Being an only child

"What's it like to spend a lifetime without brothers and sisters?" asks Joanna Moorhead.

A Sam Thompson, aged 10

When my mum's friend had a baby, it made me think about being an only child for the first time. I thought, would I like to have brothers and sisters? But to be honest, my friend's sister looked quite annoying – he was always having to watch her and I decided I was better off on my own. There are lots of good things about being an only child. I have privacy, and I like that; some of my friends have to share a bedroom and I know that will never happen to me. Plus I get time on my own with Mum and Dad, and that's very special.

B Jasmine Weller, aged 13

I always felt a bit different from other kids, and just thought it was something about me. Then I made friends with three other people who are all only children. I suddenly realised that they felt a lot like me. We all need to spend quite a lot of time on our own, and some of our friends with brothers and sisters find that strange – they think we don't like them or something. However, there are pluses, too. I think it's good to be able to entertain yourself sometimes, and my mum says I've got a great imagination.

C Bethany Shaw, aged 15

One of the bad things about being an only child when you're young is the reaction you get from other people. They think you're spoilt – you see that look in their eyes. And then you have to prove you're not spoilt, although you know you're not and nor are most only children. In general, I think the negatives outweigh the positives, but on the other hand it's all I've known and I'm OK with it.

D Leah Mitchell, aged 29

I went away to school when I was seven, and the hardest thing I found was making friends. Because I was an only child, I just didn't know how to do it. The thing is that when you're an only child, often there aren't any other children at a gathering. I found being an only child interesting, in that it gave me a place at the grown-ups' table and gave me a view into their world that children in a big family might not get. And I know it has, at least partly, made me into the person I am: I never like the idea of being one of a group, for example. I'm not comfortable with being one of a gang.

E Laura Arnold, aged 36

I know some only children feel stifled by their parents' constant demands and worries, but that wasn't my experience. I found being an only child enriching, which I think is mainly because we get on so well. I've got two children now and I do find that scary. The problem is I've absolutely no experience of this kind of situation; nothing in my past has prepared me for having to divide myself between the needs of these two little people, and the guilt is hard when I feel I've not been there enough for one of them. And on a practical level, things like sibling rivalry are going to be a whole new ball game.

Reading and Use of English Part 7

You are going to read a newspaper article about people who have no brothers or sisters. For questions **1–10**, choose from the people (**A–E**). The people may be chosen more than once.

EXAM ADVICE

Read the questions, then quickly read the texts. When you find the part of a text which matches the question, underline it.

Which person

realises that the positive relationship they had with their parents isn't shared by all only children?	1
thinks people make a judgement about only children which is mistaken?	2
thinks they developed a better understanding of adults because of being an only child?	3
finds their present circumstances a challenge?	4
says that only children have needs which can be difficult for others to deal with?	5
realised at a particular point that they were happy being an only child?	6
was unaware that their reactions to being an only child were not unique?	7
had problems as a child because they lacked a necessary skill?	8
says they accept their situation because they don't know anything different?	9
mentions a positive benefit of spending a lot of time alone?	10