

## English: Sample 13+ Entrance Examination

Spend about 20 minutes reading the following passage and answering questions 1 to 4. Spend the remaining 40 minutes answering question 5. Pay particular attention to the accuracy and neatness of your writing.

### The Blue-Eyed Cat

Then it was spring once more – the early, bare-tree spring when kittens are born. The magpie was a year old, was a grown magpie with mischief in its flickering eyes and in every gleaming feather. All over Katverloren, kittens were being born.

Four kittens were born in the barn of a dune farmer west of Katverloren. The ninth day came, on which kittens open their eyes. On the night of the ninth day the dune farmer stooped over them in their warm nest in the hay. The moonlight in the doorway fell on the kittens. Three were black, but one was white. And as the dune farmer peered into the nest the white kitten opened its eyes and blinked up at him.

The startled farmer leaped back and crossed himself. The kitten had a blue eye! The farmer ran to the door and made the sign of the cross over the door of his barn. He peered into the nest again. The white kitten blinked up again. He had been right! The kitten's one eye was an ordinary green eye, such as all cats should have, but the other eye was blue. Blue! And that blazing blue eye was an evil eye. This the farmer knew. This by all the superstitious lore of the day was sure.

There was but one thing to do. The farmer grabbed the white, naked kitten by the scruff of its thin little neck, and ran with it through the night dunes. The sea fretted behind the dunes. The tide was in; the water stood deep. The farmer threw the kitten in the sea.

The superstitious farmer did not take so much as one backward look, but ran home, crossing himself all the way – mumbling. As soon as he got home he set crossed brooms upside down in all the doorways of his barns and house. That was the only way to ward off witches, and to keep evil from the homestead. The white kitten that had blinked up at him with the first look of its life had the evil eye. The white cat was a witch's cat.

It was against nature, against reason, and perhaps even against God, for a cat to have anything but cat-green eyes. That was known, and that was right and natural. But what made this evil seem still more evil to the farmer was that this witch's cat was white, instead of black as witches' cats should be. There had been but one thing to do as fast as it could be done – throw the kitten into the sea, drown it, destroy it, and with it destroy its evil.

Once more that night the mumbling farmer made the rounds of all his barns and buildings. Once more he made the sign of the cross over the upturned brooms in the doorways.

Behind the dunes the new-born kitten swam in pitiful blind circles. Soon the ebb tide would come and sweep it out to sea.

Along the sea's edge below the dunes a dark figure came stooping. It was the wise old woman. With not a stick of firewood left in the house, she had gone out in the moonlit night to gather driftwood cast up by the sea. The bottom of her old woollen apron was bundled over her arm to make a bag in which to put the driftwood. She stooped along, searching. Suddenly she saw the drowning kitten. She looked just once up and down the moonlit stretches of dunes, then she calmly hoisted her skirts, and waded into the cold sea. She grabbed the sinking kitten. She put it in her bundled apron on top of the few pieces of driftwood, and carried it home. No-one had seen her save the kitten. No-one saw her carry it home.

But the shivering kitten on the wet wood blinked its little eyes and purred a thin nine-day-old purr up at her. At the feeble sound of that little sound of thanksgiving, the old woman peered into her wet apron. "Little one," she said fondly, "all God's creatures have the right to live."

She saw the light blue eye blink up at her. She did not cross herself. She did not throw the kitten back into the sea. She was a wise old woman; she did not believe in evil eyes, and witches' cats. And because she was wise, she was merciful. She carried the kitten home.

At home was the magpie! Cats were its enemies. This the young magpie knew by instinct, even though until this moment it had never seen a cat. It nearly chattered itself into hysterics when it saw the limp, bedraggled kitten. This was no life for a magpie – a cat in the house! It sat in its high cage, and screamed. A cat in the house!

“Now you be still,” the wise old woman said at last. “This kitten, too, wanted to live. Remember when you lay freezing in the frozen grass?”

She warmed milk for the kitten. She dried the kitten, and wrapped it in warm rags. She let it lick milk droplets from her fingertips. In the stove the driftwood sizzled. The wet woollen apron hung by the stove and the seawater oozed from it in a slow, sleepy, drip, drip. It was cosy in the room. The kitten slept.

No-one in Katverloren knew that a cat and a bird lived together in the little one-room house. In the house the kitten grew, and the magpie scolded and teased and thought up mischief. No-one knew.

- 1 How many superstitions can you find that the farmer and the villagers believe in? Identify them. (5)
- 2 Explain why the farmer thinks that the kitten is especially evil. (5)
- 3 Why does the old woman rescue the kitten? What is her reaction to the blue eye? (5)
- 4 Explain how and why the magpie reacts to the arrival of the kitten. (5)
- 5 Do ONE of the following tasks (each is worth 30 marks):
  - a) Write a possible continuation of *The Blue-Eyed Cat*.
  - b) Imagine that you are the cat: tell the story of some of your adventures.
  - c) Write a speech either in favour of or against the following idea: “It is foolish to ignore superstitions.”
  - d) Write, in playscript form, a conversation between somebody who is in favour of hunting animals and somebody who is opposed to it.
  - e) Write an essay entitled *If I Ruled the World*.