



OIB American Section

Entrance Test

2 Hours

April 27, 2016

Welcome to Lycée Magendie, good luck!

Part I Reading Comprehension:

Read each text and answer the questions you will find below the text. Do the questions in order.

Part II Written Expression:

Both texts deal with adults looking back on an incident in their childhood, described from a child's point of view.

Write a 250 word text describing an incident from a child's point of view.

Use a first-person narrative, describing what happened on one specific day when you were a child.

You may choose to narrate a funny, surprising, or frightening episode, the choice is yours.

The end of the story may be positive or negative, you decide, but the episode should have consequences and be remembered by the adult narrator.

Your story does not have to be autobiographical, you can invent everything!

## Peas

My grandfather died when I was a small boy, and my grandmother started staying with us for about six months every year. She lived in a room that doubled as my father's office, which we referred to as "the back room". She carried with her a powerful aroma. I don't know what kind of perfume she used, but it was the double-barrel, ninety-proof, knock-down, render-the-victim-unconscious, moose-killing variety. She kept it in a huge atomizer and applied it frequently and liberally. It was almost impossible to go into her room and remain breathing for any length of time. When she would leave the house to go spend six months with my Aunt Lillian, my mother and sisters would throw open all the windows, strip the bed, and take out the curtains and rugs. Then they would spend several days washing and airing things out, trying frantically to make the pungent<sup>1</sup> odor go away.

This, then, was my grandmother at the time of the infamous pea incident.

It took place at the Biltmore Hotel, which, to my eight-year-old mind, was just about the fanciest place to eat in all of Providence. My grandmother, my mother and I were having lunch after a morning spent shopping. I grandly ordered a saisbury burger with gravy.<sup>2</sup> When brought to the table, it was accompanied by a plate of peas. I do not like peas now. I did not like peas then. I have always hated peas. It is a complete mystery to me why anyone would voluntarily eat peas. I did not eat them

at home. I did not eat them at restaurants. And I certainly was not about to eat them now.

"Eat your peas," my grandmother said.

"Mother," said my mother in her warning voice. "He doesn't like peas. Leave him alone."

My grandmother did not reply, but there was a glint<sup>3</sup> in her eye and a grim<sup>4</sup> set to her jaw that signaled she was not going to be thwarted<sup>5</sup>. She leaned in my direction, looked me in the eye, and uttered the fateful words that changed my life:

"I'll pay you five dollars if you eat those peas."

I had absolutely no idea of the impending doom<sup>6</sup> that was heading my way like a giant wrecking ball<sup>7</sup>. I only knew that five dollars was an *enormous*, nearly *unimaginable* amount of money, and as awful as peas were, only one plate of them stood between me and the possession of that five dollars. I began to force the wretched things down my throat.

My mother was livid. My grandmother had that self-satisfied look of someone who has thrown down an unbearable trump card<sup>8</sup>. "I can do what I want, Ellen, and you can't stop me." My mother glared at<sup>9</sup> her mother. She glared at me. No one can glare like my mother. If there were a glaring Olympics, she would undoubtedly win the gold medal.

I, of course, kept shoving peas down my throat. The glares made me nervous, and every single pea made me want to throw up, but the magical image of that five dollars floated before me, and I finally gagged down<sup>11</sup> every last one of them. My grandmother handed me the five dollars with a flourish. My mother continued to glare in silence. And the episode ended. Or so I thought.

My grandmother left for Aunt Lillian's a few weeks later. That night, at dinner, my mother served two of my all-time favorite foods, meatloaf and mashed potatoes. Along with them came a big, screaming bowl of peas. She offered me some peas, and I, in the very last moments of my innocent youth, declined. My mother fixed me with a cold eye as she heaped a huge pile of peas onto my plate. Then came the words that were to haunt me for years.

"You ate them for money," she said. "You can eat them for love."

Oh, despair! Oh, devastation! Now, too late, came the dawning realization that I had unwittingly damned myself to a hell from which there was no escape.

"You ate them for money. You can eat them for love."

What possible argument could I muster<sup>12</sup> against that? There was none. Did I eat the peas? You bet I did. I ate them that day and every other time they were served thereafter. The five dollars were quickly spent. My grandmother passed away a few years later. But the legacy of the peas lived on, as it lives onto this day. If I so much as curl my lip when they are served (because, after all, I still hate the horrid little things), my mother repeats the dreaded words one more time:

"You ate them for money," she said. "You can eat them for love."

Rick Beyer, *True Tales of American Life*, 2001

1. *âcre* 2. *sauce au jus de viande* 3. *lueur / étincelle* 4. *(fic) machoïre contractée* 5. *contracarrée / contractée*  
6. *catastrophe imminente* 7. *qui allait s'abattre sur moi/telle une boule gigantesque détruisant tout sur son*  
passage 8. *tréfil/d'affreuses* 9. *atout* 10. *foudroyé du regard*

11. *ingurgitai* 12. *(fic) avancer*

### Text 1 - "Peas"

1 - Who is the narrator? How old was he at the time of the incident?

2 - Explain the "infamous pea incident".

→ Where were the characters?

→ What caused the problem?

→ How did the narrator react, why?

3 - How did this incident affect the narrator in his future years, as an adult?

## My Oedipus Complex

This extract is from a short story about a very young child. The story is called 'My Oedipus Complex' and it was written by the Irish writer Frank O'Connor. The story is set at the time of the First World War (1914-18).

In this extract the child narrator's life has just been disrupted by the return of his father from the war. The child had prayed for his father's safe return, but his father is now a stranger to him and, what is worse, he has usurped the child's place in his mother's big bed. The child has been made to promise that he will not come into the big bedroom and disturb his father's sleep early in the morning. Next morning, the boy wakes up very early as usual and plays with his toys for ages. Then he starts getting very bored and cold.

At last I could stand it no longer. I went into the next room. As there was still no room at Mother's side I climbed over her and she woke with a start.

'Larry,' she whispered, gripping my arm very tightly, 'what did you promise?'

'But I did, Mummy,' I wailed, caught in the very act. 'I was quiet for ever so long.'

'Oh, dear, and you're perished!' she said sadly, feeling me all over. Now if I let you stay will you promise not to talk?'

'But I want to talk, Mummy,' I wailed.

'That has nothing to do with it,' she said with a firmness that was new to me.

'Daddy wants to sleep. Now, do you understand that?'

I understood it only too well. I wanted to talk, he wanted to sleep – whose house was it anyway?'

'Mummy,' I said with equal firmness, 'I think it would be healthier for Daddy to sleep in his own bed.'

That seemed to stagger her, because she said nothing for a while.

'Now, once for all,' she went on, 'you're to be perfectly quiet or go back to your own bed. Which is it to be?'

The injustice of it got me down. I had convicted her out of her own mouth of inconsistency and unreasonableness, and she hadn't even attempted to reply. Full of spite, I gave Father a kick, which she didn't notice but made him grunt and open his eyes in alarm.

'What time is it?' he asked in a panic-stricken voice, not looking at Mother but at the door, as if he saw someone there.

'It's early yet,' she replied soothingly. 'It's only the child. Go to sleep again. ... Now Larry,' she added, getting out of bed, 'you've wakened Daddy and you must go back.'

This time, for all her quiet air, I knew she meant it, and knew that my principal rights and privileges were as good as lost unless I asserted them at once. As she lifted me, I gave a screech, enough to wake the dead, not to mind Father. He groaned,

'That damn child! Doesn't he ever sleep?'

'It's only a habit, dear,' she said quietly, though I could see she was vexed.

'Well, it's time he got out of it,' shouted Father, beginning to heave in the bed. He suddenly gathered all the bedclothes about him, turned to the wall, and then looked

back over his shoulder with nothing showing only two small, spiteful, dark eyes. The man looked very wicked.

To open the bedroom door, Mother had to let me down, and I broke free and dashed for the farthest corner, screeching. Father sat bolt upright in bed.

'Shut up, you little puppy!' he said in a choking voice.

I was so astonished that I stopped screeching. Never, never had anyone spoken to me in that tone before. I looked at him incredulously and saw his face convulsed with rage. It was only then that I fully realized how God had coddled me, listening to my prayers for the safe return of this monster.

'Shut up, you!' I bawled, beside myself.

'What's that you said?' shouted Father, making a wild leap out of bed.

'Mick, Mick!' cried Mother. Don't you see the child isn't used to you?'

'I see he's better fed than taught,' snarled Father, waving his arms wildly. 'He wants his bottom smacked.'

All his previous shouting was as nothing to these obscene words referring to my person. They really made my blood boil.

'Smack your own!' I screamed hysterically. 'Smack your own!' Shut up! Shut up!

At this he lost his patience and let fly at me. He did it with the lack of conviction you'd expect of a man under Mother's horrified eyes, and it ended up as a mere tap, but the sheer indignity of being struck at all by a stranger, a total stranger who had cajoled his way back from the war into our big bed as a result of my innocent intercession, made me completely dotty, shrieked and shrieked, and danced in my bare feet, and Father, looking awkward and hairy in nothing but a short grey army shirt, glared down at me like a mountain out for murder. I think it must have been then that I realized he was jealous too. And there stood Mother in her nightdress, looking as if her heart was broken between us. I hoped she felt as she looked. It seemed to me that she deserved it all.

Frank O'Connor  
My Oedipus Complex

### Text 2 – "My Oedipus Complex"

- 1) Why is the child upset?
- 2) What shocks the boy about his father's reaction?
- 3) How does the father feel?
- 4) How does the mother feel at the end?

#### Glossary

To usurp : prendre la place de  
Perished : very cold  
To stagger her : (ici) lui a assené un coup  
Spite : méchanceté  
To grunt : grogner  
Soothingly : d'une voix apaisante

a screech : un cri perçant  
to heave : se soulever  
had coddled me : (lang) m'a bien eu  
to bawl : brailler  
let fly : s'emporter pour de bon  
doty : fou