

19th Century literary non-fiction

Source B

This 1845 article from the satirical magazine *Punch* comes from the series 'Punch's Guide to Servants'. This one is about the nursery-maid (a live-in servant who would look after a well-off family's children), offering nursery-maids guidance on what to expect in their role.

The Nursery-Maid

When you go to a new place, your mistress will, perhaps, tell you the character of each child, that you may know how to manage their different tempers; but you will, of course, use your own discretion. If one is pointed out as a high-spirited little fellow, you may be sure that he is fond of killing flies, tying toys to the dog's tail, striking you, and crying, as if you had struck
5 him, when he hears his mamma coming. If you are told that one of the dear boys has a turn for finding out how everything is made, and he must not be checked*, as his papa intends him for a civil-engineer, you may be sure that the juvenile spirit of inquiry will be shown in pulling your work-box to pieces, unless you turn his attention to the furniture, which he should be encouraged to dissect in preference to any of your property.

10 When you have a baby to take care of, some say you should be particular in its food; but if the child cries you have no time for this, and you must stop its mouth with anything that comes handiest. Indiscriminate feeding is said to lay the foundation of diseases which remain with the child through life; but as you do not remain with the child so long, this is not your business. A nurse who knows thoroughly what she is about will keep a little Godfrey's
15 Cordial*, or some other opiate, always at hand – but quite out of sight – to soothe the infant; for nothing is so distressing to the mother, or such a nuisance to yourself, as to hear a child continually crying. When there is only one infant these soothing syrups must be cautiously applied, lest the necessity for a nurse should terminate altogether, and you are thrown out of your situation.

20 An infant sometimes requires example before it will take to its food, and, as it is very nice, you may well eat one half of it first, to encourage the infant to eat the other. Use sugar in children's food very sparingly, and, lest the infant be tempted to want some of the sugar that is saved out of the quantity allowed, lose no time in locking it up out of sight in your own tea-caddy. If you wish to save your beer-money, recollect that milk is heavy for children, unless
25 mixed copiously* with water. As nothing ought to be wasted, you can drink what remains, instead of beer, at your dinner.

[...]

It is a very fine thing to encourage generosity in children, and you should therefore talk a great deal about the presents you have received on birth-days and on other occasions from the little dears in the place where you last lived. This will of course give your mistress a hint
30 as to what she ought to do. For the children will naturally ask to be allowed to make you presents, and the parents not liking to check the amiable feeling, and desirous of not being thought shabby in comparison with your former employers, will no doubt give – through the hands of the children – what you may have occasion for.

35 If you have nephews and nieces you may supply them with many little articles of dress that
are pronounced to be “past mending.” If your mistress notices that the stock of children’s
things diminish, you can suggest that “things won’t wear for ever,” which often passes as an
apology for a sensible diminution* in the number of socks and pinafores. You may observe
that Master So-and-so is such “a spirited little fellow, that he does wear his things out very
40 fast,” and your mistress will be satisfied if she thinks her child’s spirit has caused half his
wardrobe to evaporate.

If you follow all these instructions to the letter you will make as good a Nursery-Maid as the
best of them.

Glossary

* checked – stopped

* Godfrey’s Cordial – a ‘soothing syrup’ often given to babies, it was highly dangerous as it
contained opium and could kill (this is why the author suggests ‘caution’)

* diminution – reduction; getting smaller

* copiously – in large quantities

Sample Paper 2 Section A Question 3:

03 You now need to refer only to **Source B** from **lines 1 to 12**.

How does the writer use language to describe the children?

[12 marks]

This extract is from “Punch’s Guide to Servants: The Nursery-Maid” by author unknown in
Volume 9 of *Punch* magazine (1845) and the full text can be found online at
<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.32106011982235?urlappend=%3Bseq=29>.

This resource is brought to you by Dr Catherine Charlwood, a former teacher, lifelong
scholar and co-host of [LitSciPod: The Literature and Science Podcast](#). If you have
questions, she can be contacted at catherine.charlwood@cantab.net.