

## Which writer

- 1 knew at an early age what career he would choose?
- 2 did not enjoy his education?
- 3 was not brought up by his parents?
- 4 was very critical of one person?
- 5 invented some details in his book?
- 6 worked on the book with another author?
- 7 described other people very well?
- 8 told of the good and bad times of his early career?
- 9 was confused about what he had to learn?
- 10 described how the place where he lived changed over time?

## Reviews of famous autobiographers who wrote about being teenagers

### A Winston Churchill – politician

Churchill wrote the first volume of his autobiography in 1930, nine years before becoming Prime Minister of the UK. Called *My Early Life*, it covered the time from his birth in 1870, when he grew up in a very grand house as the neglected son of a wealthy aristocratic who were too busy to spend much time with him. Instead, he spent his days – and developed his strongest bond – with the nanny who looked after him. Although he went on to become an excellent writer and perhaps the outstanding European politician of his day, the boy Churchill detested being made to study, and wrote entertainingly about his schoolmaster's attempts to teach him Latin. When instructed that 'mensa' meant 'oh, table' and informed that this was what you would say if you were talking to a table, young Churchill did not see why he needed to know this, and replied that he couldn't see the point. 'But I never do,' he said. His teacher didn't see the funny side, which, fortunately for us, makes the book all the more entertaining.

### B Laurie Lee – poet

Laurie Lee's classic memoir *Cider With Rosie* tells of his childhood in a remote valley in England's Cotswold Hills in the early years of the twentieth century. At the start of the book, the valley seemed to have developed little in hundreds of years; by the end, a bus service and electricity have arrived; Lee's village was no longer so remote, but was now

fully connected to the modern world. Much of the book shows what a remarkable woman Laurie's mother was, raising him and his brothers and sisters with little help from anyone else. As he grows older, he senses a feeling that he was born to be a poet. He was right of course, and besides his poetry, Lee also produced plays, short stories and travel books, as well as this autobiographical masterpiece, which is as alive now as the day it was written.

### **C Robbie Williams – singer**

The former singer of the British boy band Take That released his autobiography *You Know Me* after two decades being one of the most famous musicians on the planet. Starting with his childhood in Stoke-on-Trent, it tells of the successes and hard times Robbie experienced after becoming a superstar. *You Know Me* was clearly aimed at his fans, many of whom would probably already have bought *Feel*, the 2004 biography of Williams written by journalist Chris Heath, who also collaborated on this publication. So how is *You Know Me* different? Well, there are plenty of anecdotes, gathered from informal interviews Heath conducted with Williams, which provide insight not just into the man himself, but into the music industry as a whole.

### **D Gerald Durrell – wildlife writer**

British naturalist Gerald Durrell wrote this account of the years he spent aged 10 to 15 living on the island of Corfu. His eccentric family and the inhabitants of Corfu are portrayed brilliantly. Gerald's brother Lawrence in particular emerges as a bad-tempered, mean and unreasonable young man. It's tempting to think that Lawrence (who also became a writer) must have been outraged by the book's publication. But apparently he both liked it, and praised its accuracy. Although it is an autobiography, not all the 'facts' in the book are actually correct: for example, some of the family actually lived in a different part of the island, rather than all in the same home as the book claimed.