YOUNG CHEF

Dan Hodges has always been a bit different. At the age of eight, when all the other kids were outside playing football or in their bedrooms playing computer games, Dan was in the kitchen preparing dinner with his mum. When the other kids were watching football on TV, he was watching cooking programmes featuring his favourite chefs. Even schoolwork was just a distraction from Dan's true obsession: food.

Now, at the age of 18, the young man with film-star good looks has become one of the country's youngest head chefs. 'It really is all I've ever wanted to do,' he said. 'I'm living the dream.'

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as a baby Dan was quite a fussy eater. According to his mother, Sarah, he didn't like anything with fish or potatoes. 'He used to drive me crazy,' she told us. 'His older sister would eat anything we gave her, but Dan was much harder to please.' He used to watch, fascinated, when his mother was preparing meals and, as soon as he was able, he started to lend a hand in the kitchen. But it wasn't until he won a cooking contest at the age of 11 that his parents realised he had real talent. The prize was a one-on-one lesson at a local restaurant, where he learned how to properly prepare and cook chicken – and after that, there was no stopping him.

Kids are naturally messy, and Sarah's kitchen looked like a battlefield at times, but she didn't mind. 'Dan liked to experiment, and I gave him free range,' she said. There were, inevitably, a few accidents, but she regarded them as part of the learning process. 'I never said 'no' because I thought something was too dangerous. I'd just keep an eye on him, and only help if he needed me.'

Dan's skill and creativity continued to develop into his teen years, until his big break came when, at the age of 14, he won TV's *Young Chef* competition – and national fame arrived. 'It was weird when people started recognising me in the street,' says Dan. 'It was a bit of a shock. It used to get on my nerves when people I didn't know started talking to me. I'm used to it now. It doesn't bother me.' TV fame led on to advertising deals and eventually, his current job as head chef in one of the west of England's most exclusive restaurants. He appears to be much more comfortable when he's in the kitchen, away from the public gaze.

Does Dan have any tips for budding chefs who want to follow in his footsteps? 'Having a mum who lets you make a mess of her kitchen helps,' he laughs. Not everyone, of course, is so lucky. 'But seriously, you have to be committed. People will tell you anything is possible with hard work, but there's more to it than that. You can go to school and get top marks in all your tests – but if you don't feel it, if you don't have that passion, you should do something else, because it's not an easy life.' When he tells me he works from 7 am to midnight every day, you can see his point!

A London publisher recently offered Dan a contract to write a book, which they are confident would be a bestseller. 'I'm not sure, though. I'm not much of a writer, and I'm so busy in the restaurant, doing what
line 51 I love. It isn't really a priority for me at the moment.' Most successful chefs would jump at such a chance. Indeed, many of them have. But, as I said, Dan Hodges has always been a bit different.

3 **Read the article again. For questions 1–6, choose the answer which you think fits best according to the text.**

1 What is the author doing in the first paragraph?
- **A** Showing that Dan was a rather lonely child.
- **B** Explaining why Dan is the way he is.
- **C** Emphasising that Dan is interested in one thing.
- **D** Describing Dan's family background.

2 Dan's parents knew he had a talent for cooking because
- **A** he was always very critical about food.
- **B** he was keen to help in the kitchen.
- **C** he had lessons from a professional.
- **D** he came first in a competition.

3 When Dan's mother says she 'gave him free range', she means that she
- **A** paid for all of his ingredients.
- **B** encouraged him to cook with eggs.
- **C** allowed him to do what he wanted.
- **D** observed him very closely.

4 How does Dan feel about being famous?
- **A** He gets annoyed when strangers talk to him.
- **B** He has become accustomed to the attention.
- **C** He is glad because it has led to a successful career.
- **D** He is surprised that people are interested in him.

5 What advice does he give to young people who want to become chefs?
- **A** Get the relevant qualifications first.
- **B** Ask your parents to support you.
- **C** Be certain it is what you want to do.
- **D** Work as hard as you can.

6 What does 'it' refer to in line 51?
- **A** writing a book
- **B** being busy
- **C** a publisher
- **D** a restaurant

4 **Underline the parts of the text which tell you the answers.**

5 **Match the highlighted words in the text to the definitions.**

1 try something in order to discover what it's like _____
2 happening or existing now _____
3 something that is very important and must be done before other things _____
4 when you are known or recognised by many people _____
5 including someone or something as an important part _____

LIVEWORKSHEETS