Year 8 English – Learning from home booklet

Walworth Academy

INSTRUCTION:
Read the fiction extracts and answer all of the questions that follow (including all of the Challenge questions!)
Read this extract, then answer the questions that follow.

EXTRACT 1: Noughts and Crosses, by Malorie Blackman

Sephy is a Cross -- a member of the dark-skinned ruling class. Callum is a Nought -- a "colourless" member of the underclass who were once slaves to the Crosses. In this extract, Callum discusses joining Heathcroft High School with his parents. Heathcroft High School is a school that is run by Crosses.

Key vocabulary:
Scowl (verb): An angry or bad-tempered facial expression.
Malicious (adjective): Intended to harm or upset other people.
Irritate (verb): To make someone annoyed or angry.

Chapter 2: Callum

'I live in a palace with golden walls and silver turrets and marble floors...' I opened my eyes and looked at my house. My heart sank. I closed my eyes again. 'I live in a mansion with million windows and leaded light casements and a swimming pool and stables in the acres and acres of grounds.' I opened one eye. It still hadn't worked. 'I live in a three up, two down house with a lock on the front door and a little garden where we grow veggies.' I opened both eyes. It never worked. I hesitated outside my house - if you could call it that. Every time I came back from Sephy's, I flinched at the sight of the shack that was meant to be my home. Why couldn't my family live in a house like Sephy's? Why didn't any nought I knew of live in a house like Sephy's? Looking at our rundown hovel, I could feel the usual burning, churning sensation begin to rise up inside me. My stomach tightened, my eyes began to narrow... So I forced myself to look away. Forced myself to look around at the oak and beech and chestnut trees that lined our street, lifting their branches up to the sky. I watched a solitary cloud slow-dance above me, watched a swallow dart and soar without a care in the world.

'Come on... you can do this... do this... do this...' I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. Steeling myself, I pushed open the front door and walked inside.

'Where've you been, Callum? I was worried sick.'

Mum launched in before I'd even closed the door behind me. There was no hall or passageway with rooms leading off it like in Sephy's house. As soon as you opened our front door, there was our living room with its fifth-hand threadbare nylon carpet and its seventh-hand cloth sofa. The only thing in the room that was worth a damn was the oaken table. Years before, Dad had cut it and shaped it and carved the dragon's leaf pattern into it, put it together and polished it himself. A lot of love and work had gone into that table. Sephy's mother had once tried to buy it but Mum and Dad wouldn't part with it.

'Well? I'm waiting, Callum. Where were you?' Mum repeated.

I sat down at my place around the table and looked away from Mum. Dad wasn't bothered about me - or anything else, for that matter. He was totally focused on his food. Jude, my seventeen-year-old brother, grinned knowingly at me. He's a really irritating toad. I looked away from him as well.
'He was with his dagger friend.' Jude smirked.

I scowled at him. 'What dagger friend? If you don't know what you're talking about you should shut your mouth.'

Don't you call my best friend that . . . Say that again and I'll knock you flat . . .

Jude could see what I was thinking because his smirk broadened. 'What should I call her then? Your dagger what?'

He never called them Crosses. They were always doggers.

'Why don't you go and get stuffed?!

'Callum, son, don't talk to your brother like . . .' Dad didn't get any further.

'Callum, were you with her again?' Mum's eyes took on a fierce, bitter gleam.

'No, Mum. I went for a walk, that's all.'

'That had better be all.'

Mum banged down the dinner pan. Pasta sloshed over the sides and onto the table. Seconds later, Jude had whipped up the overspill and it was in his mouth!

Astounded seconds ticked past as everyone at the table stared at Jude. He even had Lynette's attention - and that was saying something. Not much brought my sister out of her mysterious world.

'How come the only time you move faster than greased lightning is when food is involved?' Mum said, her lips twitching somewhere between disgust and amusement.

'It's called incentive, Mum,' Jude grinned.

Amusement won. Mum started to laugh. 'I'll give you incentive, my lad!'

And for once I was grateful to Jude for drawing attention away from what I'd been doing all afternoon. I glanced around the table. Already Lynette was turning away, her head bowed as always, her attention on her lap - as always.

'Hi, Lynny . . .' I spoke softly to my big sister. She looked up and gave me the briefest of smiles before returning her gaze to her lap.

My sister looks like me - the same brown hair, eyes the same shade of grey. Jude's got black hair and brown eyes and looks like Mum. Lynny and I don't look like Mum or Dad particularly. Maybe that's part of the reason why we've always been close. Closer than Jude and I. She was the one who looked after me when Mum had to work and couldn't take me with her. But now she can't even look after herself. She's a bit simple. She looks her age, twenty, but her mind is outside time. She's away with
the fairies as my grandma used to say. She wasn't always that way. Three years ago something happened which changed her. An accident. And just like that the sister I knew was gone. Now she doesn't go out, doesn't talk much, doesn't think much as far as I can tell. She just is. She stays lost in the middle of her own world somewhere. We can't get in and she doesn't come out. Not often anyway, and certainly not for any length of time. But her mind takes her to somewhere kind, I think, to judge by the peaceful, serene look on her face most of the time. Sometimes I wondered if it was worth losing your marbles to find that kind of peace. Sometimes I envied her.

1. What does Callum wish for? __________________________________________

2. How does Callum describe his own living-room? _________________________

3. What does Jude call Sephy? __________________________________________

4. What do we find out about Callum's sister, Lynny? ______________________

Challenge: How does Blackman (the writer) show us that there is tension within Callum's family?

______________________________________________________________

Continue reading.

'So where have you been all this time?' Mum resumed her previous conversation. And I'd thought I'd got away with it. I should've guessed that Mum wouldn't let the matter rest. Once she gets a bee in her knickers . . .

'Just walking, I told you.'

'Hmmm . . . ' Mum's eyes narrowed but she turned around and headed back to the cooker for the mince. I breathed an outward sigh of relief. Mum was obviously tired because for once she'd chosen to believe me.

Lynette gave me one of her secret smiles. She turned to spoon pasta onto her plate as Mum returned with the pan of mince.

'Ready for school tomorrow, Callum?' Dad said warmly, seemingly oblivious to the instant tension rising up around the table like razor wire.
'Ready as I'll ever be, Dad,' I muttered, pouring myself a glass of milk from the dinner jug so that I wouldn't have to look at anyone.

'If it's tough, son, but at least it's a start. My son is going to Heathcroft High School. Imagine that!' Dad took a deep breath, his chest actually puffing up with pride as he smiled at me.

'I still think he's making a big mistake . . . ' Mum sniffed.

'Well, I don't.' Dad's smile vanished as he turned to Mum.

'He doesn't need to go to their schools. We ought to have our own schools with the same opportunities that the Crosses enjoy,' Mum retorted. 'We don't need to mix with them.'

'What's wrong with mixing?' I asked, surprised.

'It doesn't work,' Mum replied at once. 'As long as the schools are run by Crosses, we'll always be treated as second-class, second-best nothings. We should look after and educate our own, not wait for the Crosses to do it for us.'

'You never used to believe that,' said Dad.

'I'm not as naive as I used to be - if that's what you mean,' Mum replied.

I opened my mouth to speak but the words wouldn't come. They were just a jumble in my head. If a Cross had said that to me, I'd be accusing them of all sorts. It seemed to me we'd practised segregation for centuries now and that hadn't worked either. What would satisfy all the noughts and the Crosses who felt the same as Mum? Separate countries? Separate planets? How far away was far enough? What was it about the differences in others that scared some people so much?

'Meggie, if our boy is going to get anywhere in this life, he has to go to their schools and learn to play the game by their rules. He just has to be better at it, that's all.'

'That's all?'

'Don't you want something more for your son than we ever had?' Dad asked, annoyed.

'How can you ask me that? If you think . . . '

'I'm sure everything will be fine, Mum. Don't worry,' I interrupted.

Mum clamped her lips together, her expression thunderous. She stood up and went over to the fridge. I could tell from the way she took out the water bottle and slammed the fridge door shut that she wasn't happy. My going to school was the only thing I'd ever heard my parents argue about. Mum twisted the top off the bottle and tipped it so that it was directly over the yellow painted pottery jug she'd made a few weeks back. Water gushed out, rising up in the jug to slosh over the sides and down onto the work surface, but she didn't alter the angle of the bottle.
'You'll soon think you're too good for us.' Jude punched me on the arm for good measure. 'Just don't go getting too big for your boots!'

'Of course he won't. And you'll be on your best behaviour at Heathcroft, won't you?' Dad beamed. 'You'll be representing all of us noughts at the school.'

Why did I have to represent all noughts? Why couldn't I just represent myself?

'You must show them they're wrong about us. Show them we're just as good as they are,' Dad continued.

'He doesn't need to go to their stuck-up school to show them that.' Mum came back to the table, slamming the water jug down on the plastic tablecloth. Milk and water, water and milk - that was all we ever had with our dinner. Unless we were extra short of money, in which case it was just water. I lifted my glass of milk to my mouth and closed my eyes. I could almost smell the orange juice Sephy's family nearly always had at their dinner table. Chardonnay for her mother and a claret for her dad and a choice of fizzy water, fruit juice - usually orange - and/or fizzy ginger beer for Sephy and her sister, Minerva. No bottled tap water for them. I remembered years ago when Sephy had snuck me my first taste of orange juice. It was icy-cold and oh, so sweet and I held each sip in my mouth until it became warm because I was so loath to swallow. I wanted the orange juice to last - but of course it hadn't. Sephy snuck me orange juice as often as she could after that. She couldn't understand why I loved it so much. I think she still can't.

I took a sip of my drink. My juice had too obviously passed through a cow first! I guess I didn't have enough imagination to turn milk into orange juice.

'He'll soon be as stuck-up as them.' Jude prodded me in the same place where he'd just punched me, turning his finger this way and that to make sure that it really hurt. I put down my glass and glared at Jude.

'Come on then . . .' Jude whispered for my ears only.

I carefully placed my hands on my lap, my fingers interlocked.

'What's the matter? Am I embarrassing you?' Jude teased maliciously.

Beneath the table, my fingertips were beginning to go numb, I was pressing them together so hard. Ever since I'd passed the exam and got into Heathcroft, Jude had become totally unbearable. He spent every waking moment trying to goad me into hitting out at him. So far I'd managed to resist the intense temptation - but only just. I had sense enough to know that if Jude and I got into a fight, he'd wipe the floor with me. I hated it here so much. Oh, to get away. Far away. Even if I couldn't get up and physically leave the table, I had to get out of here before . . . before I exploded.

1. How does Callum's Dad feel about him joining Heathcroft High School? _____
2. Why doesn't Callum's Mum think that he should join Heathcroft High School?

3. How does Callum feel about the separation of Noughts and Crosses?

4. How does Jude try to provoke Callum?

What would you do if society tried to stop you being friends with someone because of the colour of their skin?

Did you enjoy this extract? Explain why/why not.
Harry Potter is a boy who discovered he was a wizard on his 11th birthday. He now attends a special wizard school, called Hogwarts. In this extract, Harry is staying with his Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia during the summer. They treat him terribly, and warn him not to mention anything about the fact that he is a wizard when Aunt Marge comes to visit. Uncle Vernon has promised to sign a permission slip allowing Harry on a school trip if he pretends that he is a ‘normal’ boy.

Key vocabulary:
- **Ruddy** (adjective): A red colour – used to describe a person’s face.
- **Apoplectic** (adjective): Overcome with anger; furious.
- **Sputter** (verb): A series of spitting sounds.

"So!" she barked. "Still here, are you?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Don’t you say ‘yes’ in that ungrateful tone," Aunt Marge growled. "It’s damn good of Vernon and Petunia to keep you. Wouldn’t have done it myself. You’d have gone straight to an orphanage if you’d been dumped on my doorstep."

Harry was bursting to say that he’d rather live in an orphanage than with the Dursleys, but the thought of the Hogsmeade form stopped him. He forced his face into a painful smile.

"Don’t you smirk at me!" boomed Aunt Marge. "I can see you haven’t improved since I last saw you. I hoped school would knock some manners into you." She took a large gulp of tea, wiped her moustache, and said, "Where is it that you send him, again, Vernon?"

"St. Brutus’s," said Uncle Vernon promptly. "It’s a first-rate institution for hopeless cases."

"I see," said Aunt Marge. "Do they use the cane at St. Brutus’s, boy?" she barked across the table.

"Er—"

Uncle Vernon nodded curtly behind Aunt Marge’s back.

"Yes," said Harry. Then, feeling he might as well do the thing properly, he added, "all the time."

"Excellent," said Aunt Marge. "I won’t have this namby-pamby, wishy-washy nonsense about not hitting people who deserve it. A good thrashing is what’s needed in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. Have you been beaten often?"
"Oh, yeah," said Harry, "loads of times."

Aunt Marge narrowed her eyes.

"I still don't like your tone, boy," she said. "If you can speak of your beatings in that casual way, they clearly aren't hitting you hard enough. Petunia, I'd write if I were you. Make it clear that you approve the use of extreme force in this boy's case."

Perhaps Uncle Vernon was worried that Harry might forget their bargain; in any case, he changed the subject abruptly.

"Heard the news this morning, Marge? What about that escaped prisoner, eh?"

As Aunt Marge started to make herself at home, Harry caught himself thinking almost longingly of life at number four without her. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia usually encouraged Harry to stay out of their way, which Harry was only too happy to do. Aunt Marge, on the other hand, wanted Harry under her eye at all times, so that she could boom out suggestions for his improvement. She delighted in comparing Harry with Dudley, and took huge pleasure in buying Dudley expensive presents while glaring at Harry, as though daring him to ask why he hadn't got a present too. She also kept throwing out dark hints about what made Harry such an unsatisfactory person.

"You mustn't blame yourself for the way the boy's turned out, Vernon," she said over lunch on the third day. "If there's something rotten on the inside, there's nothing anyone can do about it."

Harry tried to concentrate on his food, but his hands shook and his face was starting to burn with anger. Remember the form, he told himself. Think about Hogsmeade. Don't say anything. Don't rise --

Aunt Marge reached for her glass of wine.

"It's one of the basic rules of breeding," she said. "You see it all the time with dogs. If there's something wrong with the bitch, there'll be something wrong with the pup -"

At that moment, the wineglass Aunt Marge was holding exploded in her hand. Shards of glass flew in every direction and Aunt Marge sputtered and blinked, her great ruddy face dripping.

"Margel!" squealed Aunt Petunia. "Marge, are you all right?"

"Not to worry," grunted Aunt Marge, mopping her face with her napkin. "Must have squeezed it too hard. Did the same thing at Colonel Fubster's the other day. No need to fuss, Petunia, I have a very firm grip ..."

But Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon were both looking at Harry suspiciously, so he decided he'd better skip dessert and escape from the table as soon as he could.
Outside in the hall, he leaned against the wall, breathing deeply. It had been a long time since he'd lost control and made something explode. He couldn't afford to let it happen again. The Hogsmeade form wasn't the only thing at stake - if he carried on like that, he'd be in trouble with the Ministry of Magic.

Harry was still an underage wizard, and he was forbidden by wizard law to do magic outside school. His record wasn't exactly clean either. Only last summer he'd gotten an official warning that had stated quite clearly that if the Ministry got wind of any more magic in Privet Drive, Harry would face expulsion from Hogwarts.

He heard the Dursleys leaving the table and hurried upstairs out of the way.

1. Where would Harry rather live than with the Dursleys? 

2. What does Aunt Marge think should happen to boys that misbehave? 

3. What does Aunt Marge enjoy doing for Dudley? 

4. Who does Aunt Marge blame for the way that Harry has turned out? 

5. What happens to Aunt Marge? Who do you think is responsible for this? 

CHALLENGE: How do you think Harry will react if Aunt Marge continues to insult his parents? What do you think might happen?
Continue reading.

Harry got through the next three days by forcing himself to think about his Handbook of Do-It-Yourself Broomcare whenever Aunt Marge started on him. This worked quite well, though it seemed to give him a glazed look, because Aunt Marge started voicing the opinion that he was mentally subnormal.

At last, at long last, the final evening of Marge's stay arrived. Aunt Petunia cooked a fancy dinner and Uncle Vernon uncorked several bottles of wine. They got all the way through the soup and the salmon without a single mention of Harry's faults; during the lemon meringue pie, Uncle Vernon bored them all with a long talk about Grunnings, his drill-making company; then Aunt Petunia made coffee and Uncle Vernon brought out a bottle of brandy.

"Can I tempt you, Marge?"

Aunt Marge had already had quite a lot of wine. Her huge face was very red.

"Just a small one, then," she chuckled. "A bit more than that . . . and a bit more . . . that's the ticket."

Dudley was eating his fourth slice of pie. Aunt Petunia was sipping coffee with her little finger sticking out. Harry really wanted to disappear into his bedroom, but he met Uncle Vernon's angry little eyes and knew he would have to sit it out.

"Aah," said Aunt Marge, smacking her lips and putting the empty brandy glass back down. "Excellent nosh, Petunia. It's normally just a fry-up for me of an evening, with twelve dogs to look after. . . ." She burped richly and patted her great tweed stomach. "Pardon me. But I do like to see a healthy-sized boy," she went on, winking at Dudley. "You'll be a proper-sized man, Dudders, like your father. Yes, I'll have a spot more brandy, Vernon. . . ."

"Now, this one here -"

She jerked her head at Harry, who felt his stomach clench. The Handbook, he thought quickly.

"This one's got a mean, runty look about him. You get that with dogs. I had Colonel Fubster drown one last year. Ratty little thing it was. Weak. Underbred."

Harry was trying to remember page twelve of his book: A Charm to Cure Reluctant Reversers.

"It all comes down to blood, as I was saying the other day. Bad blood will out. Now, I'm saying nothing against your family, Petunia" - she patted Aunt Petunia's bony hand with her shovel-like one - "but your sister was a bad egg. They turn up in the best families. Then she ran off with a wastrel and here's the result right in front of us."

Harry was staring at his plate, a funny ringing in his ears. Grasp your broom firmly by the tail, he thought. But he couldn't remember what came next. Aunt Marge's voice seemed to be boring into him like one of Uncle Vernon's drills.
"This Potter," said Aunt Marge loudly, seizing the brandy bottle and splashing more into her glass and over the tablecloth, "you never told me what he did?"

Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia were looking extremely tense. Dudley had even looked up from his pie to gape at his parents.

"He - didn't work," said Uncle Vernon, with half a glance at Harry. "Unemployed."

"As I expected!" said Aunt Marge, taking a huge swig of brandy and wiping her chin on her sleeve. "A no-account, good-for-nothing, lazy scrounger who -"

"He was not," said Harry suddenly. The table went very quiet. Harry was shaking all over. He had never felt so angry in his life.

"MORE BRANDY!" yelled Uncle Vernon, who had gone very white. He emptied the bottle into Aunt Marge's glass. "You, boy," he snarled at Harry. "Go to bed, go on."

"No, Vernon," hiccuped Aunt Marge, holding up a hand, her tiny bloodshot eyes fixed on Harry's. "Go on, boy, go on. Proud of your parents, are you? They go and get themselves killed in a car crash (drunk, I expect) ."

"They didn't die in a car crash!" said Harry, who found himself on his feet.

"They died in a car crash, you nasty little liar, and left you to be a burden on their decent, hardworking relatives!" screamed Aunt Marge, swelling with fury. "You are an insolent, ungrateful little -"

But Aunt Marge suddenly stopped speaking. For a moment, it looked as though words had failed her. She seemed to be swelling with inexpressible anger - but the swelling didn't stop. Her great red face started to expand, her tiny eyes bulged, and her mouth stretched too tightly for speech - next second, several buttons had just burst from her tweed jacket and pinged off the walls - she was inflating like a monstrous balloon, her stomach bursting free of her tweed waistband, each of her fingers blowing up like a salami -

"MARGE!" yelled Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia together as Aunt Marge's whole body began to rise off her chair toward the ceiling. She was entirely round, now, like a vast life buoy with piggy eyes, and her hands and feet stuck out weirdly as she drifted up into the air, making apoplectic popping noises. Ripper came skidding into the room, barking madly.

"NOOOOOOOO!"

Uncle Vernon seized one of Marge's feet and tried to pull her down again, but was almost lifted from the floor himself. A second later, Ripper leapt forward and sank his teeth into Uncle Vernon's leg.
Harry tore from the dining room before anyone could stop him, heading for the cupboard under the stairs. The cupboard door burst magically open as he reached it. In seconds, he had heaved his trunk to the front door. He sprinted upstairs and threw himself under the bed, wrenching up the loose floorboard, and grabbed the pillowcase full of his books and birthday presents. He wriggled out, seized Hedwig’s empty cage, and dashed back downstairs to his trunk, just as Uncle Vernon burst out of the dining room, his trouser leg in bloody tatters.

"COME BACK IN HERE!" he bellowed. "COME BACK AND PUT HER RIGHT!"

But a reckless rage had come over Harry. He kicked his trunk open, pulled out his wand, and pointed it at Uncle Vernon.

"She deserved it," Harry said, breathing very fast. "She deserved what she got. You keep away from me."

He fumbled behind him for the latch on the door.

"I'm going," Harry said. "I've had enough."

And in the next moment, he was out in the dark, quiet street, heaving his heavy trunk behind him, Hedwig's cage under his arm.

1. How long did Aunt Marge stay with the Dursleys for? ________________

2. What do the Dursleys eat and drink for their fancy dinner? ________________

3. What did Uncle Vernon say that Harry’s father did for a living? ________________

4. How does Aunt Marge say that Harry’s parents died? ________________

5. What does Harry do to Aunt Marge? ________________

6. How does Uncle Vernon try to help Aunt Marge? ________________
Challenge: How does Rowling (the writer) make Aunt Marge seem like a disgusting woman? Try to write at least 2 paragraphs about two bits of language Rowling uses.
EXTRACT 3: *Fantastic Mr Fox*, by Roald Dahl

_In this extract, Mr Fox plans to steal some ducks from three farmers so that he can feed his family. The farmers are called Boggis, Bunce and Bean. They are disgusting, nasty men._

**Key vocabulary**

*Reek* (verb): A strong, unpleasant smell.

*Murky* (adjective): Dark and gloomy.

*Shovel* (noun): A large spade.

**Chapter 3: The Shooting**

'Well, my darling,' said Mr Fox. 'What shall it be tonight?'

'I think we’ll have duck tonight,' said Mrs Fox.

'Bring us two fat ducks, if you please. One for you and me, and one for the children.'

'Ducks it shall be!' said Mr Fox. 'Bunce's best!'

'Now do be careful,' said Mrs Fox.

'My darling,' said Mr Fox, 'I can smell those goons a mile away. I can even smell one from the other. Boggis gives off a filthy stink of rotten chicken-skins. Bunce reeks of goose-livers, and as for Bean, the fumes of apple cider hang around him like poisonous gases.'

'Yes, but just don't get careless,' said Mrs Fox. 'You know they'll be waiting for you, all three of them.'

'Don't you worry about me,' said Mr Fox. 'I'll see you later.'

But Mr Fox would not have been quite so cocky had he known exactly where the three farmers were waiting at that moment. They were just outside the entrance to the hole, each one crouching behind a tree with his gun loaded. And what is more, they had chosen their positions very carefully, making sure that the wind was not blowing from them towards the fox's hole. In fact, it was blowing in the opposite direction. There was no chance of them being 'smelled out'.

Mr Fox crept up the dark tunnel to the mouth of his hole. He poked his long handsome face out into the night air and sniffed once. He moved an inch or two forward and stopped. He sniffed again. He was always especially careful when coming out from his hole. He inched forward a little more. The front half of his body was now in the open.

His black nose twitched from side to side, sniffing and sniffing for the scent of danger. He found none, and he was just about to go trotting forward into the wood when he heard or thought he heard a tiny noise, a soft rustling sound, as though someone had moved a foot ever so gently through a patch of dry leaves.
Mr Fox flattened his body against the ground and lay very still, his ears pricked. He waited a long time, but he heard nothing more.

'It must have been a field-mouse,' he told himself, 'or some other small animal.'

He crept a little further out of the hole . . . then further still. He was almost right out in the open now. He took a last careful look around. The wood was murky and very still. Somewhere in the sky the moon was shining.

Just then, his sharp night-eyes caught a glint of something bright behind a tree not far away. It was a small silver speck of moonlight shining on a polished surface. Mr Fox lay still, watching it. What on earth was it? Now it was moving. It was coming up and up . . . Great heavens! It was the barrel of a gun! Quick as a whip, Mr Fox jumped back into his hole and at that same instant the entire wood seemed to explode around him. Bang-bang! Bang-bang! Bang-bang!

The smoke from the three guns floated upward in the night air. Boggis and Bunce and Bean came out from behind their trees and walked towards the hole.

'Did we get him?' said Bean.

One of them shone a flashlight on the hole, and there on the ground, in the circle of light, half in and half out of the hole, lay the poor tattered blood-stained remains of . . . a fox's tail. Bean picked it up. 'We got the tail but we missed the fox,' he said, tossing the thing away.

'Dang and blast!' said Boggis. 'We shot too late. We should have let fly the moment he poked his head out.'

'He won't be poking it out again in a hurry,' Bunce said.

Bean pulled a flask from his pocket and took a swig of cider. Then he said, 'It'll take three days at least before he gets hungry enough to come out again. I'm not sitting around here waiting for that. Let's dig him out.'

'Ah,' said Boggis. 'Now you're talking sense. We can dig him out in a couple of hours. We know he's there.'

'I reckon there's a whole family of them down that hole,' Bunce said.

'Then we'll have the lot,' said Bean. 'Get the shovels!'

1. What do Boggis, Bunce and Bean smell of? ____________

2. Why does Mr Fox sniff the air when he leaves his hole? ________
3. What noise does Mr Fox think he has heard? ____________________________

__________________________

4. What happened to Mr Fox? ____________________________

__________________________

5. What do the farmers plan to do? ____________________________

__________________________

Continue reading.

Chapter 4: The Terrible Shovels

Down the hole, Mrs Fox was tenderly licking the stump of Mr Fox's tail to stop the bleeding. 'It was the finest tail for miles around,' she said between licks.

'It hurts,' said Mr Fox.

'I know it does, sweetheart. But it'll soon get better.'

'And it will soon grow again, Dad,' said one of the Small Foxes.

'It will never grow again,' said Mr Fox. 'I shall be tailless for the rest of my life.' He looked very glum.

There was no food for the foxes that night, and soon the children dozed off. Then Mrs Fox dozed off. But Mr Fox couldn't sleep because of the pain in the stump of his tail.

'Well,' he thought, 'I suppose I'm lucky to be alive at all. And now they've found our hole, we're going to have to move out as soon as possible. We'll never get any peace if we . . . What was that?' He turned his head sharply and listened. The noise he heard now was the most frightening noise a fox can ever hear – the scrape-scraping of shovels digging into the soil.

'Wake up!' he shouted. 'They're digging us out!'

Mrs Fox was wide awake in one second. She sat up, quivering all over. 'Are you sure that's it?' she whispered.

'I'm positive! Listen!'

'They'll kill my children!' cried Mrs Fox.

'Never!' said Mr Fox.

'But darling, they will!' sobbed Mrs Fox. 'You know they will!'
Scrunch, scrunch, scrunch went the shovels above their heads. Small stones and bits of earth began falling from the roof of the tunnel.

'How will they kill us, Mummy?' asked one of the Small Foxes. His round black eyes were huge with fright. 'Will there be dogs?' he said.

Mrs Fox began to cry. She gathered her four children close to her and held them tight.

Suddenly there was an especially loud crunch above their heads and the sharp end of a shovel came right through the ceiling. The sight of this awful thing seemed to have an electric effect upon Mr Fox. He jumped up and shouted, 'I've got it! Come on! There's not a moment to lose! Why didn't I think of it before!'

'Think of what, Dad?'

'A fox can dig quicker than a man!' shouted Mr Fox, beginning to dig. 'Nobody in the world can dig as quick as a fox!'

The soil began to fly out furiously behind Mr Fox as he started to dig for dear life with his front feet. Mrs Fox ran forward to help him. So did the four children.

'Go downwards!' ordered Mr Fox. 'We've got to go deep! As deep as we possibly can!'

The tunnel began to grow longer and longer. It sloped steeply downward. Deeper and deeper below the surface of the ground it went. The mother and the father and all four of the children were digging together. Their front legs were moving so fast you couldn't see them.

And gradually the scrunching and scraping of the shovels became fainter and fainter.

After about an hour, Mr Fox stopped digging. 'Hold it!' he said.

They all stopped. They turned and looked back up the long tunnel they had just dug. All was quiet.

'Phew!' said Mr Fox. 'I think we've done it! They'll never get as deep as this. Well done, everyone!' They all sat down, panting for breath. And Mrs Fox said to her children, 'I should like you to know that if it wasn't for your father we should all be dead by now. Your father is a fantastic fox.'

Mr Fox looked at his wife and she smiled. He loved her more than ever when she said things like that.
Chapter 5: The Terrible Tractors

As the sun rose the next morning, Boggis and Bunce and Bean were still digging. They had dug a hole so deep you could have put a house into it. But they had not yet come to the end of the foxes' tunnel. They were all very tired and cross.

'Dang and blast!' said Boggis. 'Whose rotten idea was this?'

'Bean's idea,' said Bunce.

Boggis and Bunce both stared at Bean. Bean took another swig of cider, then put the flask back into his pocket without offering it to the others. 'Listen,' he said angrily, 'I want that fox! I'm going to get that fox! I'm not giving in till I've strung him up over my front porch, dead as a dumpling!'

'We can't get him by digging, that's for sure,' said the fat Boggis. 'I've had enough of digging.'

Bunce, the little pot-bellied dwarf, looked up at Bean and said, 'Have you got any more stupid ideas, then?'

'What?' said Bean. 'I can't hear you.' Bean never took a bath. He never even washed. As a result, his earholes were clogged with all kinds of muck and wax and bits of chewing-gum and dead flies and stuff like that. This made him deaf. 'Speak louder,' he said to Bunce, and Bunce shouted back, 'Got any more stupid ideas?'

Bean rubbed the back of his neck with a dirty finger. He had a boil coming there and it itched. 'What we need on this job,' he said, 'is machines... mechanical shovels. We'll have him out in five minutes with mechanical shovels.'

1. What noise wakes Mr Fox up? 

2. How do Mrs Fox and the Small Foxes feel when they hear the noise? 

3. What idea does Mr Fox come up with to escape? 

4. What do the farmers plan to do next to catch Mr Fox?
Did you enjoy this extract? Explain why/why not.
EXTRACT 4: Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief, by Rick Riordan.

The story charts the adventures of modern-day twelve-year-old Percy Jackson as he discovers he is a demigod, the son of a mortal woman and the Greek god Poseidon. In this extract from Chapter 1, Percy is on a school trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to look at ancient Greek and Roman art with the rest of his class. He has just been told off by his teacher, Mr Brunner. Percy attends a boarding school for 'troubled' kids – it is his sixth school in six years. At this point in the story, he does not know that he is a demi-god.

Key Vocabulary

Pelt (verb): To hurl missiles repeatedly at something
Pulverise (verb): To completely defeat someone/ something
Contaminate (verb): To make something impure by adding a poisonous or polluted substance.

Chapter 1

The class gathered on the front steps of the museum, where we could watch the foot traffic along Fifth Avenue.
Overhead, a huge storm was brewing, with clouds blacker than I'd ever seen over the city. I figured maybe it was global warming or something, because the weather all across New York state had been weird since Christmas. We'd had massive snow storms, flooding, wildfires from lightning strikes. I wouldn't have been surprised if this was a hurricane blowing in.

Nobody else seemed to notice. Some of the guys were pelting pigeons with Luncheables crackers. Nancy Bobofit was trying to pickpocket something out of a lady's purse, and, of course, Mrs. Dodds wasn't seeing a thing.

Grover and I sat on the edge of the fountain, away from the others. We thought that maybe if we did that, everybody wouldn't know we were from that school-the school for loser freaks who couldn't make it elsewhere.

"Detention?" Grover asked.

"Nah," I said. "Not from Brunner. I just wish he'd lay off me sometimes. I mean – I'm not a genius."

Grover didn't say anything for a while. Then, when I thought he was going to give me some deep philosophical comment to make me feel better, he said, "Can I have your apple?"

I didn't have much of an appetite, so I let him take it.

I watched the stream of cabs going down Fifth Avenue, and thought about my mom's apartment, only a little ways uptown from where we sat. I hadn't seen her since Christmas. I wanted so bad to jump in a taxi and head home. She'd hug me and be glad to see me, but she'd be disappointed, too. She'd send me right back to Yancy, remind me that I had to try harder, even if this was my sixth school in six years and I was probably going to be kicked out again. I wouldn't be able to stand that sad look she'd give me.
Mr. Brunner parked his wheelchair at the base of the handicapped ramp. He ate celery while he read a paperback novel. A red umbrella stuck up from the back of his chair, making it look like a motorized café table.

I was about to unwrap my sandwich when Nancy Bobofit appeared in front of me with her ugly friends—I guess she’d gotten tired of stealing from the tourists—and dumped her half-eaten lunch in Grover’s lap.

"Oops." She grinned at me with her crooked teeth. Her freckles were orange, as if somebody had spray-painted her face with liquid Cheetos.

I tried to stay cool. The school counselor had told me a million times, "Count to ten, get control of your temper." But I was so mad my mind went blank. A wave roared in my ears.

I don’t remember touching her, but the next thing I knew, Nancy was sitting on her butt in the fountain, screaming, "Percy pushed me!"

Mrs. Dodds materialized next to us.

Some of the kids were whispering: "Did you see—"

"—the water—"

"—like it grabbed her—"

I didn’t know what they were talking about. All I knew was that I was in trouble again.

As soon as Mrs. Dodds was sure poor little Nancy was okay, promising to get her a new shirt at the museum gift shop, etc., etc., Mrs. Dodds turned on me. There was a triumphant fire in her eyes, as if I’d done something she’d been waiting for all semester.

"Now, honey—"

"I know," I grumbled. "A month erasing workbooks."

That wasn’t the right thing to say.

"Come with me," Mrs. Dodds said.

"Wait!" Grover yelped. "It was me. I pushed her."

I stared at him, stunned. I couldn’t believe he was trying to cover for me. Mrs. Dodds scared Grover to death.

She glared at him so hard his whiskery chin trembled.

"I don’t think so, Mr. Underwood," she said.

"But—"

"You-will-stay-here."

Grover looked at me desperately.
"It's okay, man," I told him. "Thanks for trying."

"Honey," Mrs. Dodds barked at me. "Now."

Nancy Bobofit smirked.

1. Why does Percy say New York had been 'weird' since Christmas? __________

2. How does Percy think his mum will react if he is kicked out of another school?

3. What does Nancy Bobofit do to make Percy angry? ________________

4. What happens to Nancy Bobofit? ________________________________

Challenge: What are your first impressions of Mrs Dodds?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Why do you think Mrs Dodds had a 'triumphant fire in her eyes, as if I'd done something she'd been waiting for all semester'? 

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________
Continue reading.

I gave her my deluxe I’ll-kill-you-later stare. I then turned to face Mrs. Dodds, but she wasn’t there. She was standing at the museum entrance, way at the top of the steps, gesturing impatiently at me to come on.

How’d she get there so fast?

I have moments like that a lot, when my brain falls asleep or something, and the next thing I know I’ve missed something, as if a puzzle piece fell out of the universe and left me staring at the blank place behind it. The school counsellor told me this was part of the ADHD, my brain misinterpreting things.

I wasn’t so sure.

I went after Mrs. Dodds.

Halfway up the steps, I glanced back at Grover. He was looking pale, cutting his eyes between me and Mr. Brunner, like he wanted Mr. Brunner to notice what was going on, but Mr. Brunner was absorbed in his novel.

I looked back up. Mrs. Dodds had disappeared again. She was now inside the building, at the end of the entrance hall.

Okay, I thought. She’s going to make me buy a new shirt for Nancy at the gift shop.

But apparently that wasn’t the plan.

I followed her deeper into the museum. When I finally caught up to her, we were back in the Greek and Roman section.

Except for us, the gallery was empty.

Mrs. Dodds stood with her arms crossed in front of a big marble frieze of the Greek gods. She was making this weird noise in her throat, like growling.

Even without the noise, I would’ve been nervous. It’s weird being alone with a teacher, especially Mrs. Dodds. Something about the way she looked at the frieze, as if she wanted to pulverise it...

"You’ve been giving us problems, honey," she said.

I did the safe thing. I said, "Yes, ma’am."

She tugged on the cuffs of her leather jacket. "Did you really think you would get away with it?"

The look in her eyes was beyond mad. It was evil.

She’s a teacher, I thought nervously. It’s not like she’s going to hurt me.

I said, "I’ll—I’ll try harder, ma’am."

Thunder shook the building.

"We are not fools, Percy Jackson," Mrs. Dodds said. "It was only a matter of time before we found you out. Confess, and you will suffer less pain."
I didn't know what she was talking about.

All I could think of was that the teachers must've found the illegal stash of candy I'd been selling out of my dorm room. Or maybe they'd realised I got my essay on Tom Sawyer from the internet without ever reading the book and now they were going to take away my grade. Or worse, they were going to make me read the book.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Ma'am, I don't..."

"Your time is up," she hissed, her eyes glowing like barbecue coals." Her fingers stretched, turning into talons. Her jacket melted into large, leathery wings. She wasn't human. She was a shriveled hag with bat wings and claws and a mouth full of yellow fangs, and she was about to slice me to ribbons.

Then things got even stranger.

Mr. Brunner, who'd been out in front of the museum a minute before, wheeled his chair into doorway of the gallery, holding a pen in his hand.

"What ho, Percy!" he shouted, and tossed the pen through the air.

Mrs. Dodds lunged at me.

With a yelp, I dodged and felt talons slash the air next to my ear. I snatched the ballpoint pen out of the air, but when it hit my hand, it wasn't a pen anymore. It was a sword—Mr. Brunner's bronze sword, which he always used on tournament day.

Mrs. Dodds spun toward me with a murderous look in her eyes.

My knees were jelly. My hands were shaking so bad I almost dropped the sword.

She snarled, "Die, honey!"

And she flew straight at me.

Absolute terror ran through my body. I did the only thing that came naturally: I swung the sword.

The metal blade hit her shoulder and passed clean through her body as if she were made of water. Hiss!

Mrs. Dodds was a sandcastle in a power fan. She exploded into yellow powder, vaporized on the spot, leaving nothing but the smell of sulphur and a dying screech and a chill of evil in the air, as if those two glowing red eyes were still watching me.

I was alone.

There was a ballpoint pen in my hand.

Mr. Brunner wasn't there. Nobody was there but me.

My hands were still trembling. My lunch must've been contaminated with magic mushrooms or something.

Had I imagined the whole thing?
I went back outside.

It had started to rain.

Grover was sitting by the fountain, a museum map tented over his head. Nancy Bobofit was still standing there, soaked from her swim in the fountain, grumbling to her ugly friends. When she saw me, she said, "I hope Mrs. Kerr whipped your butt."

I said, "Who?"

"Our teacher. Duh!"

I blinked. We had no teacher named Mrs. Kerr. I asked Nancy what she was talking about.

She just rolled her eyes and turned away.

I asked Grover where Mrs. Dodds was.

He said, "Who?"

But he paused first, and he wouldn't look at me, so I thought he was messing with me.

"Not funny, man," I told him. "This is serious."

Thunder boomed overhead.

I saw Mr. Brunner sitting under his red umbrella, reading his book, as if he'd never moved.

I went over to him.

He looked up, a little distracted. "Ah, that would be my pen. Please bring your own writing utensil in the future, Mr. Jackson."

I handed it over. I hadn't even realised I was still holding it.

"Sir," I said, "where's Mrs. Dodds?"

He stared at me blankly. "Who?"

"The other chaperone. Mrs. Dodds. The pre-algebra teacher."

He frowned and sat forward, looking mildly concerned. "Percy, there is no Mrs. Dodds on this trip. As far as I know, there has never been a Mrs. Dodds at Yancy Academy. Are you feeling all right?"
Did you enjoy this extract? Explain why/why not.
EXTRACT 5: Abomination, by Robert Swindells

Martha is twelve, and very different from other kids. No TV. No computer. No cool clothes. Especially, no friends. It's all because of her parents. Strict members of a religious group, their rules dominate Martha's life. But one rule is the most important of all: Martha must never ever invite anyone home. If she does, their terrible secret – Abomination – could be revealed...

*heathen* (noun): a person who does not follow a religion, usually used as an insult
*abomination* (noun): a thing that causes disgust or loathing.
Some synonyms: disgrace, horror, obscenity, evil, crime, monstrosity, violation

Chapter 1 – Martha

They chased me home again today and the new boy, Scott, joined in. When he smiled at me yesterday I hoped he was going to be my friend, but he's not. He was yelling Raggedy-Ann just like everybody else as I ran up Taylor Hill.

When I got in other said, 'You've been running'. I've never told her the kids chase me and she doesn't like me to run. I said 'Yes, Mother, I'm sorry'. She shook her head like she does, tutting. 'There's a time, Martha,' she says. 'A time to every purpose under heaven.'

I hate my name. Martha. It's in the Bible but the kids think it's a stupid name. They call me Arthur or Ma, and that's when I'm lucky. Mostly it's Raggedy-Ann, because of my clothes. Mother makes my clothes and I wish she didn't. They're good clothes and I know she sews them because she loves me, but they are different. I mean they're not rags or anything – that's not why they call me Raggedy-Ann. Mother would die before she let me wear rags, but they don't look right. You can see they're home-made. I mentioned it once how all the kids have Nike trainers and jogging bottoms and stuff like that, but Mother said, 'All is vanity.' There's a saying for everything in the Bible.

The kids don't know the Bible. Mother says they're raised in darkness like the heathen, but I don't know. I mean, I know the Bible's the word of God and God never lies, but it says the meek shall inherit the earth and I'm meek and the kids are not, and it seems to me they've inherited this little bit of the earth – the bit with me in it.
Anyway, today’s Tuesday so it’s lamb cutlets with green beans and mashed potatoes. Father says plain food’s best. Good plain food, he calls it. We never have pizza or curry or fish and chips. We have cakes or biscuits sometimes, but they’re home-made like my clothes. Father says shop ones are for idle people. I never get to eat straight away, one of my jobs is to feed Abomination. It’s my worst thing. Worse than hair-pulling or name-calling or being chased. I hate the cellar, but that’s where Abomination lives and so I have to go down there every single day. If the kids knew, maybe they’d leave me alone but they don’t, because it’s a secret. Nobody knows except father and Mother and me. And God, I suppose. You can’t keep secrets from God.

1. Why did Martha run home? ____________________________

______________________________________________

2. What names did the bullies give her?____________________

______________________________________________

3. How did she get her real name? ______________________

______________________________________________

4. Why was Martha’s mum cross? ______________________

______________________________________________

5. What is different about Martha? _____________________

______________________________________________

6. When can Martha eat? _____________________________

______________________________________________

7. Which parts of the Bible does Martha’s mum quote? ______
8. Where does Abomination live?

9. Who knows about Abomination?

Chapter 2 - Scott

I think it's going to be all right, Southcott Middle. I'm in Mr Wheelwright's class. He's OK. Looks like Rolf Harris but likes computers and supports Man United so can't be all bad. The kids are OK too, apart from a snob or two and a few veg, but you always get those. They're a terrific playing-field, and at lunchtime after your meal you can play on the computers in the library. You've got to be quick, mind – there're only ten computers and it's first come first served, but that's fair. A great white shark can't wreck a dinner quicker than me.

Oh, I nearly forgot. There's this really weird girl, Martha Dewhurst. The kids laughed yesterday because Wheelwright put me on her table. I didn't know why they were laughing till morning break, when this guy called Simon came up to me and said, 'Keep your head away from Raggedy-Ann's if you don't want nits.' That's her nickname – Raggedy Ann. I don't think she has nits, but there's like a gap between her and everybody else on our table, and nobody'll lend her their rubber. She has these funny clothes. I mean, they're uniform – maroon sweater, grey skirt – but they're not like everyone else's.

I think her mum must've made them. Or her gran. There's this game after school, Chase Raggedy-Ann. Some kids start chanting – chase Raggedy-Ann, chase Raggedy-Ann – like that. A few others join in, and when there's about ten they set off after her. I didn't go yesterday – felt a bit sorry for her if you must know – but I did today because Simon started it and he's my friend. She looks really funny, running. She's got these very thin, long legs that splay out sort of sideways as she runs, and her arms are all over the place too. I doubt she'll ever run for England. The
kids don't try to catch her – it's be over straight away if they did – so they hang back, running about fifty meters behind her, chanting Raggedy-Ann, Raggedy-Ann, we'll all scrag you if we can. She doesn't seem to know they're not trying to catch her. You can tell she's going full belt. She lives up this very steep slope called Taylor Hill. Her house is near the top, and she's near collapsing by the time she reaches the gate. We pull up and watch her stagger up the path like a shot bandit, then we walk back down the hill, laughing and joking and taking turns with ciggy.

I reckon I'll be fine at my new school.

1. What is the name of the school? ________________________________

2. What is the uniform? ________________________________

3. Whose class are Scott and Martha in? ________________________________

4. What does Scott like about his new school? ________________________________

5. Why does he eat his dinner so quickly? ________________________________

6. How does Scott describe Martha? ________________________________

7. How is Martha different to the other kids? ________________________________
8. What is the after school game?

9. Who is Simon and why is he important to Scott?

Did you enjoy this extract? Explain why/why not.
EXTRACT 6: *The Subtle Knife*, by Philip Pullman

'The Subtle Knife' is written by Philip Pullman. It is part of a trilogy of books called 'His Dark Materials'. The first book, 'Northern Lights' has been turned into a Hollywood film. The novel is set in worlds that are similar to our own. In many of the worlds, people have their own daemon: an animal that represents that person's soul and characteristics. In the opening to Chapter 1, we are introduced to a character called Will. Will is looking for somebody to look after his mother. He wakes up in the middle of the night to find two men in his house.

**Key Vocabulary**

**Musty** (adjective): Having a stale, mouldy or damp smell.

**Systematically** (adverb): Doing something according to a fixed plan; methodically.

**Bewildered** (adjective): Confused or puzzled.

Chapter 1

Will tugged at his mother’s hand and said, “Come on, come on…”

But his mother hung back. She was still afraid. Will looked up and down the street in the evening light, along the little terrace of houses, each behind its tiny garden and its box hedge, with the sun glaring off the windows of one side and leaving the other in shadow. There wasn't much time. People would be having their meal about now, and soon there would be other children around, to stare and comment and notice. It was dangerous to wait, but all he could do was persuade her, as usual.

"Mum, let's go in and see Mrs. Cooper," he said. "Look, we're nearly there."

"Mrs. Cooper?" she said doubtfully.

But he was already ringing the bell. He had to put down the bag to do it, because his other hand still held his mother's. It might have bothered him at twelve years of age to be seen holding his mother's hand, but he knew what would happen to her if he didn't.

The door opened, and there was the stooped elderly figure of the piano teacher, with the scent of lavender water about her as he remembered.

"Who's that? Is that William?" the old lady said. "I haven't seen you for over a year. What do you want, dear?"

"I want to come in, please, and bring my mother," he said firmly.

Mrs. Cooper looked at the woman with the untidy hair and the distracted half-smile, and at the boy with the fierce, unhappy glare in his eyes, the tight-set lips, the jutting jaw. And then she saw that Mrs. Parry, Will's mother, had put makeup on one eye but not on the other. And she hadn't noticed. And neither had Will. Something was wrong.

"Well..." she said, and stepped aside to make room in the narrow hall.
Will looked up and down the road before closing the door, and Mrs. Cooper saw how tightly Mrs. Parry was clinging to her son's hand, and how tenderly he guided her into the sitting room where the piano was (of course, that was the only room he knew); and she noticed that Mrs. Parry's clothes smelled slightly musty, as if they'd been too long in the washing machine before drying; and how similar the two of them looked as they sat on the sofa with the evening sun full on their faces, their broad cheekbones, their wide eyes, their straight black brows.

"What is it, William?" the old lady said. "What's the matter?"

"My mother needs somewhere to stay for a few days," he said. "It's too difficult to look after her at home just now. I don't mean she's ill. She's just kind of confused and muddled, and she gets a bit worried. She won't be hard to look after. She just needs someone to be kind to her, and I think you could do that quite easily, probably."

The woman was looking at her son without seeming to understand, and Mrs. Cooper saw a bruise on her cheek. Will hadn't taken his eyes off Mrs. Cooper, and his expression was desperate.

"She won't be expensive," he went on. "I've brought some packets of food, enough to last, I should think. You could have some of it too. She won't mind sharing."

"But ... I don't know if I should ... Doesn't she need a doctor?"

"No! She's not ill."

"But there must be someone who can... I mean, isn't there a neighbour or someone in the family—"

"We haven't got any family. Only us. And the neighbours are too busy."

"What about the social services? I don't mean to put you off, dear, but—"

"No! No. She just needs a bit of help. I can't do it myself for a little while, but I won't be long. I'm going to ... I've got things to do. But I'll be back soon, and I'll take her home again, I promise. You won't have to do it for long."

The mother was looking at her son with such trust, and he turned and smiled at her with such love and reassurance, that Mrs. Cooper couldn't say no.

"Well," she said, turning to Mrs. Parry, "I'm sure it won't matter for a day or so. You can have my daughter's room, dear. She's in Australia. She won't be needling it again."

"Thank you," said Will, and stood up as if he were in a hurry to leave.

"But where are you going to be?" said Mrs. Cooper.

"I'm going to be staying with a friend," he said. "I'll phone up as often as I can. I've got your number. It'll be all right."
His mother was looking at him, bewildered. He bent over and kissed her clumsily.

"Don't worry," he said. "Mrs. Cooper will look after you better than me, honest. And I'll phone up and talk to you tomorrow."

They hugged tightly, and then Will kissed her again and gently unfastened her arms from his neck before going to the front door. Mrs. Cooper could see he was upset, because his eyes were glistening, but he turned, remembering his manners, and held out his hand.

"Good-bye," he said, "and thank you very much."
"William," she said, "I wish you'd tell me what the matter is—"

"It's a bit complicated," he said, "but she won't be any trouble, honestly."

That wasn't what she meant, and both of them knew it; but somehow Will was in charge of this business, whatever it was. The old lady thought she'd never seen a child so implacable.

He turned away, already thinking about the empty house.

1. What time of day is Will out with his mother? __________________________

2. Who does Will take his mother to see? ________________________________

3. How does Will feel in this extract? _________________________________

4. What impression do you get of Will’s mother? ________________________

CHALLENGE: What impression do you get of Will in the opening part of this extract? What words would you use to describe him?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
Continue reading.

The close where Will and his mother lived was a loop of road in a modern estate with a dozen identical houses, of which theirs was by far the shabbiest. The front garden was just a patch of weedy grass; his mother had planted some shrubs earlier in the year, but they'd shrivelled and died for lack of watering. As Will came around the corner, his cat, Moxie, rose up from her favourite spot under the still-living hydrangea and stretched before greeting him with a soft meow and butting her head against his leg.

He picked her up and whispered, "Have they come back, Moxie? Have you seen them?"

The house was silent. In the last of the evening light the man across the road was washing his car, but he took no notice of Will, and Will didn't look at him. The less notice people took, the better.

Holding Moxie against his chest, he unlocked the door and went in quickly. Then he listened very carefully before putting her down. There was nothing to hear; the house was empty. He opened a tin for Moxie and left her to eat in the kitchen. How long before the men came back?

There was no way of telling, so he'd better move quickly. He went upstairs and began to search.

He was looking for a battered green leather writing case. There are a surprising number of places to hide something that size even in any ordinary modern house; you don't need secret panels and extensive cellars in order to make something hard to find. Will searched his mother's bedroom first, ashamed to be looking through the drawers where she kept her underclothes, and then he worked systematically through the rest of the rooms upstairs, even his own. Moxie came to see what he was doing and sat and cleaned herself nearby, for company.

But he didn't find it.

By that time it was dark, and he was hungry. He made himself baked beans on toast and sat at the kitchen table wondering about the best order to look through the downstairs rooms.

As he was finishing his meal, the phone rang.

He sat absolutely still, his heart thumping. He counted: twenty-six rings, and then it stopped.

He put his plate in the sink and started to search again.

Four hours later he still hadn't found the green leather case. It was half past one, and he was exhausted. He lay on his bed fully clothed and fell asleep at once, his dreams tense and crowded, his mother's unhappy, frightened face always there just out of reach.

And almost at once, it seemed (though he'd been asleep for nearly three hours), he woke up knowing two things simultaneously.
First, he knew where the case was. And second, he knew that the men were downstairs, opening the kitchen door.

He lifted Moxie out of the way and softly hushed her sleepy protest. Then he swung his legs over the side of the bed and put on his shoes, straining every nerve to hear the sounds from downstairs. They were very quiet sounds: a chair being lifted and replaced, a short whisper, the creak of a floorboard.

Moving more silently than the men were, he left his bedroom and tiptoed to the spare room at the top of the stairs. It wasn't quite pitch-dark, and in the ghostly grey predawn light he could see the old treadle sewing machine. He'd been through the room thoroughly only hours before, but he'd forgotten the compartment at the side of the sewing machine, where all the patterns and bobbins were kept.

He felt for it delicately, listening all the while. The men were moving about downstairs, and Will could see a dim flicker of light that might have been a flashlight at the edge of the door.

Then he found the catch of the compartment and clicked it open, and there, just as he'd known it would be, was the leather writing case.

And now what could he do? He crouched in the dimness, heart pounding, listening hard.

The two men were in the hall downstairs. He heard one of them say quietly, "Come on. I can hear the milkman down the road."

"It's not here, though," said the other voice. "We'll have to look upstairs."

"Go on, then. Don't hang about."

Will braced himself as he heard the quiet creak of the top step. The man was making no noise at all, but he couldn't help the creak if he wasn't expecting it. Then there was a pause. A very thin beam of flashlight swept along the floor outside. Will saw it through the crack.

Then the door began to move. Will waited till the man was framed in the open doorway, and then exploded up out of the dark and crashed into the intruder's belly.

But neither of them saw the cat.

As the man had reached the top step, Moxie had come silently out of the bedroom and stood with raised tail just behind the man's legs, ready to rub herself against them. The man, who was trained and fit and hard, could have dealt with Will, but the cat was in the way, and as the man tried to move back, he tripped over her. With a sharp gasp he fell backward down the stairs and crashed his head brutally against the hall table.

Will heard a hideous crack, and didn't stop to wonder about it. Clutching the writing case, he swung himself down the banister, leaping over the man's body that lay twitching and crumpled at the foot of the flight, seized the tattered tote bag from the table, and was out of the front door and away before the other man could do more than come out of the living room and stare.
Even in his fear and haste Will wondered why the other man didn't shout after him, or chase him. They'd be after him soon, though, with their cars and their cell phones. The only thing to do was run.

He saw the milkman turning into the close, the lights of his electric cart pallid in the dawn glimmer that was already filling the sky. Will jumped over the fence into the next-door garden, down the passage beside the house, over the next garden wall, across a dew-wet lawn, through the hedge, and into the tangle of shrubs and trees between the housing estate and the main road. There he crawled under a bush and lay panting and trembling. It was too early to be out on the road: wait till later, when the rush hour started.

He couldn't get out of his mind the crack as the man's head struck the table, and the way his neck was bent so far and in such a wrong way, and the dreadful twitching of his limbs. The man was dead. He'd killed him.

He couldn't get it out of his mind, but he had to. There was quite enough to think about. His mother: would she really be safe where she was? Mrs. Cooper wouldn't tell, would she? Even if Will didn't turn up as he'd said he would? Because he couldn't, now that he'd killed someone.

And Moxie. Who'd feed Moxie? Would Moxie worry about where they were? Would she try to follow them?

It was getting lighter by the minute. It was light enough already to check through the things in the tote bag: his mother's purse, the latest letter from the lawyer, the road map of southern England, chocolate bars, toothpaste, spare socks and pants. And the green leather writing case.

Everything was there. Everything was going according to plan, really.

Except that he'd killed someone.

1. What was the name of Will's pet cat? ____________________________

2. What was Will looking for when he got back to his house? ____________________________

3. Where did Will find the object that he was looking for? ____________________________

4. How did Will kill one of the men? ____________________________
5. How does Will react when he kills the man? Is he worried, or concerned, about the man's death?

Challenge: How did Pullman (the writer) create a sense of tension in this extract? Try to write two paragraphs about two bits of language that Pullman used.
What was your favourite extract in this whole booklet and why?