

Evans Tries An O-Level (Vistas Supplementary Reader)

—Colin Dexter

Chapter Analysis

Question Type & Marks	Year					
	2016		2017		2018	
	D	OD	D	OD	D	OD
SA	-	3	-	-	1	1
LA	-	-	-	-	-	-

Introduction :

In 'Evans Tries An O-Level', author Colin Dexter describes how Evans proves that all attempts of the prison officers like Jackson and Stephens and good-for-a-giggle Governor failed to stop him from escaping. All precautions have been made to see that O-level German examination, in the prison arranged for Evans, doesn't provide him with any means of escape. But in spite of all this, it is Evans who had the last laugh.

Summary :

1. Secretary, Examinations Board, Receives a call from Oxford Prison

It was early March. The Secretary of the Examination Board receives a call from the Oxford Prison. A chap called Evans started night classes in O-Level German last September. He is very keen to get some sort of academic qualification. The Governor enquires about the procedure. The Secretary asks him not to worry about it. He will be sending him all the forms and other necessary things. He enquires about Evans. The Governor assures him that there is no record of violence against Evans. It is decided to examine him in his prison cell. One of the persons from St. Mary Mag is arranged to invigilate.

2. 'Evans the Break'

The prison officers call him 'Evans the Break'. He had escaped from prison three times. At 8:30 in the morning, Evans had two visitors. Jackson was the senior prison officer of D Wing. He and Evans had already become 'warm enemies'. Stephens was a burly-surly officer. Evans' face is unshaven. He wears a dirty red and white bobble hat upon his head. They make sure that his razor and nail-scissors are taken away. He is given half an hour to smarten himself.

3. Reverend Stuart McLeery Comes to Invigilate

McLeery carries a brown suitcase. It contains all the necessary papers, including a sealed question paper envelope. The two hour examination is scheduled to start at 9:15 a.m. Stephens brings two small square tables and two hard chairs and places them opposite to each other. They are taking no chances with Evans. Stuart McLeery is greeted by Jackson at D Wing in the prison. It will be very difficult for Evans to make another break. He is sitting in a locked cell and all the prison officers are on high alert. The invigilator's duty is to ensure that the strictest silence is observed. The Governor is worried about McLeery. If he has brought something, even a Jack-knife, Evans can hold him hostage with such a weapon.

4. Examination Begins

The examinee and the invigilator have already been introduced by Stephens. McLeery asks Evans to write his name and index number on the paper. At 9:40 a.m., the Assistant Secretary speaks to the Governor. They had forgotten to place a correction slip in the examination package. Jackson fears whether the phone call is fake or is it some signal. But everything seems to be all right. Evans sits staring straight in front of him holding his pen between his lips. And opposite him sits McLeery. At 10:50 a.m., Evans wants a blanket round his shoulders as he is feeling cold. At 10:51 a.m. Stephens is surprised to see a grey blanket draped around Evans' shoulders. Stephens wonders if Evans is not planning anything in the blanket. At 11:20 a.m., McLeery informs Evans that only five minutes are remaining. At 11:22 a.m. Governor wants to speak to Stephens. He wants him to accompany McLeery to the main gates. At 11:25 a.m. McLeery announces "Stop writing, please". Stephens walks with McLeery to the main gates. Two abnormalities can be noticed here. McLeery's Scots accent seems broader than ever. His long black overcoat is reaching almost to his knees.



5. Stephens Wants to Take Just One Last Look at Evans

Stephens wants to take just one last look at Evans. He makes his way to Evans' cell. He opens the peep-hole once more. "Oh, no, Christ, No". Stephens cries. In Evans' chair a man is lying. His blanket is slipping from his shoulders. His tufted hair is awash with red blood. The man is McLeery. Stephens shouts loudly for Jackson. McLeery gives a long moan and tries to speak. He asks them to get the police. He knows where Evans has gone. Almost immediately, sirens start sounding. And within a minute McLeery, with Jackson and Stephens supporting him on either side, is greeted by the Governor. McLeery shows him a photocopied sheet cleverly super-imposed over the last page of the question paper. The Governor reads. "... Don't hit him too hard—remember, he's a minister! And don't overdo the Scots accent when" McLeery cries "Elsfield Way". Evans has gone there. The Governor is furious. He asks who took Evans to the main gates. Stephens says that he acted as he was directed. The Governor is angry again. He calls Stephens 'a blithering idiot'. It was not he who rang them at 11:20 a.m. He also tells Jackson that his "skull's empty". It was Jackson who had spent two hours in Evans' cell and reported that there was nothing hidden there. And yet Evans managed to conceal a false beard, a pair of spectacles and also a sort of weapon with which he had given McLeery such a terrible blow. The Governor read the last line of the paper left by Evans in German "... make your way to ... to Neugraben".

6. Hunt for Evans

The Governor lights a cigarette. It is a "beautifully laid plan." He has left that question paper behind. Perhaps he was careless to leave that clue. He is sure that 'Mr. clever-clever Evans' will be back inside his cell again. Then information comes that McLeery has spotted Evans driving off along the Elsfield Way.

The Governor asks Carter if he has managed to get McLeery to hospital properly. He is told that McLeery is in the Radcliffe hospital. A few minutes later, the Governor rings the hospital. The reply comes that no one named McLeery is there. The ambulance was sent to Elsfield to pick him up but he vanished. A quarter of an hour later, they find S. McLeery, securely bound and gagged in his study in Broad Street. He has been there since 8:15 a.m.

And by that time, everyone in the prison knows what has happened. It is not Evans, impersonating McLeery, who has walked out, it is Evans, impersonating McLeery who has stayed in.

7. Where Did Evans Go ?

Evans walks up to the reception desk of the Golden Lion Hotel. He had to do a long and tricky operation. He was lucky that Jackson didn't take his hat off. Sticking a beard was one of the worst things. Evans now collects his key. He asks for an early morning call at 6:45 a.m. He, himself, whistles softly to him. He thanks God that everything has gone "beautifully smoothly." He unlocks his bedroom door and, then, stands frozen at the spot. Sitting on the bed is the last man in the world that Evans had expected. He was the Governor.

8. Evans Surrenders

Evans is visibly shaken. For several minutes, there is utter silence. He is beaten at his own game. He tells that the correction slip killed two little birds with a single stone. It gave the name of the hotel for Evans and the exact time the exam started. Then, Evans asks how the Governor could locate the hotel in which he was staying. The clue came from the paper itself. Evans wrote Index Number 313; Centre Number 271. The six figure reference 313/271 landed him there. The Governor stands up. He asks Evans to tell him how he got all that blood to pour over his head. Evans replies that it was 'pig's blood' from the slaughter house. But to stop it from clotting one has to mix actual blood and a chemical. In the end, the Governor asks how he could manage to plan all this business. Evans replies that he has many friends. The German teacher is one of them.

A silent prison officer handcuffs the recaptured Evans. He does not resist. Two men clamber into the back seat of the prison van. The Governor says farewell to him like a good old friend.

9. Evans Has the Last Laugh

The prison van turns right on to the Oxford road. The silent prison officer unlocks Evans' handcuffs. He asks the driver to 'move on' to Newbury. "It won't take them long to find out—". Thus, Evans moves on to freedom proving that the Governor was a fool and only "good-for-a-giggle". The man who removes his handcuffs is Evans' own man.

Short Answer Type Questions

[2 marks each]

(Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words each.)

Q. 1. How did the Governor, Oxford Prison describe Evans to the Secretary Examination Board ?

[Outside Delhi Set I, 2016]

OR

What impression of Evan's did the Governor give to the Secretary of the Examination Board ?

[Comptt. Delhi / Outside Delhi 2018]

OR

What opinion of Evans did the prison authorities convey to the secretary, Education Board?

[Outside Delhi Set II, 2016]

Ans. Value Points :

- no record of violence
- very pleasant fellow
- star at the Christmas concert
- a congenital kleptomaniac (any 2)

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2018] 2



Ans. e) The governor of the prison told the secretary of the Ex Education Board that Evans was well trained to take the 'O' level German exam. Also he told that Evans was a nice chap and was not violent. He was rather an entertainer in the prison. He had special talents of and took part in plays. The Governor called Evans a congenital kleptomaniac.

[Topper's Answer, 2016] 2

Detailed Answer : The Governor gave quite a satisfactory report about Evans to the Secretary of the Board. It was stated that Evans had no record of violence and he was quite a 'pleasant sort of chap'. Evans was one of the stars at the Christmas concert but he suffered from a weakness. He was a congenital kleptomaniac. On the other hand, he was good at imitations.

Q. 3. What was his German teacher's opinion of Evan's proficiency in German ? [Outside Delhi Set III, 2016]

Ans. Value Points :

- German teacher doubtful of Evan's language ability
- Evans could not even understand basic pleasantries in German

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2016] 2

Detailed Answer : The German teacher did not have a good opinion about Evan's proficiency in German. He was doubtful about whether he would pass the exam as Evans could not understand even the basic pleasantries in German. So he was doubtful of Evans' language ability.

Q. 4. According to the Governor, what kind of person was Evans ? [Delhi Set III, 2015]

OR

What kind of a person was Evans ? Why did he want to sit for O level German examination ?

[Comptt., Delhi Set-III, 2014]

Ans. Value Points :

- Evans was considered a pleasant sort of chap by the prison authorities
- was good at imitations
- congenital kleptomaniac
- wanted to sit for examination to use the opportunity to escape from the prison
- was known as 'Evans the Break' because he had escaped from the prison thrice

(Any three) [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 2

Detailed Answer : Evans was also known as 'Evans the Break' as he had run away thrice from the jail. He was considered a pleasant sort of a chap by the prison authorities. He was good at imitations but was a congenital kleptomaniac. He wanted to sit

for examination so as to use the opportunity to escape from the prison.

Q. 5. What reasons did Evans give to keep his hat on his head ? What was the actual reason ?

[Comptt., Delhi Set-I, 2013]

Ans. Evans said that he wanted to keep his hat on because it was lucky for him. It always brought luck to him. But the real reason was that he had cut his hair to impersonate McLeery and he did not want the jail authorities to know that. 2

Q. 6. What were the contents of the small brown suitcase that McLeery carried ?

[HOTS] [Delhi Set-II, 2012]

Ans. McLeery's small brown suitcase contained a sealed question-paper envelope, a yellow invigilation form, a special 'authentication' card from the examination board, a paper knife and a semi-inflated rubber tube. 2

Q. 7. Why did people doubt Evans' sincerity towards taking the O' level exam ? [CBSE, SQP II, 2012]

Ans. Evans was very keen to get some sort of academic qualification. Evans was notorious for jail-breaking, so extra precautions were taken by the Governor because he didn't want to take any chances with him and it was decided that the exam would be conducted in Evans' cell. 2

Commonly Made Error

- The students do not follow the question carefully and give vague answers.

Answering Tips

- The circumstances in which and the level of preparation of Evans is a question on his sincerity.

Q. 8. Which important call did the Governor receive when the examination was going on ?

[Comptt., Delhi Set I, 2015]

Ans. The important call that the Governor received was from the Exam Department. The person said that there were some corrections in the Question Paper and told the Governor about the said corrections. Besides, the caller also asked for the time when the exam started. 2

Q.9. Which article in McLeery's suitcase played perhaps the most significant role in Evans' escape and how ? [Delhi / Outside Delhi 2018]



Ans. Value Points :

- semi-inflated rubber ring/tube with pigs blood; which he used to escape (pretend to be wounded McLeery)
- the question paper, provided the escape plan that misguided the jail authorities to go in another direction

2

[CBSE Marking Scheme 2018]

Detailed Answer : Evan was a habitual jail-breaker, who outwitted everyone and in spite of all the precautions, escaped from the prison. From the very beginning, when the German teacher entered the prison to the last encounter with the Governor in the hotel, the latter outsmarted everybody. The question paper for the examination served to send a message to Evans. McLerry drew the Governor's attention to the photocopied sheet super imposed over the last sheet of the question paper. It contained a message for Evans. He had been asked to follow the escape plan. The most important point in time, according to the message was three minutes before the end of the examination. The Governor was unable to decipher the next line of the German text. Then, he was asked to hit McLerry and not to overdo the Scott's accent. The correction slips also played a crucial role. At first, they hadn't been able to fix a hotel. The slips gave Evans the name of the hotel where he was to stay.

Q. 10. How does Evans escape from jail ?

[CBSE SQP 2015]

Ans. Evans decided to appear for the O level German Examination. When the examination was conducted, one of his accomplices came as the

invigilator, Mcleery. After the exam, Evans walked out, a free man disguised as the examiner McLeery.

2

Q. 11. What did the detective Superintendent inform the Governor about Evans ? [Delhi Set-III, 2012]

Ans. Carter told the Governor that he was at the Radcliffe Hospital. He was really groggy when they got to the Examination office and they rang for the ambulance from there.

2

Q. 12. What could the Governor have done to securely bring Evans back to the prison from the 'Golden Lion'. [HOTS] [Delhi Set I, 2015]

Ans. The Governor, instead of sending Evans with other officers in some other car, could have got Evans back with himself in his own car or should have sat in the van in which Evans was supposed to go. This way, he could have known that the people in the van were not his men but Evan's accomplices.

2

Commonly Made Error

- Some students answer what steps were taken by the Governor to bring Evans to the prison.

Answering Tips

- The question asks about the opinion of the students as to what steps should have been taken by the Governor.

Q. 13. How did the Governor find out where Evans was ? [Comptt., Outside Delhi Set-I, II & III, 2012]

Ans. The Governor came to know where Evans was when he read the note in German on the question paper, about index & centre number.

2

Long Answer Type Questions

[6 marks each]

(Answer the following questions in about 125-150 words)

Q.1. It was sheer negligence on the part of the prison staff that helped Evans to escape. Comment. [Comptt., Delhi Set II, 2015]

OR

How did the negligence of the prison officers prove to be a boon for Evans ? [Foreign, 2014]

OR

In spite of the precautions taken by the Governor, Evans was able to escape. How do you think he was able to do it ? [Outside Delhi Set-II, 2012]

Ans. Value Points :

- letting Evans see the name of the invigilator on the form
 - not taking more precautions in verifying the invigilator's identity despite knowing that Evans knew his name
 - letting Evans wear the hat for good luck
 - allowing McLeery to take the rubber tube inside
- Stephens's Mistakes :**
- not going to the cell despite seeing that Evans was just sitting there not writing at all

- not verifying the Governor's call
- not checking him despite seeing that McLeery looked slimmer while going out

Governor's Mistakes :

- appointed Stephens, a new guard to guard Evans
- allowing Stephens to move out of the cell when Evans protested
- letting Evans know that the cell was bugged
- letting the Examination phone call go through without verifying its call authenticity
- letting Evans wear a blanket
- assuming he had left the correction paper behind by mistake and believing the information in it
- calling for the police not the ambulance
- at the end, letting Evans escape a second time in a van without verifying the guards despite knowing how cunning Evans was

(Any three) [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 6

Detailed Answer : In spite of all the precautions taken by the Governor and his staff, they failed to foil Evans' bid to escape because of certain lapses



on their part. First of all, they called a teacher from the technical college to act as Evans' German tutor, but never cared to check on him. Then, they engaged Reverend S. McLeery to invigilate but never cared to check on him when he came to discharge his duties. When Stephens raised an alarm, they blindly went by his assumption that Evans impersonating as McLeery had walked out of the prison after injuring McLeery. They did not even bother to check the identity of the injured McLeery. Then, McLeery gave them the slip and disappeared. Belatedly they discovered that it was Evans impersonating McLeery who had stayed in. Finally, following the clues, the Governor nabs Evans at the Golden Lion Hotel. Here again, he acted foolishly. He rang up the local police station and asked them to send a police van which successfully took Evans away right from under his nose as no security check of the van was done.

Q. 2. Give a detailed account of the preparations made by the Governor for Evans James to write his examination. [Comptt. Delhi / Outside Delhi 2018]

OR

What precautions were taken by the prison authorities for the smooth conduct of examination ? [Delhi Set II, 2015]

[Comptt., Outside Delhi Set-I, 2014]

OR

What were the precautions taken by the prison officers to prevent Evans from escaping ? [Comptt., Outside Delhi Set II, 2014]

OR

Describe the precautions taken by the prison officers to prevent Evans from escaping ?

[Delhi Set-I, 2014]

OR

What precautions were taken by the prison authorities to ensure that the German exam was conducted smoothly and also under strict security ? [Delhi Set-I, II & III, 2011]

Ans. Value Points : Precautions taken by the prison authorities to prevent Evans' escape :

- officer Jackson - the senior prison officer of D wing and Stephens who was newly recruited to the force, visited Evans' cell
- checking of Evans' cell before the exam
- two square tables were set opposite to each other and two hard chairs were placed in the cell
- his razor, nail file and nail scissors were removed from the cell
- a bugging device was installed in the cell so that the Governor could listen to any talk going on there
- Stephens had to peep into his cell every few minutes.
- extra precautions were taken at the gates locked door between Evans' cell and the yard with high walls
- all messages and phone calls to go via the Governor

— a person from St. Mary Mags was deputed as an invigilator **[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2014] 6**

Detailed Answer : Evans, the prisoner was famous as "Evans, the Breaker". So the prison officers were quite alert while conducting the O' level exam and took all the precautions to prevent him from escaping. First of all, it was requested that the board should conduct the exam in the cell itself and the request was accepted. Two prison officers, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Stephens, were appointed to make all necessary arrangements. They took away his razor as well as nail-scissors so that he could not use them for any type of injuries to McLeery, the invigilator. The cell was searched for two hours and every objectionable thing was removed. Heavy security arrangements were made in the cell. Stephens was given the charge of staying there all the time to keep an eye on Evans and also to leave McLeery at the gate when the exam was over. The Governor was all the time in touch with the officers so as to thwart any untoward incident. Hence, it was a foolproof plan on the part of the prison officials. Even then, Evans had the last laugh and escaped from the prison.

Q. 3. How was the 'injured' McLeery able to befool the prison officers ? [Outside Delhi Set-I, 2012]

Ans. Value Points :

Injured McLeery was Evans himself
Evans impersonated McLeery with all make-up
didn't take an ambulance to avoid being taken to hospital
found a German question paper to convince the Governor of Evans' plans
managed to leave the premises with the Detective Superintendent, Carter

(Any three) [CBSE Marking Scheme, 2012] 6

Detailed Answer : All precautions had been taken for the smooth conduct of the O-level German examination. No one wanted to take chances with 'Evans the Breaker'. He had already escaped from prison three times. The Governor had to make an unusual request to the Board to conduct the examination in the cell itself. One of the persons from St. Mary Mag was to invigilate. The senior prison officer Jackson and prison officer Stephens left no stone unturned to make all the necessary arrangements. Evans' razor and nail scissors were taken away as they could be used for cutting his throat or injuring McLeery. Jackson took two hours to search his cell and reported that nothing was hidden there. But Evans disturbed all his plans. He managed to procure a false beard, a pair of spectacles, a dog collar and some sort of weapon in his cell through the false McLeery. Actually, he had managed to keep the real McLeery securely bound and gagged in his study at Board Street. He had been there since 8:15 am. This meant that McLeery never went to prison. Secondly, it was Evans who impersonated McLeery and stayed in the cell. Stephens made a hasty conclusion that the injured man in the chair was McLeery. The

last act of folly on the part of the Governor was enough to let Evans slip out of his net. Thus, this was how the 'injured' McLeery was able to befool the prison officers and Evans was able to escape.

Q. 4. What purpose did the question paper and the correction slip serve ? How did they help both the criminals and the Governor ?

[Outside Delhi Set-III, 2012]

Ans. The question paper serves to send a message to Evans. McLeery draws the Governor's attention to the photo-copied sheet superimposed over the last sheet of the question paper. It contains a message for Evans. He has been asked to follow the plan. The most important point in time, according to the message is three minutes before the end of the examination. The Governor is unable to decipher the next line of the German text. Then, Evans has been asked not to hit McLeery too hard and not to overdo the Scots accent.

The correction slip plays a crucial role in the plan of Evans' escape. It kills two birds with one stone. At first, they had not been able to fix up a hotel. The correction slip gives Evans the name of the hotel where he is to stay. Secondly, it gives them the opportunity to know the time when the examination started.

Q. 5. Describe three tricks used by Evans to escape from the prison.

[Comptt., Delhi Set-I/II/III, 2017]

Ans. Value Points : Tricks used by Evans

- taking O level exam with accomplice as invigilator / also tutor
- played on Jackson's compassion- allowed to wear cap
- used Stephens's ego – to walk McLeery to gate
- knew Governor was fair – asked him to remove Stephens from the cell
- had accomplice pose as McLeery
- cut his hair, covered with cap
- used blanket to cover himself
- devised plan B
- used correction slip

(Any three of the above)

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 6

Detailed Answer : Evans, the habitual jail-breaker outwits everyone and in spite of all the precautions taken by the Governor he is able to escape from the prison. From the very beginning when the German teacher enters the prison to the last encounter between the Governor and Evans in the hotel, the latter outsmarts them at each stage and proves that they are no match for his crafty scheming. Evans carries out all his plans 'right under their noses', turning the tables on them, making the prison authorities appear as 'good for nothing' officers.

For example, he knew that Mr. Jackson who used a rough tone had some compassion in him. He granted Evans' request to keep the filthy

looking red and white bobble hat on his head during the examination. The hat was actually to hide his recently cropped hair. Also he knew that prison officers will blindly go by assumption. He pretended to pose as 'injured' McLeery in the cell. No one checked the identity of 'injured' McLeery as it was assumed that Evans had hit McLeery and escaped.

In fact, Evans is actually, officially escorted out of jail by the prison official themselves. Finally at the hotel, when the Governor feels that he has been able to nab Evans, he dodges him and slips away.

Commonly Made Error

- Some students end up writing summary of the story here.

Answering Tips

- The various tricks (only the major ones) used by Evans need to be covered here.

Q. 6. Attempt a character sketch of the Governor in the story, 'Evans Tries an O-Level' What was the only flaw in his handling of Evans ?

[Comptt., Outside Delhi Set-I/II/III, 2017]

Ans. Value Points :

- conscientious – does his duty, does not want a bad name
 - meticulous – planned the exam
 - kind and considerate, fair, methodical
 - understanding, overcautious
- he was too considerate and humane towards Evans.

(Any other similar trait with example) (Any two)

[CBSE Marking Scheme, 2017] 6

Detailed Answer : The Governor of the HM prison, Oxford, appears to be a kind-hearted fellow at the start as he arranges for an O-level exam for a prisoner notorious for his ability to escape. As he was quite skeptical of Evans, he made every arrangement to make sure that Evans had no means to escape.

He was also very proud and self-conscious. He did not want Evans to disgrace him by escaping from the prison. He had a sharp presence of mind, which was clear from the fact that he cross-checked every call that was made to the prison that day.

However, he got over-confident of his arrangements and gave Evans the opportunity to escape. Also, he was a person who did not mind showering praise plan to him, he admired him.

At last, he proved to be just another gullible Governor when Evans tricked him again and successfully escaped. His overconfidence and self-praise let him down.

