

S3

Understanding

Questions-

Homework

Booklet 2



Taxi!

Aaron Hinklin remembers a New York cabby.

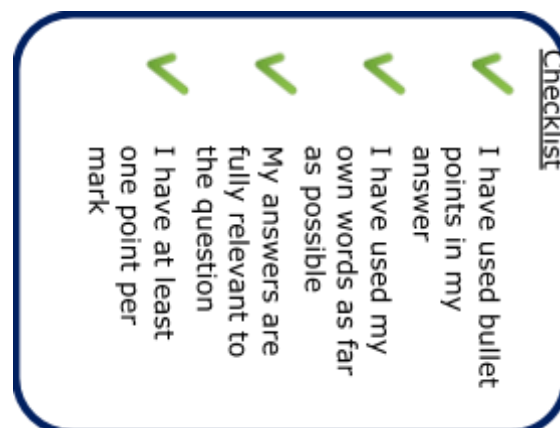
1. Tourists are always wanting to jump in cabs, as if the fact they are yellow and look just like they do on TV gives it some kind of meaning, but every New Yorker hates them with a vengeance. They are designed to remind you that life is a fragile commodity and that, at any moment, you might lose yours. They are cramped, airless death traps and they come equipped with the drivers they deserve. They are the kind of drivers that are imported for the purpose of scaring you witless. It works.
2. Under other circumstances, I would have taken the subway. Even though everyone knows that the subway will be the first target of terrorists, it's still safer than taking a cab. But I'd been shopping at Balducci's, my favourite New York deli, and was loath to manoeuvre my bags into the crowded, subterranean world where the sun never shone.
3. The moment I stepped into the taxi I knew something was wrong. For a start the driver was called Eddie and taxi drivers in New York shouldn't have names. They should be anonymous, for then you can be rude and condescending to them without guilt.
4. I could see Eddie glaring in his mirror. It was the kind of glare I've come to know well and expect from a taxi ride. But it turned out I was wrong, because then he began talking, which was not part of the deal. Eddie would not allow me to be rude and condescending, even though I did my usual grumbling act.
5. It turned out that Eddie was not Eddie after all, but a rock star named Joe Betts. At least, this was the alternative reality he had created for himself.
6. Joe Betts was born in Queens, grew up in Brooklyn and was almost discovered at the 1964 World Fair in New York at which he came second in the Battle of the Bands. He played Café Wah in McDougal Street with some guy who would later end up in The New York Dolls. He was 16 at the time and he was going to be a rock star.
7. Joe didn't mind that he ended up driving cabs instead. The cab was going to make him famous. It was thanks to the cab that he'd made a video with Joe Pesci and Robert de Niro, well, okay, not *the* Joe Pesci and Robert De Niro, but a pair of lookalikes.
8. Thirty years of incidentally driving a cab is a long time but Joe was convinced that his moment would come. He didn't seem to recognise the sadness in these things as I did. For me, it seemed his story illuminated thwarted ambition and the inevitable compromise between the aims of life and its necessities. For Joe, however, life's possibilities were boundless. "Every day I go in the cab you never know what's going to happen," he said, before adding: "I met you."

9. This doesn't seem such a big deal but I don't want to disappoint Joe so I take his number and promise to be in touch should anything arise. "It's about never giving up," he says as I fumble to find the fare. "You never give up. It's all about having dreams and dreams come true."
10. I don't believe Joe, and I don't believe Joe believes Joe, though I do believe in the power of dreams. It's fashionable to sneer at America's tenacious belief in the self-made man but I liked Joe's attitude. It was not the attitude of other cab drivers who seem to have resigned themselves to date, such an un-American spirit. In that way, Joe was to be admired.
11. Only when the taxi was out of sight did I realise that he hadn't given me my change.

Questions

1. Read paragraph one. In this, the author explains how visitors to New York and tourists have different attitudes towards travelling in taxi-cabs. **In your own words**, say what each attitude is and explain why each type of person has that attitude. (4)
2. Read paragraph two. **In your own words**, explain how the writer emphasises the dangers of travelling by cab. (2)
3. Read paragraphs six and seven. **In your own words**, summarise the facts which suggest that the cab driver was deluding himself. (2)
4. Read paragraph eight. **In your own words**, explain how Joe views his "thirty years" of driving a cab and how the writer sees it, in contrast. (3)
5. Read paragraph ten. **In your own words**, explain why the writer admires Joe. (2)
6. Read paragraph eleven. **In your own words**, explain what happens at the end. (2)

Total: 15 marks



A Walk in the Woods

In this extract from his book "A Walk in the Woods", Bill Bryson tells of his reaction to some of the books he read before beginning his walk along the Appalachian Trail in North America.



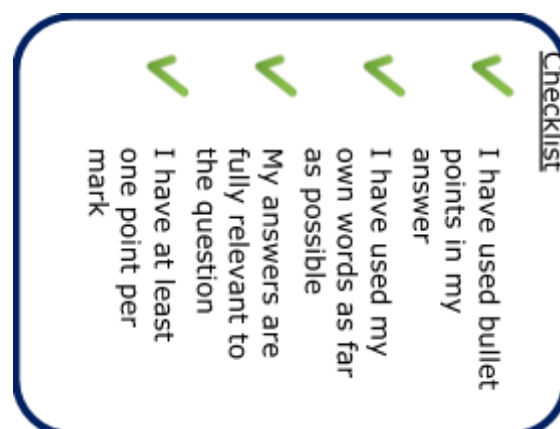
1. Through long winter nights in New Hampshire, while snow piled up outdoors and my wife slumbered peacefully beside me, I lay saucer-eyed in bed reading clinically precise accounts of people gnawed pulpy in their sleeping bags, plucked whimpering from trees, even noiselessly stalked (I didn't know this happened!) as they sauntered unawares down leafy paths or cooled their feet in mountain streams. People whose one fatal mistake was to smooth their hair with a dab of aromatic gel, or eat juicy meat, or tuck a chocolate bar in their shirt pocket for later, or in some small, inadvertent way irritate the hungry bear. Or, come to that, whose fatal failing was simply to be very, very unfortunate- to round a bend and find a moody male blocking the path, head rocking appraisingly, or wander unwittingly into the territory of a bear too slowed by age or idleness to chase down other prey.
2. Now it is important to establish right away that the possibility of a serious bear attack on the Appalachian Trail is remote. To begin with, the really terrifying American bear, the grizzly- *Ursus horribilis* as it is so vividly and correctly labelled- doesn't range east of the Mississippi, which is good news because grizzlies are large, powerful and ferociously bad-tempered. Nothing unnerved the Native Americans more than the grizzly, and not surprisingly since you could riddle a grizzly with arrows- positively porcupine it- and it would still keep coming. Even later hunters with big guns were astounded and unsettled by the ability of the grizzly to absorb volleys of lead with barely a wobble.
3. If I were to be pawed and chewed- and this seemed to me entirely possible, the more I read- it would be by a black bear. *Ursus americanus*. There are at least 500,000 black bears in North America, possibly as many as 700,000. They are notably common in the hills along the Appalachian Trail (indeed, they often use the trail, for convenience), and their numbers are growing.
4. Black bears rarely attack. But here's the thing, sometimes they do. All bears are agile, cunning and immensely strong, and they are always hungry. If they want to kill you and eat you, they can, and pretty much whenever they want. That doesn't happen often, but- and here is the absolutely salient point- once would be enough.

5. So let us imagine that a bear does go for us out in the wilds. What are we to do? Interestingly, the advised tactics are exactly opposite for grizzly and black bears. With a grizzly, you should make for a tall tree, since grizzlies aren't much for climbing, or play dead. With black bears, however, playing dead is futile since they will continue chewing on you until you are considerably past caring. It is also foolish to climb a tree because black bears are adroit climbers and you will simply end up fighting the bear in a tree.
6. To ward off an aggressive black bear, the books suggest making a lot of noise, banging pots and pans together, throwing sticks and rocks, and "running at the bear". (Yeah, right. You first, Professor). On the other hand, they then add judiciously these tactics could "merely provoke the bear". Well, thanks. Elsewhere they suggest that hikers should consider making noises from time to time- singing a song, say- to alert bears to their presence, since a startled bear is more likely to be an angry bear, but then a few pages later caution that "there may be danger in making noise", since that can attract a hungry bear that might otherwise overlook you. The fact is, no one can tell you what to do. Bears are unpredictable, and what works in one circumstance may not work in another.
7. I won't say I became obsessed by all this, but it did occupy my thoughts a great deal in the months while I waited for spring to come. My particular dread- the vivid possibility that left me staring at tree shadows on the bedroom ceiling night after night- was having to lie in a small tent, alone in an inky wilderness, listening to a foraging bear outside, and wondering what its intentions were.

Questions

1. Read paragraph one. **In your own words**, explain the ways in which human beings might have accidental confrontations with bears. (3)
2. Read paragraph two. **In your own words**, explain what makes the grizzly bear so "terrifying". (2)
3. Read paragraph three. **In your own words**, outline the reasons why the writer believes that, if he were attacked by a bear, it is more probable "it would be by a black bear". (2)
4. Read paragraph four. **In your own words**, explain why the writer is still worried even though "Black bears rarely attack". (3)
5. Read paragraph six. **In your own words**, summarise the "tactics" you are advised to adopt if you are attacked by a black bear. (3)
6. Read paragraph seven. **In your own words**, explain the writer's "particular dread". (2)

Total: 15 marks



Travel Book

The passage that follows is an excerpt from the fifth chapter of a travel book in which Jonathan Raban describes his fascination with boats.



1. In 1979 I wandered down the Mississippi in a 16-foot open boat with an outboard motor. There was no element of stunt in the trip; it was the only possible way of encountering a great river at close quarters. I didn't camp out on sandbars, or pretend to be Huckleberry Finn; I stayed in motels, ate in restaurants and drank too much and too long in riverside bars.
2. Simple possession of a boat turned out to be a ticket of entry to the society of the river. Lock keepers, ferrymen, towboat captains, fishermen, duck hunters treated me as an insider. Within a month of setting off, I could gossip comfortably about chutes, sloughs, sawyers, silting-up bends, wingdams and drownings, adding my own bit to the lore. By the time I was halfway down, and into the beginning of the Mississippi reaches, I was an accredited river man. Though the oddity of my accent in those parts sometimes marked me out, I never felt less of a tourist, or more easily able to drift into the lives of strangers. We had the river in common, and it was a powerful bond.
3. Back in England, I felt quite unexpectedly bereft. After a long night of confused passage making, dodging tows, skidding on boils and racing through chutes, I'd wake up in the morning and remember with a pang, that I'd lost the river and the boat. There was only one way to stop the dreams coming, and I bought a scuffed 15-foot launch which I kept moored on the Thames at Hammersmith. I took it to Lechlade at one end of the river and Tilbury at the other in a succession of soft, suburban outings.
4. Boat beget boat. My Mississippi book sold well in the United States, and I was able to buy a seagoing ketch and have it refitted for a voyage round the British Isles. It travels at a Victorian pace. Under way, with a friendly tide and wind behind it, it will manage seven to eight knots over the ground- say nine m.p.h. at most. At this speed, you can get to know each wave on intimate terms, and if land is in sight you can study it- you have to study it- as closely as a book.
5. But it is the wind that makes travelling in a small boat into an *adventure*. The wind blows you into places that you'd never meant to visit, and keeps you pinioned there. You want to go to France- the wind will maroon you for ten days in Dover. You can't move without the wind's consent, and when you do move, you find yourself suddenly rescheduled, heading for a destination that you hadn't heard of ten minutes ago. Sometimes you have to stay out at sea, missing your original destination altogether. More often, you're driven in haste into harbours you'd overlooked, far short of where you'd planned to be that night.

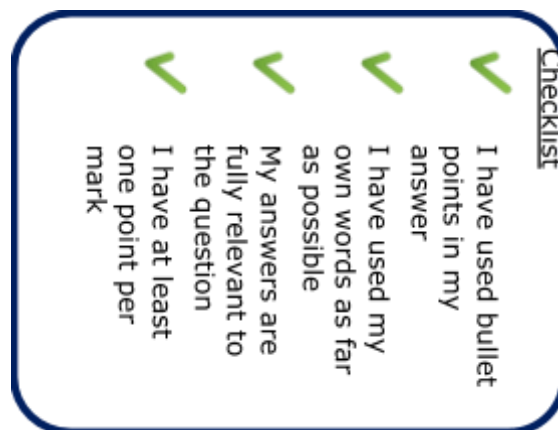
6. Going by sea is a reliably constant adventure. It's a slow and unpredictable business. It requires patience and a curiosity about those unregarded places in the world where you're forever finding yourself stranded. Since its original circuit of the British Isles, *Gosfield Maiden* has taken me to Ireland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Sweden. In every country, the wind has taken control of the itinerary, landing the boat up, for days on end, in ports that I had no idea I was destined to visit.

7. From Girvan in Scotland to Hoganas in Sweden, they were chosen by the weather. It is true about any port in a storm: as you round the inner breakwater after a few hours out in rough sea, the dingiest town seems a wonderful place to be. I've come humiliatingly close to kissing the stones of Grimsby fish dock, I was so glad to be there. The worse the weather, the more you love the town- which is useful, since you'll probably have time to learn the name of every single street before the wind will allow you to leave it.

Questions

1. Read paragraph one. **In your own words**, explain fully how the evidence the writer provides shows that there was "no element of stunt" in this trip. (2)
2. Read paragraph two. **In your own words**, explain the reasons the writer gives for feeling like the boat gave him "a ticket of entry to the society of the river". (2)
3. Read paragraph three. **In your own words**, explain what makes the writer feel "unexpectedly bereft" and what he does about it. (2)
4. Read paragraph five. **In your own words**, explain what the writer loves about the wind when he is sailing. (3)
5. Read paragraph six. **In your own words**, explain what the writer has learned about going by sea. (3)
6. Read the final paragraph. **In your own words**, explain how the writer exemplifies the idea that "after a few hours out in a rough sea, the dingiest town seems a wonderful place to be". (3)

Total: 15 marks



Playing at Guide and Seek

The passage which follows is adapted from an article in the Travel section of a newspaper. In it, Sean Newsom tells of his experience as a trainee guide in the African bush.



1. At some point in their lives, everybody has been at this place. Maybe they were waiting to give a best man's speech with not one good joke in it. Or perhaps it was outside a school hall before the start of an exam. And I'm pretty sure they all felt the same thing: as if they had just jumped out of a plane at the start of their first-ever sky dive, and realised they had forgotten their parachute.
2. In 45 minutes I will lead a walking safari through the African bush- with only five days' training under my belt. That's right, dear reader: six days ago I knew as much about the fauna and flora of East Africa as I did about the contents of your fridge. Now I am going to lead six strangers into a two-mile stretch of savannah and attempt to turn this brown world of dry vegetation and nervous, secretive animals into a colourful and exciting abundance of biological complexity. And I'm going to attempt to do so without anyone getting hurt.
3. Actually, there's very little chance that we are going to meet anything dangerous. This is the Saadani, not the Serengeti. It's a small game reserve on the coast, north of Dar-es-Salaam, and although there are plenty of animals here- from a kaleidoscope of kingfishers to a wide range of buck, giraffes and even lions- it's also the site of one of the oldest settlements in Tanzania. The presence of humans long ago taught the local carnivore populations who really is the king of the jungle. Just in case one of them attempts a takeover, however, we're going to be accompanied by an armed warden.
4. That's not what I'm worried about. Now, I am faced by the prospect of six trusting souls who all think I'm an expert. And I am terrifyingly short of the information that I need.
5. You can imagine what the walking safari is like. There is a brief moment of triumph at the start when I manage to get an antlion to perform for us. Antlions are little grubs that live in the ground and excavate cone-shaped holes in the soil. They're expert hunters and perfect examples of how murderous the bush is, even when the animals involved are smaller than your fingernail. They also happen to be a useful way of keeping your clients entertained when there is nothing more glamorous to look at.

6. From then on, however, a more familiar pattern reasserts itself. My warden leads us into a thicket of whistling thorn acacia that seems to be half a mile thick. I dutifully say my piece on whistling thorn acacia. After a minute or two, I start to get nervous. After five, I am beginning to panic.
7. So it's with a huge wash of relief that eventually I spot a medium-sized, brilliantly-colourful bird, flitting between the trees. "Hey everyone!" I call. "It's a lilac-backed roller!" And I take a look through my binoculars. That's when I realise that actually it doesn't have a lilac-coloured back at all. Its breast is lilac. It's a lilac-breasted roller, one of the most common birds on the savannah. The kind you never, ever misidentify. It's as if you've called a blackbird a robin.
8. It gets worse. Because when I turn back to see if anybody has noticed, I realise that they're all looking the other way. The reason? Well, it turns out that we are no more than 50 yards from a small herd of giraffe. Actually, it's 100 yards now. Not only was I the last to spot them, my shouting has scared them off.
9. By the time we reach the salt flats that mark the end of our route, I am ready to leave everybody behind and carry on walking into the sea. The sun is beginning to set now, and there is just enough time to check out the latest animal prints in the sand before we climb into the waiting Land Rover for the drive home. I sit down next to the driver and my whole body goes slack with relief.

Questions

1. Read paragraph one. **In your own words**, summarise the examples the writer uses to make his point that "everybody has been at this place". (2)
2. Read paragraph three. **In your own words**, explain why it is unlikely anyone will get hurt on this walk through the savannah. (2)
3. Read paragraph five. **In your own words**, explain why the writer thinks the antlion's performance provided him with "a brief moment of triumph". (2)
4. Read paragraphs six and seven. **In your own words**, explain the difficulties the writer finds himself in. (3)
5. Read paragraph eight. **In your own words**, explain clearly why the writer feels "It gets worse". (2)
6. Consider the passage as a whole. Summarise the key reasons why the writer is so nervous about this experience. You should use your own words as far as possible. (4)

Total: 15 marks



Red Hair is a Beacon in a Sea of Mediocrity

In this passage from The Herald, Rosemary Goring reflects on being a redhead in light of the release of Disney's "Brave".



1. I have only seen a trailer for Brave, Pixar's latest film, but even watching a few fleeting frames my heart swelled with pride. That Scotland looks romantically lush and mysterious is, of course, a bonus, but the really clever bit was the filmmakers' pin-sharp social realism. In one single detail, they captured what makes Scotland distinctive.
2. I'm not referring to the fact the heroine Merida is a feisty, talented young woman, of which Scotland has more than its fair share. No, what's striking is her unruly nest of red hair. This mane takes on a life of its own, tumbling around her face when she gets angry, streaming behind her like a flag as she rides through the forest, fizzing with anticipation as she fires an arrow that hits its target smack on. In terms of characters, it has as big a part as she does, suggesting her independent spirit and courage. But she's not the only redhead. The scene where Merida and her siblings chat around the dinner table is like watching a box of tomatoes spring into life. You begin to wonder if, by using such brilliantly rich colour, the director is trying to evoke the passion that makes Merida's family, and indeed this nation, tick.
3. I'm sure I won't be the only one who thinks Pixar has scored a bulls-eye for Scotland's flame-haired tribe. If there's one defining physical characteristic of the Scots down the centuries, beyond skin whiter than chalk, it's the preponderance of ginger-heads in any crowd. No other country in the world can boast as many. Roughly 13% of Scots are copper-coloured, a clan of much maligned folk who from childhood have had to endure taunts of "ginge" and sniggers about Heinz soup. No wonder their fuses tend to be short.
4. When you think of how many talented redheads we've had, from Mary, Queen of Scots to Ewan McGregor, it's anyone's guess where the stigma comes from. Some, apparently, used to think it was a sign of immorality, as if devilish flames were licking around the person's head. Personally, I love it: whether it's a Tilda Swinton burnt orange, or a Robert Redford strawberry blonde, all reds are beautiful. Sadly, though, not everyone would agree. And women have taken to disguising their natural shade.

5. Admittedly there was a flurry of interest in redheaded men when the American thriller *Homeland* was aired this spring with Damien Lewis in the main role. A glance at Lewis's career, however, shows that he's made a living playing sinister characters, as if his coppery thatch was a convenient shorthand for viewers. Benedict Cumberbatch, meanwhile, toned himself down to a dull brown to play Sherlock Holmes, and Michael C Hall, from *Dexter* and *Six Feet Under*, is boringly mousy in both series when in reality he could effortlessly hide himself in a field of pumpkins.

6. I simply don't understand why anyone would camouflage themselves as brunette or black or even blonde when they could stand out like a lighted match, a flaring beacon in a sea of mediocrity. I just hope Merida's crimson curls mean redheads finally get the respect they deserve. Otherwise, they will surely soon be dyed out of existence.

Questions

1. Read paragraph two. **In your own words**, explain why Merida's red hair is so important. (4)
2. Read paragraph three. **In your own words**, explain what we learn about redheads in Scotland. (3)
3. Read paragraph five. **In your own words**, explain what we learn about redhaired actors. (3)
4. Read paragraph six. **In your own words**, summarise the writer's views of redheads. (3)
5. Consider the passage as a whole. Summarise the key points the writer makes about redheads. You should use your own words as far as possible. (5)

Total: 15 marks



Teenage Bedroom

In this passage, the writer explores the reasons behind teenage untidiness.



1. The other morning, I found myself on my knees in my son's bedroom, sobbing into a rather iffy smelling sock. All around me was the detritus of 16-year-old male life: piles of discarded clothes of indeterminate cleanliness, BB gun pellets, shards of glass from the mirror shattered by said BB gun. I counted five towels, all damp and heaped on the floor. One smelt as if it might have started sprouting its own fungal lifeform. On the plus side, there were also plenty of books, mostly school textbooks, which had been put to ingenious uses: a handy breakfast tray (with bowl and spoon virtually welded to the front cover), a prop to jam open the window.
2. At first I'd been cautiously optimistic to see that the dirty washing basket actually contained some items of clothing. I was considerably less thrilled to find it filled mostly with the clean laundry that had gone up, freshly folded, to his room earlier in the week. Clearly the effort required to put it away in drawers was too great when it could just as easily be recycled straight into the wash basket, thus cutting out the middle man. Underneath the bed, on top of the mantelpiece and balancing precariously on the mattress, were 13 (count 'em) mugs featuring dregs of tea in various stages of decay. The bedding had mostly come off the bed and was trailing on the floor, and everywhere the eye could see were single socks. Lots and lots of socks. Like the one into which I wept.
3. Let me make one thing clear. I'm not a tidy person. Ours is the type of home where visitors try to make "lived in" into a compliment. But there is something about the particular mess of the teenager's room that goes beyond untidiness into something far deeper. Once, after we were burgled a few years back, a tutting CID officer looked into my daughter's bedroom and said, "Disgusting! Who'd do that to a little girl's room?" It was the one part of the house that had been left untouched.
4. As parents, our response to a messy room is often similarly emotional. Years ago, when my own children still went to bed neatly scrubbed in fresh Thomas the Tank Engine pyjamas and sheets scented with fabric conditioner rather than stale sweat, I watched a documentary on the late, great John Peel, in which the famously easy-going DJ was reduced almost to tears when talking about the state of his teenage son's bedroom—the arguments it triggered and the feelings it evoked in him. I was astounded. What a disproportionate reaction! How bizarrely out of character!

5. Now, of course, I understand only too well where those feelings came from. The powerlessness, the sense of failing in your parental duties, the feeling of not being considered, not respected.
6. The fact is that even the most laidback parents can find that children's bedrooms become emotional battlefields within the family home. According to Professor Tanya Byron, a clinical psychologist, this could be because the mess plays right into our deep-seated fears as parents.
7. "On one level, seeing your child surrounded by squalor and chaos makes you worry about the future. Will he be able to cope with life and look after himself or will he end up in a flea-ridden squat?
8. On another level, it's yet more evidence of your child asserting independence. And on a different level still, it can feel like total disrespect, as if your child is sticking two fingers up at you."
9. Part of the problem is that as our children grow up, we expect them to show the same consideration and empathy as adults. Wrong, says Professor Byron.
10. "Adolescence is about making the transition from dependent child to independent adult. There are all these changes happening. The biological, psychological and social elements are thrown into a big washing machine and whirled about. It's all part of the process, but it's confusing." But that doesn't mean we have to accept that one room in our home will look permanently as if it has had an encounter with Hurricane Katrina.
11. "It's still OK to set boundaries for adolescents, just different boundaries," says Professor Byron. "It's OK for there to be family contracts that say these are the rules. "Teenagers need to understand that life isn't all about their needs. A family is like a team. You all work together and pull your weight."
12. However you deal with it, experts and parents who've already been through it and out the other side all agree it's important not to lose perspective. You haven't failed as a parent because your son can't remember the colour of his bedroom carpet. Your daughter won't go off the rails just because you once found half a fossilised Arctic Roll under her bed.
13. Look at it in context. Is this part of a wider pattern of worrying behaviour, or is it just a messy room? If she's getting her work done and she's got a nice group of mates, you're just going to have to grit your teeth and get through it.

Questions

1. Look at paragraph one. Identify the writer's attitude to her son's bedroom, and then **using your own** words explain **four** reasons for this attitude. (5)
2. Re-read paragraph four and then explain fully **in your own words** why the writer was "astounded". (2)
3. Read paragraphs seven and eight. **In your own words**, explain the three levels of issues Byron points out here. (3)
4. Re-read paragraph ten and then explain **in your own words three** reasons why, according to Professor Byron, we are wrong to expect growing children "to show the same consideration and empathy as adults". (3)
5. Read paragraphs eleven-thirteen. **In your own words**, identify two key pieces of advice the writer gives here. (2)

Total: 15 marks