

**Reading extract**

*This is an abridged extract from Clive James' autobiography, Unreliable Memoirs, published in 1980. Here he describes his experiences of life at school.*

1. Disaster struck on the first day, when Carnaby was assigned to a different class. In quiet desperation I sought out his company in the playground, but he was always surrounded by lots of new friends. Soon enough I made new friends in my own class but not in the same way as Carnaby did. His natural authority was reinforced by early maturity. Either that year or the year after, his voice broke. He had acne for about two 5 days and grew a foot taller. During this period almost everyone except me did something similar. I obstinately stayed small. Nobody looked up to me any longer.
2. In that first year the only thing that made me worth knowing was my good marks. The teachers weren't brilliant but they were conscientious. At the half-yearly examinations I averaged in the high nineties, coming third in the class. Things might have gone on 10 like that for a good while longer if it had not been for Mary Luke.
3. I was coping with physics and chemistry well enough while Mr. Ryan was still teaching them. But Mr. Ryan was due for retirement, an event which was hastened by an accident in the laboratory. He was showing us how careful you had to be when handling potassium in the presence of water. Certainly you had to be more careful 15 than he was. The school's entire supply of potassium was ignited at once. Wreathed by dense smoke and lit by garish flames, the stunned Mr. Ryan looked like an ancient Greek god in receipt of bad news. The smoke enveloped us all. Windows being thrown open, it jetted into what passed for a playground, where it hung around like some sinister leftover from a battle on the Somme. Shocked, scorched and 20 gassed, Mr. Ryan was carried away, never to return.
4. Back from his third retirement came Mary Luke. A chronic shortage of teachers led to Mary Luke being magically resurrected after each burial. Why he should have been called Mary was lost in antiquity. The school presented him with a pocket watch every time he retired. Perhaps that was a mistake. It might have been the massed 25 ticking that kept him alive. Anyway, Mary Luke, having ruined science for a whole generation of schoolboys, came back from the shadows to ruin science for me.
5. Mary was keen but incomprehensible. The first thing he said at the beginning of every lesson, whether of physics or chemistry, was 'Make a Bunsen burner'. He was apparently convinced that given the right encouragement we would continue our 30 science studies in makeshift laboratories at home. So we might have done, if we could have understood anything else he said. The mouth moved constantly. 'Combustioff off magnesioff,' Mary would announce keenly. 'Magnesioff off oxidoff off hydrogoff off givoff

off.' Worriedly I slid the cap off the inverted jar and ignited the gaseous contents to prove the hydrogoff had been givoff off. Carefully I drew the 35 apparatus in my book, already aware that these experiments would be the last I would ever understand.

6. In English I shone – fitfully, but sufficiently to keep my morale from collapsing altogether. Our teacher in the early years was 'Jazz' Aked. He also doubled as our music teacher: hence the nickname. 'Jazz' taught English according to the 40 curriculum. Without resorting to violence, 'Jazz' had a way of getting results. Eventually I learned to parse any sentence\* I was given. I couldn't do it now, but the knowledge is still there at an unconscious level. It was invaluable training. On top of that, he set good essay subjects. My essays were sometimes read out to the class. I was thereby established all over again as teacher's pet, but at least it was *something*, 45 in those dreadful days when everyone else seemed to be doubling in size overnight, while simultaneously acquiring an Adam's apple like a half-swallowed rock...

*\*parse any sentence* – describe the parts of a sentence

**Answer Questions A and B: Comprehension (10 marks)****AND****C: Personal Writing (10 marks)****A**Look again at lines **1–7 only**.

- i. **Identify one phrase** from these lines which shows Clive James' reaction to finding Carnaby is in a different class to him. (1 mark)
- ii. Clive James and Carnaby are in different classes. **Give two more examples** of differences between the boys. (2 marks)

**B**Look again at lines **12–21**.

I was coping with physics and chemistry well enough while Mr. Ryan was still teaching them. But Mr. Ryan was due for retirement, an event which was hastened by an accident in the laboratory. He was showing us how careful you had to be when handling potassium in the presence of water. Certainly you had to be more careful than he was. The school's entire supply of potassium was ignited at once. Wreathed by dense smoke and lit by garish flames, the stunned Mr. Ryan looked like an ancient Greek god in receipt of bad news. The smoke enveloped us all. Windows being thrown open, it jetted into what passed for a playground, where it hung around like some sinister leftover from a battle on the Somme. Shocked, scorched and 20 gassed, Mr. Ryan was carried away, never to return.

**How does Clive James use language and structure to make his description of Mr Ryan's lesson entertaining? (7 marks)**

**C**

In this extract, the author writes about his experiences and memories of school.

**Write a piece of personal writing in which you describe a memorable event, incident or person from school. (10 marks)**

Aim to write one side.

- Use paragraphs
- Include a range of sentence types / lengths
- Use ambitious vocabulary
- Structure your work
- Remember accurate punctuation and spelling