Read the following extract from *David Copperfield* Imagine that you are David Copperfield who has been sent to boarding school as punishment for biting his stepfather…

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School began in earnest next day. A profound impression was made upon me, I remember, by the roar of voices in the schoolroom suddenly becoming hushed as death when Mr Creakle entered after breakfast, and stood in the doorway looking round upon us like a giant in a story-book surveying his captives.

Tungay stood at Mr Creakle's elbow. He had no occasion, I thought, to cry out 'Silence!' so ferociously, for the boys were all struck speechless and motionless.

Mr Creakle was seen to speak, and Tungay was heard, to this effect.

'Now, boys, this is a new half. Take care what you're about, in this new half. Come fresh up to the lessons, I advise you, for I come fresh up to the punishment. I won't flinch. It will be of no use your rubbing yourselves; you won't rub the marks out that I shall give you. Now get to work, every boy!'

When this dreadful exordium was over, and Tungay had stumped out again, Mr Creakle came to where I sat, and told me that if I were famous for biting, he was famous for biting, too. He then showed me the cane, and asked me what I thought of THAT, for a tooth? Was it a sharp tooth, hey? Was it a double tooth, hey? Had it a deep prong, hey? Did it bite, hey? Did it bite? At every question he gave me a fleshy cut with it that made me writhe; so I was very soon made free of Salem House (as Steerforth said), and was very soon in tears also.

Here I sit at the desk again, watching his eye—humbly watching his eye, as he rules a ciphering-book for another victim whose hands have just been flattened by that identical ruler, and who is trying to wipe the sting out with a pocket-handkerchief. I have plenty to do. I don't watch his eye in idleness, but because I am morbidly attracted to it, in a dread desire to know what he will do next, and whether it will be my turn to suffer, or somebody else's. A lane of small boys beyond me, with the same interest in his eye, watch it too. I think he knows it, though he pretends he don't. He makes dreadful mouths as he rules the ciphering-book; and now he throws his eye sideways down our lane, and we all droop over our books and tremble. A moment afterwards we are again eyeing him. An unhappy culprit, found guilty of imperfect exercise, approaches at his command. The culprit falters excuses, and professes a determination to do better tomorrow. Mr Creakle cuts a joke before he beats him, and we laugh at it,—miserable little dogs, we laugh, with our visages as white as ashes, and our hearts sinking into our boots.

Here I sit at the desk again, on a drowsy summer afternoon. A buzz and hum go up around me, as if the boys were so many bluebottles. A cloggy sensation of the lukewarm fat of meat is upon me (we dined an hour or two ago), and my head is as heavy as so much lead. I would give the world to go to sleep. I sit with my eye on Mr Creakle, blinking at him like a young owl; when sleep overpowers me for a minute, he still looms through my slumber, ruling those ciphering-books, until he softly comes behind me and wakes me to plainer perception of him, with a red ridge across my back.

**Comprehension**

Discuss the answers to these questions:

1. Who is Mr Creakle?
2. Who is Tungay?
3. Why do you think the hushed silence made such a profound impression on Copperfield?
4. Why do you think Mr Creakle refers to his cane as having a bite?
5. If you could change one thing about this extract, what would it be?
6. Do you think any boy ever defied Mr Creakle? Explain your opinion.

Think for yourself…

1. David Copperfield was sent to boarding school as a punishment for biting his stepfather. What does this suggest about the stepfather’s character? (2)
2. What similarities are there between Copperfield’s stepfather and Mr Creakle? (2)
3. What can we tell about Copperfield’s character? (2)
4. How can we tell that all the boys are petrified of Mr Creakle? (3)
5. Why do you think the boys laugh at Mr Creakle’s jokes? (3)
6. Mr Creakle has been portrayed as a tyrant, and all the boys are terrified of him. Do you think they would have been as scared of him had he been less obviously cruel? (2)
7. If you were a boy in the school, what would you say to David Copperfield about the way he is being treated? (2)
8. If you were a school inspector, how would you evaluate Mr Creakle’s school? (2)
9. How does the writer influence the reader’s opinion of Mr Creakle? (2)
10. How does the writer influence the reader to feel sorry for David Copperfield? After all, he did bite his stepfather! (2)