

3

Boarding schools



Source: Adobe Stock/smartin69

3 a

Ten words to go on

Speaking

Eton, Harrow, Westminster – boarding schools have a long-standing tradition in the British school system. Look at the ten words below and with a partner talk about what they mean when it comes to boarding schools. Go into some detail. Talk not only about the literal meaning, but also about the personal associations that come to your mind.

admittance

halls / spaces

bursary / scholarships

dormitory

houses

boards vs. day

expulsion

assembly

academic achievements

selective

3 b

School vocab

Lead-in

Before you dive further into the topic of boarding schools, have a look at the phrases below and complete them with one word from the box.

be expelled • receive • get suspended • join • participate • be assigned • sit • fall behind • take up • get • attend • follow • catch up on

- to _____ ¹ a boarding school = to go to boarding school
- to _____ ² a strict timetable = to stick to a strict timetable
- to _____ ³ in extracurricular activities = to take part in extracurricular activities
- to _____ ⁴ pastoral care = to get pastoral care
- to _____ ⁵ a housemaster / housemistress = to be told who your housemaster / housemistress is
- to _____ ⁶ an exam = to take an exam
- to _____ ⁷ homework = to spend time doing homework you should have done before
- to _____ ⁸ in class = to fail to keep up with schoolwork
- to _____ ⁹ from school = to be kicked out of school
- to _____ ¹⁰ for bad behaviour = to be excluded temporarily
- to _____ ¹¹ a school society / club = to start participating in a society / club
- to _____ ¹² a leadership role = to step into a leadership role
- to _____ ¹³ homesick = to miss home

pastoral care: support provided for students' social, emotional and spiritual well-being

3 c

Language in use

The pros of boarding

Ever considered what advantages a boarding school may have? Read the text by Sidcot School about the benefits of living at school. Some words are missing. Choose the correct word (A–M) for each gap (1–10). There are two extra words that you should not use. Write your answers in the spaces provided. The first one (0) has been done for you.

BE

Six advantages of boarding schools

Boarding school life is rewarding, challenging and sets children up for a bright future. Some of the many advantages of boarding schools (0) _ _ _:

1. Intellectual growth

Conversations around learning can (1) _ _ _ on long after lessons have finished thanks to extra time on campus. Children are able to discuss what they have learnt and new ideas they have had.

2. Resources and facilities

The quality of the resources and facilities is one of the renowned advantages of boarding schools. It is a perfect environment for children with a thirst for learning but also for those who want to pursue other hobbies and passions. At Sidcot, students (2) _ _ _ close to our libraries and sports centre and have lots of open green spaces to pursue the activities that (3) _ _ _ them live life to the full.

3. Personal growth

Access to varied opportunities means children have the time and ability to (4) _ _ _ their curiosity. Sidcot School offers students the chance to try everything from art and drama to sporting endeavours and intellectual pursuits. Students can actively (5) _ _ _ time in interests they're most passionate about.

4. Relationships

Friendships flourish at boarding school. Children support and encourage one another, make lifelong friendships and (6) _ _ _ a wonderful experience. The teacher and student relationship is also a supportive one, with an increased level of mentorship and guidance. Interpersonal relationships (7) _ _ _ children a real sense of belonging and therefore boost student wellbeing.

5. Independence

Students naturally (8) _ _ _ to being away from home, looking after themselves, and managing responsibilities. Children learn to make their own decisions, navigate challenges, and (9) _ _ _ their time. This fosters personal growth and self-reliance.

6. Cultural diversity

Living with peers from diverse backgrounds exposes students to different cultures and perspectives. At Sidcot School, we have an ethos of equality and community, and an environment that values all individuals and the contribution they (10) _ _ _ to school and the wider world.

Source: www.sidcot.org.uk/sidcot-blog/7-advantages-boarding-schools

Test format
Banked gap-fill

- | | | |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------|
| A adapt | F include | K prioritise |
| B broaden | G invest | L satisfy |
| C carry | H live | M share |
| D give | I make | |
| E help | J mean | |

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
F										

3 d The downsides of boarding schools

Speaking

As true as all of the arguments in the text above certainly are, there's always a flip side to every coin. Go back to the text in 3 c and read it for understanding. Think of arguments or scenarios that express disadvantages of boarding. Use the phrases in the VocabBooster.

VocabBooster

... yet on the other hand, ...	I doubt that ...
While it is true that ..., you mustn't forget ...	I don't see how boarding schools provide ...
As much as ..., boarding also ...	The flip side, however, could be students with ...
... doesn't seem to be an advantage of boarding as such, but rather ...	I reckon boarding schools can have a major impact on ...
To my mind boarding deepens / fosters ...	Despite the fact that students learn ..., they also ...
I am sceptical that boarding increases ...	Bearing all of this in mind, it still seems a ... option for ...
The text fails to consider ...	
I believe there is great danger in ...	
The argument is ..., but what about ...?	
... nevertheless, we must consider ...	

3 e The seventh reason

Writing

The text in 3 c lacks a paragraph entitled "Structure". Write one, explaining how boarding school helps provide structure. Bear in mind that any English paragraph needs a topic sentence that is then fleshed out with explanations and examples.

3 f Who goes there?

Speaking



Form groups of three and talk about how you picture the pupils who attend boarding school and their parents. Consider the questions below and take notes.

- » What are the stereotypes that come to your minds?
- » Why might children want to go to boarding school?
- » Why might parents want to send their children to boarding school?
- » Which jobs do their parents have?

Then feed your info into a picture-generating AI tool (e.g. Midjourney, Canva or Stable Diffusion) and have it create a picture that encompasses all your ideas. Show the pictures that were created by the AI tool in class and talk about your opinions and how objective you think your assumptions are.

3 g Role play

Speaking

Get into groups of four and decide who gets to play which role. The situation is this: it's family dinner time and the debate is whether or not Robin should attend Oakleigh Hall – a private boarding school that is a 60-minute car ride away. Who of you will win the discussion?

alumnus / alumna
(plural: alumni):
person who has
attended a certain
school

weekly boarding: only
staying at boarding
school from Monday
to Friday

Role A: Robin – the age you are now

- » not convinced by idea of boarding school
- » strong friendships in current school
- » would like to think about it for one more year

Role B: Robin's father / mother

- » values educational opportunities there
- » worried about letting daughter go
- » wants Robin to start as soon as possible, but doing weekly boarding

Role C: Robin's great-uncle / great-aunt

- » one in a long line of Oakleigh Hall alumni
- » boarding school enthusiast
- » weekends there were the best thing ever
- » wants Robin to start yesterday

Role D: Robin's older brother / sister

- » first in family line to stay at a day school
- » sees great dangers in boarding schools
- » wants Robin to stay at her current day school

3 h Speaking

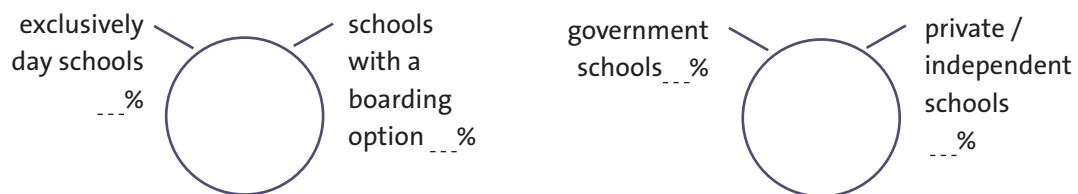
The top 10 schools of the UK

Below you find the top ten secondary schools (11- to 18-year-olds) of 2025 according to *The Times*. Read through the ranking criteria. If there is anything you don't know / are unsure about, ask a classmate; only use your teacher as a last resort.

boarding option	private / independent school	
		1. St Paul's Girls' School
		2. St Paul's School
		3. = 4. Brighton College
		4. = 3. King's College School, Wimbledon
		5. Westminster School
		6. Godolphin and Latymer
		7. North London Collegiate School
		8. Guildford High School
		9. City of London School for Girls
		10. The Henrietta Barnett School

Parent Power table ranks schools on their average performance using A-level, GCSE and IB outcomes from summer 2024 and Advance Higher, Higher, National and KS2 outcomes from 2023. If a school does not appear in the league table, it is most likely because it did not respond to our requests for its results, or the results could not be found in the public domain.

Top 10 schools



3 i Follow-up

Boarding school or day school?

Take out your mobile phone, tablet or laptop. How quickly can you find out which of these offer a boarding option? Also find out whether they are private / independent or government schools. Then do the math and complete the pie charts in 3 h.

3 j Speaking

Why?

Ask your teacher for the percentages regarding boarding and funding for the entire UK. Compare these numbers with your two pie charts. What might be the reasons for these results? What qualities does a boarding school foster to achieve such a high ranking? Also talk about what factors make a good school for you. Collect ideas on how you could measure the quality of a school.

3 k Follow-up

Pick a school

Go online and find the top 100 boarding schools on a website such as [Top School Guide](#) or [Best Schools](#). Find one that has an image video available online, watch it and take notes about these aspects:

- » people that are shown
- » qualities that are emphasised
- » aspects that are not addressed

Source: www.thetimes.com/best-schools-league-table/secondary/article/top-secondary-schools-revealed-6wgtftfnwk

3 I Speaking

Leaving home

“Unless you have been to boarding school when you are very young, it is absolutely impossible to appreciate the delight of living at home.” – Roald Dahl, 1916–1990, author

Test format Individual long turn

Give a five-minute talk on the subject of sending children to boarding school in which you

- » explain different students' attitudes towards boarding,
- » consider how much students' age matters when it comes to boarding,
- » speculate what might make you want to go to boarding school.

3 m

The Second Form at St. Clare's

Lead-in

Enid Blyton (1897–1968) was a famous and successful author of children's and young adult literature (CYAL).

antics:
behaviour that
is silly or funny

Read this extract about what unsupervised young girls did in Enid Blyton's 1944 novel that is set in the fictional boarding school St. Clare's. Does this sound like a core boarding school experience to you? What do you think you would get up to, if you lived with your classmates?

“Midnight,” she whispered in Carlotta's ear. Carlotta's heart jumped for joy. Her birthday feast, of course! [...]

5 Everyone went to the common room. Not until the door was fast-shut and cushions put along the bottom to hide the crack of light, was the light switched on. Then what a whispering and giggling there was! [...]

10 Everything was taken from the hiding-places – from the bottom of cupboards, and the back of shelves, from tuckboxes and tins, and from behind books in book-cases. Soon the common room tables were set with the empty plates and dishes. The largest plate of all was put in the

15 middle. That was for the lovely birthday cake. “Now for a real, proper Feast!” said Carlotta, happily. She and the others set out the goodies they had – the cakes and the buns, the biscuits and the sweets. They opened the tins and emptied the contents on to dishes – sardines, fruit

20 salad, pineapples, prawns, the most wonderful selection of things imaginable! Carlotta opened a dozen ginger-beer bottles. At each pop there was a giggle. [...] “Come on, every

25 one – let's really enjoy ourselves!” The second-formers certainly *did* enjoy themselves. After a bit they forgot to whisper, and began to speak in their normal voices. It didn't

matter, really. They were too far from any sleeping mistress to be heard. They giggled at 30 everything, and laughed till the tears came at Doris and her idiotic antics with empty ginger-beer bottles.

They ate everything. Carlotta even ate sardines and pineapple together. Alison tried prawns 35 dipped in ginger-beer, which Pat and Isabel said were “simply super”, but they made her feel sick taken that way. However, the others didn't mind, and mixed all the food together with surprising results. 40

“Nobody would dream that sardines pressed into ginger-bread cake would taste so nice,” said Janet. “My brother told me that and I didn't believe him. But it's true.”

The birthday cake was marvellous. It melted 45 in the mouth! The candles were lighted very soon and the light turned off. All the girls sat munching happily, watching the fifteen candles flicker and glow. It was lovely.

“A happy year to you, Carlotta!” said Pat, holding up her mug of ginger-beer. “It's your birthday now, because it's past midnight. Many happy returns of the day!”

“Thanks,” said Carlotta, her vivid little face radiant. 55



prawn

Source: Adobe Stock/seephai

Source: Enid Blyton – *The Second Form at St. Clare's* (Methuen 1944)

3 n Reading

Parents in CYAL

Generally, less parental supervision enables more adventures for the students. And this is used in many children's and young adult novels. Read this book extract that shows the ideas presented in *Family in Children's and Young Adult Literature*. Some parts are missing. Choose the correct part (A–L) for each gap (1–9). There are two extra parts that you should not use. Write your answers in the spaces provided. The first one (0) has been done for you.



Source: Adobe Stock/Daria

Australian English

Why children's stories are full of orphans, evil stepmothers and boarding schools

For most of the history of western children's literature, only a narrow range of familial experiences was 'reflected' in children's literature. Readers became familiar with both the bourgeois 'ideal' of the white, heteronormative nuclear family and, conversely, (0) ...

The plucky orphan protagonist has been a stock character in children's literature for centuries. Many of the canonical or 'classic' children's stories focus on the trials and eventual triumphs of an orphaned (or at least bereaved) child, and the theme remains a popular one for contemporary authors, too.

Why is the only good parent a dead parent?

Even in fantasy literature, it would stretch a reader's credulity too far to expect them to believe that a parent would allow their child to play with wolves and bears in the jungle, work as a teenage spy for MI5, rob priceless artworks from the great museums of Europe or fight the most powerful dark wizard of the age.

Instead, parents must necessarily be either physically absent or, at the very least, emotionally distant. Often this imperative is achieved even before the story begins or (1) ... There exists, then, a very practical understanding between authors and readers; parents must be disposed of, ideally swiftly and with no questions asked.

In a 2010 article in *Publishers Weekly*, children's book editor Leila Sales reported: "Dead parents are so much a part of middle-grade and teen fiction at this point, it's not even the 'in' thing. It's just an accepted fact: (2) ..."

She decries the recourse to what she calls "The Ol' Dead Dad Syndrome" as "lazy writing" and

encourages authors to explore (3) ...:

"Set the book at boarding school, summer camp, or another parent-free zone. Create parents who are clueless or uninvolved, à la *Harriet the Spy*. Fade their role into the background."

Escape to boarding school

From the school stories of Angela Brazil (1906–1946); Enid Blyton's *Malory Towers* (1946–1951) and *St. Clare's* (1941–1945) series and, of course, the more recent success of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007), the boarding school narrative has long enjoyed popularity with young readers.

The boarding school appears to function as a wish fulfilment for many children, allowing them to imagine being temporarily free from the strictures of parental supervision (4) ...

Mothers are sacrosanct, but stepmothers – obviously they're evil

While all readers, children and adults alike, are familiar with the stock character of the wicked stepmother from fairy tales like *Snow White*, *Rapunzel* and *Cinderella* (not to mention their Disney adaptations), there are few genuinely cruel natal mothers in children's literature.

In our book, Claudia Schwabe explains in her essay *Where Are They Now? Manifestations of (Monstrous) Mothers in Fairy Tales*, when Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm set about collecting their now canonical German fairy tales in the early nineteenth century, they silently excised any 'bad' mothers, (5) ... to preserve what she terms the "sanctity of motherhood".

While mothers may be incompetent, incapacitated, or inattentive, a truly wicked natal

nuclear family:
parents and
their children as
a family unit

credulity: wish
to believe
something

to excise: to
remove

Source: Eleanor Spencer-Regan, Jade Dillon Craig – pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/why-children-s-stories-are-full-of-orphans-evil-stepmothers-and-boarding-schools

to valorise: to accept, to put value to sth

seminal: very important

75 mother is, it seems, (6) ___ (even Mrs Wormwood in Roald Dahl's *Matilda* is stupid, selfish and uncaring rather than actively malevolent and Mary's cruel mother in Jacqueline Wilson's *The Diamond Girls* is revealed to be suffering from an undiagnosed mental illness).

The expanding notion of family, reflected back on us

80 In her seminal 1990 article *Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors*, Rudine Sims Bishop suggested that children's books may function either as 'mirrors', allowing readers to see their

own lives reflected, or 'windows', (7) ___.

85 For many decades, only a narrow range of familial experiences was 'reflected' in children's literature, denying many children the affirming experience of (8) ___.

90 The romanticised and socially valorised 'ideal' of the heteronormative nuclear family certainly still persists, as suggested by (9) ___.

95 But, as the academics and practitioners who contributed to our book make clear, modern authors and readers alike are more open to different ideas of what makes a family.

- A without having to confront that most frightening of prospects – parental death and orphanhood
- ~~B~~ the plight of the orphaned child
- C grief work to have been completed such as in *James and the Giant Peach*
- D affording them a view of a reality different from their own
- E kids in books are parentless
- F seeing families just like theirs
- G the hope of reunion with their parents driving the plot
- H in its very first pages
- I a taboo too far
- J the 'happily ever after' of the *Twilight* novels and the epilogue of the *Harry Potter* series
- K alternative ways of liberating child protagonists from parental supervision
- L replacing them with cruel, scheming and even murderous stepmothers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
B									

Test format
Multiple matching

3 o

Follow-up

Map it out

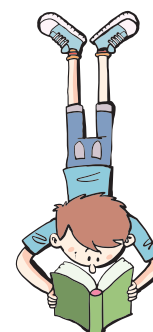
After getting the missing parts into the text in 3 n, read the whole text again. Organise the information you get into a mind map as preparation to summarise what you've read. Then get into pairs: one of you talks (try to speak for no more than two minutes while still getting all the main ideas across) while the other one listens and checks if all the points were covered.

3 p

Speaking

Where were the parents in your books?

Take a minute to recall the books you've read over the past seven or eight years. Where were the parents in those books? Collect the titles on the board and discuss how "absent" the parents were.



Source: Adobe Stock/Dusan