

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL, HISTORY DEPARTMENT

6TH FORM ENTRY, SAMPLE EXAM

This exercise is intended to provide both a challenge and a level playing-field for all candidates. The text below is meant to be unfamiliar to you. You are not expected to have any knowledge of this period of History; what matters most is how carefully you read the text and how well you communicate your understanding of it in your answer. There is no 'right' answer to the question asked: you will be assessed on how you construct your argument, how intelligently you make your case and how well you support it with evidence from the text. The question is at the end of the text.

In the middle of the twelfth century, the English writer William of Newburgh (Newburgh is in Yorkshire) wrote down what he had heard about a strange recent event. This is an adapted version of what he recorded.

In East Anglia there is a village. One year during harvest, while the workers were employed in gathering in the produce of the fields, two children, a boy and a girl, completely green in colour and dressed in garments of a strange colour and unknown materials, emerged from some nearby caves. While wandering through the fields in astonishment, they were seized by the workers and conducted to the village, and many people coming to see so novel a sight, they were kept some days without food. At length, by degrees, they changed their original colour, through the natural effects of our food, and became like ourselves and also learned our language. The boy, who appeared to be the younger, died prematurely; his sister, however, continued in good health and differed not in the least from the women of our own country. Afterwards, as it is reported, she was married and was living a few years since, at least, so they say. Moreover, after they had acquired our language, on being asked who they were and where they came from, they are said to have replied, 'We are inhabitants of the land of St. Martin, who is regarded with peculiar veneration in the country which gave us birth'. Being further asked where that land was and how they came to the village, they answered, 'We are ignorant of both these things'. Being questioned whether in that land they believed in Christ, or whether the sun arose, they replied that the country was Christian and possessed churches; but they said, 'The sun does not rise upon our countrymen; our land is little cheered by its beams; we are contented with the twilight which, among you, precedes the sunrise or follows the sunset. Moreover, a certain luminous country is seen, not far distant from ours and divided from it by a very considerable river'. These, and many other matters too numerous to particularise, they are said to have recounted to curious inquirers. Though it is asserted by many, yet I have long been in doubt concerning the matter, and deemed it ridiculous to give credit to a circumstance supported on no rational foundation, or at least one of a very mysterious character; yet, at length I was so overwhelmed by the weight of so many and such competent witnesses, that I have been compelled to believe and wonder over a matter which I was unable to comprehend, or unravel, by any powers of intellect. I feel no regret at having recorded an event so prodigious and miraculous.

***Q: How useful can a source like this be for historians studying society in twelfth-century England?
[30 marks]***

You are advised to spend about 10 minutes reading the text closely and planning your answer and about 35 minutes writing it up.