Schools' Chess Championship.**

Question 4

- **B1** Identifies the image of something calm but inevitable, steadily approaching (oe)
- **B1** Comment on effect, e.g. builds tension and suggests both boys sense an unavoidable resolution approaching, whether they are prepared for it or not (oe)
- **Answer: Comparing the clock to a patient countdown suggests something calm but unstoppable, steadily approaching. This builds tension and suggests both boys sense that an unavoidable resolution is coming, whether they feel ready for it or not.**

Question 5

- **B1** Identifies the physical, visceral image of discomfort (oe)
- **B1** Comment on effect, e.g. conveys his conflicted, uneasy emotion, hinting at hidden feelings beneath his calm exterior at the board (oe)
- **Answer: Describing the feeling as something twisting in his chest creates a physical, visceral sense of discomfort, conveying Dominic's conflicted, uneasy emotions and hinting that something is troubling him beneath his calm exterior at the board.**

Question 6

- **B1** B only, cao
- **Answer: B) that one day it would be his turn to walk up onto the stage.**

Question 7

- **B1** Winning would mean watching his best friend lose in front of the whole school (oe)
- **B1** The wanting had curdled into something heavier, closer to dread / losing would mean six years of near-misses ending one place short (oe)
- **Answer: Winning would mean watching his best friend lose in front of the whole school; and his wanting to win had curdled into something heavier, closer to dread, while losing would mean six years of near-misses ending one place short.**

Question 8

- **B1** Identifies the connotation of something turning sour or spoiling, associated with milk going off (oe)
- **B1** Comment on effect, e.g. suggests his once-simple desire to win has turned unpleasant and uncomfortable, no longer something he enjoys (oe)
- **Answer: The word 'curdled' has connotations of something wholesome turning sour, like milk going off. This suggests Dominic's once-simple desire to win has turned into something unpleasant and uncomfortable, rather than something he can enjoy.**

Question 9

- **B1** Yusuf accidentally brushes his bishop while reaching for his water bottle (oe)
- **B1** Under the tournament rules, any piece touched must be moved if a legal move exists, whether the touch was deliberate or not (oe)
- **B1** Dominic realises the only legal move would fatally weaken Yusuf's king, meaning he could win fairly by the rules, but knows Yusuf did not mean to touch it (oe)
- **Answer: Yusuf accidentally brushes his bishop while reaching for his water bottle. Under the strict tournament rules, any piece touched must be moved if a legal move exists, whether the touch was deliberate or not. Dominic realises the only legal move available would fatally weaken Yusuf's king, meaning he could claim a clean win by the rules, even though he knows Yusuf did not mean to touch the piece.**

Question 10

- **B1** B only, cao
- **Answer: B) the 31st move.**

Question 11

- **B1** B only, cao
- **Answer: B) 'whether the touch had been deliberate or not'.**

Question 12

- **B1** Identifies the image of something taut, fragile and close to snapping (oe)
- **B1** Comment on effect, e.g. conveys the tension of the moment and suggests the friendship itself feels fragile and at risk (oe)
- **Answer: Comparing the silence to something 'thin as wire' suggests something taut, fragile and close to snapping. This conveys the tension of the moment and suggests that the friendship itself feels fragile, at risk of breaking under the strain.**

Question 13

- **B1** Identifies this as a familiar, specific detail that Dominic recognises from knowing Yusuf well (oe)
- **B1** Comment on effect, e.g. shows the closeness and history of their friendship, making Yusuf's embarrassment feel personal and real rather than generic (oe)
- **Answer: The detail that Dominic recognises this as something that 'always' happens shows how well he knows his friend, revealing the closeness and long history of their friendship. It makes Yusuf's embarrassment feel personal and real, rather than a generic description.**

Question 14

- **B1** He thinks carefully rather than acting impulsively, taking a long moment to consider (oe)
- **B1** He values their long friendship, recalling lunchtimes in the library, more than the immediate advantage in the game (oe)
- **B1** He reaches a mature realisation that some kinds of winning are not worth having, showing developing self-awareness and integrity (oe)
- **Answer: Dominic thinks carefully rather than acting on impulse, taking a long moment before doing anything. He values the pair's long friendship, remembering lunchtimes together in the library, more than the immediate advantage the game offers him, and he reaches a mature realisation that some kinds of winning are not actually worth having, revealing developing self-awareness and integrity.**

Question 15

- **B1** 'I didn't see anything' (or 'Take your time'), cao
- **Answer: 'I didn't see anything.'**

Question 16

- **B1** Identifies the writer's blunt, direct admission that Dominic is not telling the truth (oe)
- **B1** Comment on effect, e.g. shows Dominic is knowingly making a difficult, imperfect choice rather than simply being virtuous, adding honesty and complexity to his characterisation (oe)
- **Answer: By stating directly that the words were 'a lie', the writer avoids presenting Dominic's choice as simply good or virtuous. This shows he is knowingly making a difficult, imperfect decision, adding honesty and complexity to his characterisation.**

Question 17

- **B1** He plays every remaining move as sharply as he knows how (oe)
- **B1** He hunts for every advantage the position honestly offers him (oe)
- **B1** It is ultimately Yusuf's own careful defending, not Dominic's mercy, that decides the result, meaning the win is genuinely earned (oe)
- **Answer: Dominic plays every remaining move as sharply as he knows how, hunting for every advantage the position honestly offers him, rather than deliberately playing badly. In the end it is Yusuf's own quiet, careful defending, not any mercy from Dominic, that turns the game around, meaning Yusuf's eventual win is genuinely earned.**

Question 18

- **Level 1** (1-2): Identifies language or details with little or no explanation of their effect; may rely on narrative retelling with minimal reference to the text.
- **Level 2** (3-4): Explains, with some development, how specific words or details (for example the touch-move rule, the simile of wire, or the dialogue in paragraph [5]) build tension, supported by relevant quotation.
- **Level 3** (5-6): Gives a clear, well-developed explanation of how the writer's precise choices of language and structure work together across the three paragraphs to build and then release tension around Dominic's dilemma, integrating apt quotations fluently and showing secure understanding of the effect on the reader.
- **Indicative content:**
 - the single, dramatic touch-move incident that opens paragraph [3] immediately raises the stakes and introduces the central dilemma without delay
 - the short, blunt sentences 'He could call the arbiter over right now. He could win, cleanly, by the letter of the rules.' present the tempting, easy option starkly, increasing the pressure of the decision
 - the extended pause in paragraph [4], signalled by 'For a long moment', deliberately slows the pace to reflect Dominic's internal deliberation
 - the simile describing the silence as stretching 'thin as wire' and the detail of the creaking chair heighten the reader's sense of suspense at the moment of decision
 - the short line of dialogue 'Take your time... I didn't see anything.' in paragraph [5] provides a sudden release of tension after the build-up, marking the turning point of the sequence
 - the phrase 'it was, strictly speaking, a lie' immediately complicates the resolution, preventing the tension from resolving too simply or comfortably

Question 19

- **Level 1** (1): Identifies a single structural feature (for example the opening or the ending) with little explanation.
- **Level 2** (2-3): Explains, with some development, one or two ways the passage is structured to show a change in what Dominic values, with reference to the text.
- **Level 3** (4-5): Gives a clear, well-supported explanation referring to at least two points across the passage (for example, the opening's external stakes, the central dilemma, and the ending's return to the library chess set), showing secure understanding of how structure shapes the reader's experience.
- **Indicative content:**
 - the opening paragraph establishes external stakes through the trophy and the spectators, before Dominic's own internal conflict is introduced in paragraph [2]
 - paragraph [2]'s flashback reveals Dominic's earlier, simpler desire to win, giving the reader context before the central dilemma unfolds
 - the central dilemma in paragraphs [3] and [4] forms a clear turning point in the structure, where the narrative pace slows to focus entirely on Dominic's decision
 - the ending in paragraph [6] returns to the image of the battered library chess set first mentioned in paragraph [1], creating a circular structure that measures how far Dominic's understanding of winning has travelled
 - the closing metaphor of 'a bad trade' provides a deliberately understated final judgement, signalling that the change in Dominic's values is genuine rather than an exaggerated moment of triumph

Question 20

- **B1** Dominic and his best friend Yusuf reach the final of a school chess championship (oe)
- **B1** Yusuf accidentally breaks the touch-move rule in a way that would let Dominic win easily (oe)
- **B1** Dominic chooses to say nothing about the mistake (oe)
- **B1** He still plays his hardest, and Yusuf wins fairly through his own skill (oe)
- **B1** Dominic ends up valuing the friendship and his own integrity more than winning the trophy (oe)
- **Answer: Dominic and his best friend Yusuf reach the final of a school chess championship. When Yusuf accidentally breaks a rule that would hand Dominic an easy win, Dominic stays silent but still plays his hardest. Yusuf wins fairly through his own skill, and Dominic realises he values their friendship and his own integrity more than the trophy.**

Question 21

- **Level 1** (1-2): Simple or surface-level response with little reference to the passage; limited personal engagement with the question.
- **Level 2** (3-4): Some relevant explanation with limited textual reference; makes a straightforward personal comment on why the ending is, or is not, effective.
- **Level 3** (5-6): Clear, developed response with relevant textual reference and some apt quotation; explains effectively how particular techniques (for example the return to the chess set, or the metaphor of the trade) contribute to an effective ending.
- **Level 4** (7-8): Perceptive, well-evaluated response with sustained and precise reference to the passage as a whole; explores subtlety in the writer's choices (for example the understated final judgement, or the shift from external to internal measures of success) and their effect on the reader.
- **Indicative content:**
 - the return to the battered library chess set, 'missing one white pawn and half a knight's ear', creates a circular structure that directly recalls the opening of the passage and measures the distance Dominic has travelled emotionally
 - the phrase describing the twisting feeling finally loosening 'into something almost like relief' provides a satisfying physical resolution to the recurring image of tension introduced in paragraph [1]
 - the metaphor of needing 'to still recognise his own reflection in the mirror on the way home' suggests self-respect and integrity have replaced external validation as Dominic's true measure of success
 - the closing image of 'a bad trade' is understated rather than triumphant, arguably making the ending feel more genuine and thoughtful than an unrestrained celebration of losing would
 - the final detail of walking out into 'the cool evening air' provides a calm, quiet close that contrasts with the tension of the earlier tournament hall scenes, reinforcing the sense of resolution
 - candidates may reasonably disagree about how satisfying or complete this resolution feels, or whether Dominic's honesty with himself excuses his dishonesty with Yusuf; credit any well-supported, thoughtful personal response, whether positive or qualified