

Source A

This is an extract from *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (1838). On his ninth birthday, Oliver Twist is taken to the workhouse where he will be put to work to earn his keep in very harsh conditions. The following, very well-known passage, shows Oliver challenging the system.

5 *The room in which the boys were fed, was a large stone hall, with a copper at one end: out of which the master, dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at mealtimes. Of this festive composition each boy had one porringer, and no more—except on occasions of great public rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides.*

10 *The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites. Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months: at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that one boy, who was tall for his age, and hadn't been used to that sort of thing (for his father had kept a small cook-shop), hinted darkly to his companions, that unless he had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye; and they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.*

15 *The evening arrived; the boys took their places. The master, in his cook's uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him; the gruel was served out; and a long grace was said over the short commons. The gruel disappeared; the boys whispered each other, and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbors nudged him. Child as he was, he was desperate with hunger, and reckless with misery. He rose from the table; and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: somewhat alarmed at his own temerity: 'Please, sir, I want some more.'*

20 *The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear.*

25 *'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice.
'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.'*

30 *The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle.*

Section A: Reading

1. Read again the first part of the source, lines **1 to 10**. List **4 things** from this part of the text that you learn about the workhouse.

[4 marks]

2. Look at in detail this extract from lines **6 to 20**.

The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Boys have generally excellent appetites. Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months: at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that one boy, who was tall for his age, and hadn't been used to that sort of thing (for his father had kept a small cook-shop), hinted darkly to his companions, that unless he had another basin of gruel per diem, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye; and they implicitly believed him. A council was held; lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist.

How does the writer use language here to describe the conditions of the workhouse?

You could include the writer's choice of:

- Words and phrases
- Language features and techniques
- Sentence forms

[8 marks]

3. You now need to think about the whole of the source. The text is an extract from a novel called *Oliver Twist*.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:

- What the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning
- How and why the writer changes focus as the source develops
- Any other structural features that interest you

[8 marks]

4. Focus this part of your answer on the end of the source, from line 6 to the end.

A student, having read this section of the text said: “The writer brings the character’s experience to life. I can feel the tension build as we follow the action with them. “

To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

- Write about your own impression of the character
- Evaluate how the writer has created these impressions
- Support your opinions with references to the text

[20 marks]