

EXAMEN D'ADMISSIBILITÉ ÉCRIT
Seconde Section Internationale, Session 2018

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All through school, if I'd had to wait to be chosen for any team, I'd have waited at the sidelines like the other left-behind losers. Fat girls, girls wearing thick glasses, girls lacking "motor coordination", asthmatic girls who puffed and panted if they had to trot a few yards. But Ugly Girl was one of the best athletes at Rocky River High¹. Even the guys had to acknowledge that fact, however they hated to. So Ms. Schultz, our gym teacher (kind of an Ugly Girl herself, big-boned, clumsy in social situations, with coarse swarthy skin and kinky hair), always named me a team captain. She'd call out "Ursula Riggs" like she hadn't any idea the name was ugly, and even when she chided me – "Ursula, be careful!" – "Ursula, that's a foul!" – you could tell she favored me, in secret. *Ugly Girls got to stick together, right?*

In seventh and eighth grades I was a swimmer-diver, and that was my happiest time. But swim team didn't work out. Ugly Girl's body wasn't built for the diving board, or for water. Or for critical eyes. In high school I got into "land" sports – "contact" sports. Soccer, field hockey, volleyball, basketball. There Ugly Girl excelled. Junior year I was captain of the Rocky River girls' basketball team. We were on a winning streak, though I surely wasn't what you'd call a popular captain, and if I was in one of my Fiery Red moods, I wasn't what you'd call a team player. I was out to score, and I scored.

Ms. Schultz scolded me, in the way that teachers who like you can scold, letting you know they expect more of you than you're giving. "You're a gifted athlete, Ursula, and I know that you're a very good academic student too. When you want to be." Pause. "I wish I could rely upon you more, with your teammates." I didn't like hearing this, but I just shrugged and stared at the floor. My clunky feet. Ugly Girl wished she could rely upon herself more, too.

I didn't have many friends in Rocky River. (My mom and little sister were into "friends.") But that was a Boring Fact.

Strange: how stuff that used to bother me in middle school, had the power to make me hide away and cry, didn't bother me at all now. Since that day I woke up and knew I wasn't an ugly girl, I was Ugly Girl.

I laughed, and it wasn't a nice feminine laugh like my mother encourages. It was a real laugh, deep in the gut.

I would never be ashamed of my body again; I would be proud of it. (Except maybe my breasts. Which I strapped in like I was on swim team, and kind of flattened, in a sports bra.)

My hair used to be this pretty fluffy blond, the baby pictures show. Now it's darker. For the hell of it someday I'd like to shave my skull, like a skinhead. Or maybe trim my hair in a crew cut. Or dye it black. Or bleach it. Except my dad wouldn't approve and my mom would die of shame. They had their prissy notions of *girl* like my kid sister, Lisa. Lisa is an aspiring ballerina, and Mom's gaga about her dancing classes.

What pissed me was until just recently my Grandma Riggs was into comparing Lisa and me. "Ursula, dear, when are you going to *stop growing?*" Like this was a joke, or something I could control by an act of will, which made me hate the Grandma Riggs I used to love.

Why do old people who've known you since infancy think they actually *know you* and can say insulting things?

"I'll stop growing, Grandma," I said, trying to keep it pleasant, "when you stop getting older. OK?"

That was mean. That hurt Grandma. Ugly Girl didn't care.

45 Lots of people I was starting to hate who I used to like a lot. But when you like people, you can be hurt. I'd made a few mistakes with girl friends, and one or two guys I'd thought were my buddies, and I wouldn't make these mistakes again.

50 What I liked about being so tall was I could look just about any guy eye-to-eye, even older guys on the street, or actual adult men I didn't know. Unlike other girls, I didn't shrink away like a balloon deflating if guys teased me or said crude things meant to embarrass. How do you embarrass Ugly Girl, exactly? [...]

Most of all it felt good to be as tall as, in some cases taller than, my teachers. [...]

55 I could see that my teachers didn't know what to make of me. There was Ursula Riggs, who was an excellent student, a serious girl with an interest in biology and art, and there was Ugly Girl, who played sports like a Comanche and who had a sullen, sarcastic tongue. It was Ugly Girl who was susceptible to "moods" – these ranged from Inky Black to Fiery Red. In a mood I'd sometimes walk out of class, yawning; or I might quit a test in the middle, just snatch up my backpack and exit. My grades were everything from A+ to F. In a rational frame of mind I knew I had to worry I'd screw up my SATs² and not get into a college of the caliber I could bear going to, but then in the next minute I'd shrug and laugh. *Who cares? Not Ugly Girl.*

Adapted from *Big Mouth & Ugly Girl* by Joyce Carol Oates, 2002.

¹ Rocky River High School

² The SAT is a standardized test used for college admissions in the United States.

COMPREHENSION (20 points)

Answer the questions in order. Try to respect the number of words specified by developing several ideas in longer answers. When the number of words is not specified, answer in one sentence. 'In your own words' means you have to reformulate the ideas of the text.

1. a) Who is the narrator and what do we know about her? (full name, approximate age, family members, particular talent)
b) Who is Ugly Girl?
2. Vocabulary: explain (or give a synonym for) the following words in context.
a) clumsy (l. 6) b) scold (l. 17) c) rely upon (l. 19)
d) buddies (l. 46) e) crude (l. 49) f) screw up (l. 58)
3. How does Ms. Schultz, the gym teacher, treat the narrator? Why? (*approx. 30-40 words*)
4. What does the narrator's family expect from her? How do you think this makes her feel? (*approx. 40-50 words*)
5. "Since that day I woke up and knew I wasn't an ugly girl, I was Ugly Girl." (l. 25-26) How did the narrator change? What was she like before and after? (*approx. 50-60 words*)
6. Focus on the last paragraph (l. 51-59).
a) "I could see that my teachers didn't know what to make of me." Explain the underlined section in your own words.
b) How do you think the narrator feels when she is in an "Inky Black" mood? What about a "Fiery Red" mood?
c) Choose a short quotation (not a full sentence) to justify each adjective describing the narrator:
-impulsive -aggressive -insolent
7. The narrator is a complex character. What makes her so complex? Make reference to ideas but also the style of writing (e.g. point of view, punctuation, use of capitals or italics, tone...). (*approx. 60 words*)

WRITING (20 points)

Treat both subjects. On the whole, you should write approximately 300-350 words. Please indicate the number of words you used at the end of each subject. Up to ten points are available for the content of your answer, and up to ten points for the quality of your writing. Please do not write your name anywhere in your answers.

1. Imagine you are an American student transferring to Rocky River High. The principal has asked Ursula Riggs to show you around the school. Write the scene from your point of view, but include some dialogue. Start with this and continue: *I was waiting in the hall of my new school when I saw a girl walking towards me. She was...* (150-200 words)
2. The narrator says "when you like people, you can be hurt." (l. 44-45) Do you agree? Discuss and illustrate with examples. (150-200 words)