

PART C: PROSE

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the following selection and answer the questions on pages 8 to 13 of the written-response booklet.

adapted from **The Thrill of the Grass**

by W.P. Kinsella

- 1 1981: the summer the baseball players went on strike.... Summer without baseball: a disruption to the psyche. An unexplainable aimlessness engulfs me. I stay later and later each evening in the small office ... of my shop. Now, driving home after work ... it is the time of evening I would normally be heading for the stadium.
- 2 I enjoy arriving an hour early, parking in a far corner of the lot, walking slowly toward the stadium, rays of sun dropping softly over my shoulders like tangerine ropes.... I like to watch young families beside their campers.... I enjoy seeing little boys dressed in the home team uniform ... clutching hotdogs in upraised hands.
- 3 I am a failed shortstop. As a young man, I saw myself diving to my left, graceful as a toppling tree, fielding high grounders like a cat leaping for butterflies, bracing my right foot and tossing to first....
- 4 I know the stadium will be deserted; nevertheless I wheel my car down off the freeway, park, and walk across the silent lot, my footsteps rasping and mournful. Strangle-grass and creeping charlie are already inching up through the gravel.... Faded bottle caps, rusted bits of chrome ... recede into the earth. I circle a ticket booth, sun-faded, empty, the door closed by an oversized padlock.... The whole place is silent as an empty classroom, like a house suddenly without children....
- 5 ... My desire to be inside the ballpark is so great that for the first time in my life I commit a criminal act.... I take the small tools from the pocket of my jacket, and in less time than it would take a speedy runner to circle the bases I am inside the stadium. Though the ballpark is open-air, it smells of abandonment; the walkways and seating areas are cold as basements. I breathe the odours of rancid popcorn and wilted cardboard.
- 6 The maintenance staff were laid off when the strike began. Synthetic grass does not need to be cut or watered. I stare down at the ball diamond, where just to the right of the pitcher's mound, a single weed, perhaps two inches high, stands defiant in the rain-pocked dirt....
- 7 I remember the ballfields of my childhood, the outfields full of soft hummocks and brown-eyed gopher holes.
- 8 I stride down from the stands and walk out to the middle of the field. I touch the stubble that is called grass, take off my shoes, but find it is like walking on a row of toothbrushes. It was an evil day when they stripped the sod from this ballpark, cut it into yard-wide swathes, rolled it, memories and all, into great green-and-black cinnamonroll shapes, trucked it away. Nature temporarily defeated. But Nature is patient.
- 9 Over the next few days an idea forms within me, ripening, swelling, pushing everything else into a corner. It is like knowing a new, wonderful joke and not being able to share. I need an accomplice.
- 10 I go to see a man I don't know personally, though I have seen his face peering at me from the financial pages of the local newspaper ... and I have been watching his profile at the baseball

stadium, two boxes to the right of me, for several years. He is a fan.... When the weather is intemperate, or the game not close, the people around us disappear like flowers closing at sunset, but we are always there until the last pitch. I know he is a man who attends because of the beauty and mystery of the game, a man who can sit during the last of the ninth with the game decided innings ago, and draw joy from watching the first baseman adjust the angle of his glove as the pitcher goes into his windup....

- 11 'Tell him a baseball fan is here to see him,' is all I will say to his secretary. His office is in a skyscraper, from which he can look out over the city to where the prairies roll green as mountain water to the limits of the eye. I wait all afternoon in the reception area.... Finally, in the late afternoon, my message is passed along.
- 12 'I've seen you at the baseball stadium,' I say, not introducing myself.
- 13 'Yes,' he says. 'I recognize you. Three rows back, about eight seats to my left. You have a red scorebook and you often bring your daughter...'
- 14 'Granddaughter. Yes, she goes to sleep in my lap in the late innings, but she knows how to calculate an ERA¹ and she's only in Grade 2.'
- 15 'One of my greatest regrets,' says this tall man... , 'is that my grandchildren all live over a thousand miles away.... Now, what can I do for you?'
- 16 'I have an idea,' I say. 'One that's been creeping towards me like a first baseman when the bunt sign is on. What do you think about artificial turf?'
- 17 'Hmmm,' he snorts, 'that's what the strike should be about. Baseball is meant to be played on summer evenings and Sunday afternoons, on grass just cut by a horse-drawn mower,' and we smile as our eyes meet.
- 18 'I've discovered the ballpark is open, to me anyway,' I go on. 'There's no one there while the strike is on.... It's lonely as a ghost town.'
- 19 'And what is it you do there...?'
- 20 'I dream.'
- 21 'And where do I come in?'
- 22 'You've always struck me as a man who dreams.... I think we have things in common. I think you might like to come with me. I could show you what I dream, paint you pictures, suggest what might happen....'
- 23 He studies me carefully for a moment, like a pitcher trying to decide if he can trust the sign his catcher has just given him.
- 24 'Tonight?' he says. 'Would tonight be too soon?'
- 25 'Park in the northwest corner of the lot about 1:00 a.m. There is a door about fifty yards to the right of the main gate. I'll open it when I hear you.'
- 26 He nods....

¹ ERA: *statistic used to measure the pitcher's success*

- 27 The night is clear and cotton warm when he arrives....
- 28 'Let's go down to the field,' I say. I am carrying a cardboard pizza box, holding it on the upturned palms of my hands, like an offering.
- 29 When we reach the field, he first stands on the mound.... 'I think I know what you've brought,' he says, gesturing toward the box, 'but let me see anyway.'
- 30 I open the box in which rests a square foot of sod, the grass smooth and pure, cool as a swatch of satin, fragile as baby's hair....
- 31 We walk across the field, the harsh, prickly turf making the bottoms of my feet tingle, to the left-field corner where ... I lay down the square foot of sod. 'That's beautiful,' my friend says, kneeling beside me....
- 32 I take from my belt a sickle-shaped blade.... I measure along the edge of the sod, dig the point in and pull carefully toward me. There is a ripping sound, like tearing an old bed sheet.... I replace the sod lovingly, covering the newly bared surface.
- 33 'A protest,' I say.
- 34 'But it could be more,' the man replies.
- 35 'I hoped you'd say that. It could be. If you'd like to come back...'
- 36 'Tomorrow night?'
- 37 'Tomorrow night would be fine. But there will be an admission charge...'
- 38 'A square of sod?' ... 'Of the same grass?'
- 39 'Of the same grass. But there's more.'
- 40 'I suspected as much.'
- 41 'You must have a friend...'
- 42 'I have two. Would that be all right?'
- 43 'I trust your judgement.'
- 44 'My father. He's over eighty,' my friend says. 'You might have seen him with me once or twice. He lives over fifty miles from here, but if I call him he'll come. And my friend...'
- 45 'If they pay their admission they'll be welcome....'
- 46 'And *they* may have friends....'
- 47 They do come, those trusted friends, and friends of friends, each making a live, green deposit. At first, a tiny row of sod squares begins to inch along toward left-centre field. The next night even more people arrive, the following night more again.... Those who come once seem always to return accompanied by friends, occasionally a son or young brother, but mostly men my age or older, for we are the ones who remember the grass....
- 48 Night after night, virtually no words are spoken. Each man seems to know his assignment....

- 49 I often remain high in the stadium, looking down on the men moving over the earth, dark as ants, each sodding, cutting, watering, shaping....
- 50 Towards dawn, I watch the men walking away in groups, like small patrols of soldiers, carrying instead of arms, the tools and utensils which breathe life back into the arid ballfield....
- 51 When the strike is over I know we will all be here to watch the workouts.... We will sit in our regular seats, scattered like popcorn throughout the stadium, and we'll nod as we pass on the way to the exits, exchange secret smiles, proud as new fathers.
- 52 For me, the best part of all will be the surprise. I feel like a magician who has ... produced an elephant from thin air.... Our secret rites have been performed with love, like delivering a valentine to a sweetheart's door....
- 53 What will the players think, as they straggle into the stadium and find the miracle we have created? The old-timers will raise their heads like ponies, as far away as the parking lot, when the thrill of the grass reaches their nostrils. And, as they dress, they'll recall sprawling in the lush outfields of childhood, the grass as cool as a mother's hand on a forehead....
- 54 Alone in the stadium in the last chill darkness before dawn, I drop to my hands and knees in the centre of the outfield.... I lower my face to the silvered grass, which, wonder of wonders, already has the ephemeral odours of baseball about it.

PART C: PROSE

Total Value: 33 marks

Suggested Time: 45 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the story entitled “The Thrill of the Grass” on pages 2 to 5 in the **Readings Booklet**. Select the **best** answer for each question and record your choice on the Response Form provided.

19. In paragraph 5, the narrator of the story commits a criminal act in order to
- A. circle the bases.
 - B. enter the ballpark.
 - C. smell the popcorn.
 - D. protest against the strike.
20. Paragraph 8 suggests that the field is
- A. smooth.
 - B. polluted.
 - C. colourful.
 - D. unnatural.
21. Paragraph 8 contains examples of
- A. cliché.
 - B. jargon.
 - C. figurative language.
 - D. euphemistic expression.
22. The word “accomplice” (paragraph 9) means
- A. friend.
 - B. helper.
 - C. enemy.
 - D. criminal.
23. The narrator chooses the man he recognizes from the local newspaper because he is
- A. wealthy.
 - B. bankrupt.
 - C. a baseball fan.
 - D. a business man.

24. The statement, “for we are the ones who remember the grass” (paragraph 47) suggests that the narrator is
- A. nostalgic.
 - B. indifferent.
 - C. melancholy.
 - D. enthusiastic.
25. The statement, “I watch the men walking away in groups, like small patrols of soldiers” (paragraph 50) implies that the men
- A. are organized.
 - B. are aggressive.
 - C. wear uniforms.
 - D. work diligently.
26. Paragraph 53 suggests that the “old-timers” will feel
- A. proud.
 - B. unsure.
 - C. excited.
 - D. disillusioned.
27. Paragraph 54 suggests that the narrator feels
- A. scared.
 - B. lonely.
 - C. generous.
 - D. successful.