

DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHERS

LISTENING SECTION

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH

Thursday, June 15, 2000—9:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., only

BE SURE THAT THE LISTENING SECTION IS ADMINISTERED TO EVERY STUDENT.

- 1 Before the start of the examination period, say:

Do not open the examination booklet until you are instructed to do so.

- 2 Distribute one examination booklet and one essay booklet to each student.

- 3 After each student has received an examination booklet and an essay booklet, say:

Tear off the answer sheet, which is the last page of the examination booklet, and fill in its heading. Now circle “Session One” and fill in the heading on each page of your essay booklet.

- 4 After the students have filled in all headings on their answer sheets and essay booklets, say:

Look at page 2 of your examination booklet and follow along while I read the **Overview** and **The Situation**.

Overview:

For this part of the test, you will listen to a speech by blues musician B. B. King, answer some multiple-choice questions, and write a response based on the situation described below. You will hear the speech twice. You may take notes on the next page anytime you wish during the readings.

The Situation:

As part of a concert series offered by your local arts council, blues musician B. B. King is scheduled to perform in your community. In anticipation of King’s forthcoming concert, the editor of the school newspaper has asked you to prepare a feature article for the newspaper in which you describe how King’s early experiences helped to shape King’s career as a blues musician. In preparation for writing your feature article, listen to a speech by B. B. King. Then use relevant information from the speech to write your article.

Now I will read the passage aloud to you for the first time.

- 5 Now read the passage aloud with appropriate expression, but without added comment.

Listening Passage

I struggle with words. Never could express myself the way I wanted. My mind fights my mouth, and thoughts get stuck in my throat. Sometimes they stay stuck for seconds or even minutes. Some thoughts stay for years; some have stayed hidden all my life. As a child, I stuttered. What was inside couldn't get out. I'm still not real fluent. I don't know a lot of good words. Words aren't my friends. Music is. Sounds, notes, rhythms. I talk through music.

The blues is a simple music, and I'm a simple man. But the blues isn't a science; the blues can't be broken down like mathematics. The blues is a mystery, and mysteries are never as simple as they look.

My great-grandmother, who'd been a slave, talked about the old days. She would talk about the beginnings of the blues. She said that, sure, singing helped the day go by. Singing about your sadness unburdens your soul. But the blues hollerers shouted about more than being sad. They were also delivering messages in musical code. If the master was coming, you might sing a hidden warning to the other field hands. Maybe you'd want to get out of his way or hide. The blues could warn you what was coming. I could see the blues was about survival. Now I'd heard shouting in the fields ever since I could remember. No matter where you went, walking behind the plow or picking cotton, you'd be hearing beautiful voices singing about the sun high in the sky or the gathering storm clouds or the long, hard day or how good the food would taste once work was done. Seems like the songs were made up by the heart, nothing written or rehearsed, music meant to take the ache out our backs and the burden off our brains. Some of this music you might call blues.

It angers me how scholars associate the blues strictly with tragedy. When I was a little kid, blues meant hope, excitement, pure emotion. Blues were about feelings. They seem to bring out the feelings of the artist, and they brought out my feelings as a kid. They made me wanna move or sing or pick up Reverend's guitar and figure out how to make those wonderful sounds.

I had dreams as a kid. Wanted to preach, wanted to sing, wanted to play guitar and travel with our gospel group. My group, the Famous St. John Gospel Singers, was sometimes hired as an opening act for big-time programs in the area. I saw how gospel groups can get so popular that the members don't need day jobs. Living off music seemed better than living off the land. I'd say to the guys in our group, "Maybe we could take off after the crops been picked and start traveling." Because saving was practically impossible, the guys were still living hand to mouth and were reluctant to leave. So our circle of churches stayed close to Indianola, and I felt stuck.

At the same time I felt determined to make more money and did something that surprised even me. On some Saturdays, I'd find a corner off Church Street, sit on the curb, take out my guitar and play some gospel songs, accompanying myself while singing "Old Rugged Cross" or "Working on the Building." I'm looking for a way to draw attention and maybe make a little money. I'm singing with feeling and strumming with conviction. I don't stutter when I sing, so singing is easier than speaking. If people pass by without noticing me, I'll sing or strum a little louder, raise my voice a little higher, hoping someone will stop. A man does. He's dressed nice and clean and listens for a short while. He likes what he hears and hums along. This is going good. I'm feeling good, the song's flowing out of me, and the man is smiling and feeling the spirit. When I'm through, he's pleased. "You can sing, son," he says. "Thank you, sir," I say. "Well, keep up the good

work,” he tells me before patting me on the shoulder and strolling off. No tip.

Then I have this idea. Change my attitude. Make a slight move from the sanctified to the secular. I strum a little blues I heard Sonny Boy playing last Saturday night. I remember half the words and make up the other half. Something about my baby done left me and I’m feeling down; yes, she done left me and I’m feeling down; Lord knows this here is a mighty lonesome town. Thing about blues is that blues is simple. You sing one line; you repeat that line; and then rhyme your third line with the first two. They call it the 12-bar blues ’cause each of those lines is four bars. That’s it. In that basic form, though, you can cram a lifetime of stories ’bout the woes and wonders of earthly love. Everything fits into the blues.

“Sing those blues, son,” says the same man who earlier praised my gospel song. When I’m through with my blues, he’s smiling like he was before. He’s patting me on the shoulder but—he’s reaching in his pocket and looking for change. “Keep singing, son,” he says as he slips me a dime.

We all have our different paths. Mine would follow blues, but never at the expense of personal beliefs. I played blues first because blues began loving me. When blues began paying, and when the other St. John Singers still wouldn’t go to a big city like Memphis to find fame, I gave the blues even more of me.

I like today’s young Black music. I like hip-hop and I like rap; I’m not among those who want to bring ’em down. I don’t like a lot of the cursing, but I like a lot of the grooves. I respect the rhyming genius of these brothers and feel rap is filled with creativity. Now is the era of the rappers, and they’re entitled to the freedom to express themselves and find their artistic way. I like their determination, and I feel, underneath it all, their rhythm is that same rhythm that drives me; it’s the rhythm of life. Their blues have taken a different shape than mine. But they’re still talkin’ about heartache and love and fear and hope and the mysteries of making it in a world that don’t care nothing ’bout you. To my mind, the blues have never been in better shape. I’ve watched the blues travel from the rural roads of Mississippi to practically every point on the planet. People are grooving on the blues because the blues is universal. The rockers and rappers and soul-singing children all come out of the blues. The blues is the grandfather watching over his children.

6 After reading the passage aloud once, say:

You may take a few minutes to look over **The Situation** and your notes.
(Pause) Now I will read the passage aloud a second time.

7 Read the passage a second time.

8 After the second reading, say:

Now turn to page 4 of your examination booklet, read the directions, and answer the multiple-choice questions. Be sure to follow all the directions given in your examination booklet and your essay booklet. You may now begin.