

Read the extract below, then answer the exam-style questions.

## Passage A

**Creative School**

My parents were never conventional and our schooling proved to be a fine example of their rejection of anything that would help me to blend in and disappear into a crowd.

My school was known locally as 'The Happy Hippy House' and was indeed started by some members of a band in the 1960s. The curtains (now a bit tattered and faded) had apparently started out as bright rainbow stripes and the building itself was once a fine private mansion, rather than a recognisably public institution. Term started with huge bunches of balloons being released from the top windows – a local event which we had never missed as youngsters.

If you happened to walk past 'T.H.H.H.' as it was fondly called, you would notice that it was never quiet. Electric guitars appeared to strum incessantly and the crashing of drums was an unavoidable menace. Yet many passers-by would pause and cock their heads, smiling with pleasure as a young voice soared sweetly, or the cacophony synchronised and a well-known hit filled the air. Tickets for the annual music and drama festival always sold out; and I'd spent many a summer's night curled up at my parents' feet getting an early taste of Shakespeare in between games of hide and seek in the wild gardens that surrounded the mansion house before I even set foot in a classroom there.

Actually, I did manage to gain a decent set of exam results. Despite the school's unusual facade, everyone took English and English Literature ("Why would you rob yourself of the tools of life boy? Why? Why? Why?" was the answer I got when I regularly begged to be released from English for extra band practice before a big concert). Maths was also compulsory – and there was plenty of daily practical learning on that score as we took bookings for performances, calculated our costs and set out invoices. T.H.H.H. was a business – and a profitable one at that. Talented students flocked there from neighbouring towns, to enjoy the extra hours of performing arts lessons which were available instead of other less glamorous subjects.

There were no barriers – boys could do ballet, girls played bass guitar. Most of us could dance, and everyone did their bit up on stage – you couldn't be shy for long when everyone was so encouraging. It's a confidence that has stayed with me to this day – and I wish I could bottle it and pass it on to my own children who seem so worried about what everyone thinks of them.

My favourite memories were of the 'show and tell' days when everyone was encouraged to bring a new piece, or for that matter, skill, to demonstrate in front of the class. There was often an air of secrecy about your offering and the school buzzed with excitement for days beforehand. It was at one of those sessions that I heard Shia Reece sing for the first time. (She went on to be signed by a record label and now lives somewhere in L.A. I'm told!) We all supported each other. I played the piano for Shia once (and have dined out on that story ever since!). She probably doesn't

ever mention that she had a tiny bit-part in my first play, 'Solemn Starts', which launched my career when it was broadcast on the local radio and grabbed the attention of a producer driving his kids home from their swimming lessons!

I suppose it is true that the school took risks – we made our own sets and scenery for shows. And there was no such thing as healthy eating, but most of us missed meals frequently for rehearsals and gigs so it all evened out in the end. We travelled to concerts in a beaten-up school bus, until we bought a new one with the proceeds of a Summer Spectacular concert which featured a laser light show to music that some Year 11s had developed. But I don't remember anyone ever getting hurt – well, occasional cuts and bruises aside. We were always well supervised; sometimes by visiting stars who had come to visit the Principal of the school and inevitably got roped into whatever was going on at the time. Most memorably, hijacking my Geography lesson to describe a concert-tour of Alabama and the effects of flooding on local infrastructure!

1 Imagine that you are a student at a school in the same area as the 'Creative School' who has just read the extract in **Passage A**. Write your journal entry for that day explaining:

- What you think school life would be like there.
- How the school would help you to develop your artistic abilities.
- Do you think you will ever be a student there?

Dotted lines for writing a journal entry.

[25]