

# Candidate 4

Uses ~~dog~~ explaining to dog to try  
and explain to self. ✓

Dog symbolises her. ✓

Lost husband too. going out = moving on  
→ back to work

hearing things. ✓ ←

separate from others. ✓

empty life ~~park edge~~

flashbacks. ✓ ←

room symbolises empty life.

Squirrel. ✓

understanding. ✓

natural order ✓

names ✓

death word. ✓

B. Susan Perabo is very effective in presenting the grief of the mother in this story. She uses several literary techniques such as symbolism, comparison and repetition to show this ~~grief~~ grief.

In the story, Perabo uses the idea of the mother trying to explain her daughter's death to her dog Stu as a way of explaining it to herself. Therefore Stu the dog symbolises the mother's mind, simplified and confused. The mother's indifference to the world around her is effectively portrayed by Perabo using Stu's condition:

"His ears were back and his eyes open. He didn't raise his head when I came in."

This shows that the mother is still in shock after the death of her child.

This is also shown in the dog's reaction to a squirrel, which he would usually chase:

"Stu walked right past it, didn't even notice"

This reveals that the mother is incapable of feeling anything but grief.

The symbolism of the dog is also used to show the mother's confusion after the baby's death, as the truth hasn't quite sunk in yet:

"It wasn't even like trying to explain death to a child. The dog simply couldn't understand the language."

Perabo is making it clear here that the mother's mind has been addled: by her grief and she is refusing to accept what has happened. At the end of the story

the mother does come to some sort of understanding, through the dog:

"All he would come to understand was that the baby was not coming back."

This shows the finality of death and the defeated nature of the mother's grief.

Another effective use of symbolism is Perabo's representation of the baby's empty room as the mother's now-empty life. Perabo describes the room as "just too sad to look at", which reflects the mother's empty life.

Their attempts to get back to normal, represented by the solitary chair in the bare room, are also described:

"It looked unnatural by itself in the baby's room. Worse than bare. Just awkward."

This effectively shows that the mother is not ready yet to move on from her grief. The empty room also shows that the chapter of the mother's life with the baby in it has finished, as the "dolls and mobiles" have been stored "with the cobwebs in the basement"; irretrievable and final.

The mother's empty life is also shown by her trip to the park, as ~~this makes her realise that~~ this is somewhere that she used to come with the baby:

"The park was different with no baby. It seemed much safer."

This effectively shows how much less the mother has to think about now, and how much she misses the baby.

QUESTION	
	<p>Perabo also uses repetition to emphasise how much the mother had had to do when the baby was alive:</p>
	<p>"What to do with the baby dead? No diapers, no screaming, no feeding!"</p>
	<p>The rhetorical question also highlights the fact that the mother really can do nothing, as she is still in the numb stage of grief.</p>
	<p>Furthermore, Perabo makes it clear that the baby was her mother's whole life by showing that the mother cannot remember a time before the baby:</p>
	<p>"And what had I done before I got pregnant. I tried to remember."</p>
	<p>This really emphasises the grief as it shows how much the mother has lost.</p>

The mother's flashbacks are also an effective way of portraying her grief. First, she remembers the morning that she woke up to the dead baby:

"The morning the baby died ~~moments~~  
Todd shook me awake to the  
stillness."

This seems ominous, and the mother's refusal to accept the death is further emphasised in another flashback:

"...get me to stop slaking her and  
trying to wake her up."

These flashbacks show that the mother can't stop replaying the moments in her head, and can't escape the grief.

Furthermore, later on, Perabo drives the mother's grief home by saying:

"In the middle of the night I woke

up and heard the baby crying":

This is yet another indication that the mother can't believe what has happened, <sup>an</sup> and ineffective one too, as it ~~is~~ evokes great sympathy for the mother, especially when Perabo reminds us that it is impossible to: ~~was~~

"have heard the baby crying when the baby had been dead for over a week."

This brings both the reader and the mother back to the reality of death.

The mother's separation from others is also a sign of her grief, as nobody can understand what she is feeling. Perabo effectively ~~for~~ portrays this by repetition and imagery, ~~is~~ describing the mourners, who<sup>o</sup>:



"made their separate ways back to their separate lives, lives ~~was~~ that sailed along quite smoothly despite the absence of the infant whom they had been mourning for a good seven or eight days".

The repetition of "separate" and "lives" emphasises how these people can move on from the grief while the mother cannot. The image of them "sailing" along in their lives is also effective as it reveals the mother's bitterness that they are not as sad as she is, as does the ~~the~~ phrase "a good seven or eight days". The word choice of "good" is what reveals her sarcasm, as this would usually be used when talking about a longer period of time. This effectively shows that the

mother feels that everybody else got over her daughter's death much too quickly.

Her alienation is also emphasised by her almost petulant statement:

"~~As~~ No one wants to have lunch with me."

This highlights both how lonely the mother is without her baby and the fact that she ~~feels separate from people who~~ people who don't fully share her grief feel awkward to be with her.

Furthermore, Perabo has made the mother's grief even worse for her by making her almost lose her husband as well as the baby. He seems to be losing his mind:

"His spoon went from the cereal bowl to his mouth without being led by anything but habit."

This shows that her husband is also suffering, which effectively alienates the mother still further.

The <sup>couple's</sup> ~~wife's~~ inability ~~to~~ to move on from her grief is shown by their attempt to go out for dinner. Although at the beginning it looks like Todd has moved on:

"Todd went back to work; packed up his briefcase and kissed me goodbye;" it is clear that he has not, when, instead of finding him getting ready to go out, his wife finds him breaking down completely:

"He was more making little howling noises with his throat. And he just kept

whacking himself on the head."

This ~~effect~~ strange behaviour effectively shows that neither parent has got over their child's death, however her husband's inability to comfort the mother merely heightens her own grief.

Perabo also uses pathetic fallacy to show the mother's grief, saying:

"the natural order of things was wrong, so it was ugly out".

The "ugly" weather reflects the mother's mood, and the reference to the "natural order" reflects the fact that parents are supposed to die before their children, not see their children die, which effectively emphasises the mother's grief.

Perabo's decision to use the word "death"

throughout the story is also important.

She could easily have used euphemisms such as "passed away", but instead she uses the harsh truth. This effectively highlights the harshness and finality of death itself, especially in a child who did not get to live her life.

Finally, in the whole story, Perabo never gives the reader either the mother's or the daughter's names. The absence of the daughter's name ~~is~~ effectively portrays the mother's grief as it shows that "the baby" will only ever be a baby, never a fully grown person. The lack of a name for the mother is symbolic of the fact that she can't be a normal person again; she will always be the mother of the dead baby.