# KS3 More about his work

## Reading Text 6 – An extract from *Dylan Thomas – A New Life* by Andrew Lycett, pages 32 and 34.

This is an extract from Andrew Lycett’s biography of Dylan Thomas, where he describes Dylan’s early days in Swansea Grammar School.

Notes:

**Florrie** is Dylan Thomas’s mother.

**D.J** is Dylan Thomas’s father, who was an English master at Swansea Grammar School.

**Class 3A** is the equivalent of Year 9. The most academic pupils were taught in ‘A’ classes.

**Trigonometry** is the branch of mathematics which deals with measuring sides and angles of triangles.

Just before eight o’clock every morning, a mad scramble occurred on the hill outside the imposing Gothic Revival edifice of Swansea Grammar School. For several minutes beforehand, caretaker Williams Marley had tolled a bell summoning pupils from all quarters of the town. Then two or three minutes before the hour, he stopped, slowly walked across the courtyard, and then abruptly brought down a bar across the main front door. Anyone still outside was late and was duly punished.

On his first morning at his new school in September 1925 Dylan almost certainly made the journey there with his father. Florrie had dressed him in his uniform of bright red blazer, with matching cap, and had added a scarf to protect the sickly boy against Swansea’s changeable elements. Then he and D.J. took the back route – a fifteen-minute stroll along Terrace Road to the school on Mount Pleasant…

A traditional feature of the establishment was the ritual chastisement meted out to new boys by their peers. During their first week, recent arrivals would be taken to the lower of the school’s two playgrounds, beside the fives courts and the cricket nets, and unceremoniously thrown into the brambles and bushes beneath. With a resilience that belied his delicate physique, Dylan survived this barbaric initiation and began making his mark on the school… In the fast-stream class 3A, he had a reputation for being bright but lazy. When, despairing of Dylan’s repeated failures to complete any homework, his young Latin Master, J. Morgan Williams, boxed him around the ears, he was surprised to hear a staff colleague advise against such punishment, as D.J. would disapprove. Dylan usually played on this perception, trying to get away with doing as little as possible, because he knew that most masters stood in awe of his stiff father.

Initially at least, Dylan’s Latin improved under this regime and he may not have been as bad a student as his proud boast of being thirty-third in trigonometery would suggest. One of his physics exercise books survives, and it shows a conscientious second-year pupil who, despite a tendency to scribble random verses and sign his full name – Dylan Marlais Thomas – wrote up his experiments neatly and regularly received good marks…

## Tasks

1. Tick **true** or **false** for each sentence.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **true** | **false** |
| Swansea Grammar School was on the seafront. |  |  |
| Late pupils were unable to get into school. |  |  |
| New pupils had to play a game of cricket. |  |  |
| Dylan always did his Latin homework. |  |  |
| Dylan wrote his full name on his physics book. |  |  |
| Dylan’s physics book shows that he worked hard. |  |  |
| Dylan claimed he was a poor student. |  |  |

1. Look at the first paragraph again. Look at the definitions below and write the words from the text next to them:

|  |
| --- |
| impressive –  called together –  building –  suddenly –  properly, rightly – |

1. **Find and copy** one word from the third paragraph that shows that Dylan was a hard-working student.
2. Draw **4** lines to link the adjectives on the left with the nouns on the right.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| delicate |  | initiation |
|  |  |  |
| barbaric |  | failures |
|  |  |  |
| repeated |  | verses |
|  |  |  |
| random |  | physique |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| proud |  | boast |

Now, explain in which contexts the nouns and adjectives are used. One example is given for you:

1. Dylan is said to have a **delicate physique**.
2. Why had Florrie dressed Dylan in a scarf? Give **two** reasons

1. Why was Dylan not punished like other boys?

1. How did Dylan take advantage of this?
2. From the information in the passage, what have you learnt about Dylan as a student in Swansea Grammar School?
3. What impression do you get of D.J. Thomas, Dylan’s father, from the last 2 sentences of the 3rd paragraph?
4. Make a note of at least **5 differences** between your school and Swansea Grammar School.