

# Commentary on candidate evidence

## Candidate 6

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for the coursework assessment task.

The candidate was awarded **15 marks**.

**Topic:** “Only a bi-polar poet? A comparative study of the varying moods of Sylvia Plath in her poetry.”

### Task

The task vaguely references “varying moods” without giving any indication of techniques to be studied. It also suggests that Plath’s qualities as a poet will be assessed despite her illness. Overall this could be seen as rather vague and not entirely helpful as a task.

### Knowledge and Understanding

The candidate undertakes an initial overview of the poet’s life which acts as a very simplistic introduction to the “emotional rollercoaster” of her life. The list of moods, ending “and much more” is overly casual, as is the simplicity of the term “The bi-polar Poet”. There follows three poems relating to Plath’s motherhood and two dark poems *Daddy* and *Lady Lazarus*. Through the analysis of these, we are asked to consider the extreme moods of the poet. The quality and insight of the analysis is straightforward and broadly supports the demands of the task: “Plath uses metaphors”, “Children find (clowns) funny”, “When fog appears it hides things ...” etc. Better is her treatment of Plath’s ambivalence as a mother. Occasionally the argument may go too far – “fat gold watch”. There is no link explaining the move from the baby poems to *Daddy*. Overall there is a knowledge and understanding of the key elements of mood in the poems. There is a broadly relevant approach to this task. The textual evidence does support the task though with some limitations.

### Analysis

Each poem is analysed clearly enough, though there is an inconsistency in the quality of the analysis: “her word choice of ‘happiest’ suggests that this child could be the thing that makes her happiest ...” versus “The nursery rhyme feel and flow makes it sound like an incantation ... her father”. Features of language are identified, but sometimes unnecessarily defined.

### Evaluation

Although each poem is analysed within its context, the place of each poem in the argument is not always made clear. The first poem starts optimistically with some dark ‘troubled’ images; the second is more optimistic; the third offers a duality of mood; then there is *Daddy*, without pointing out a change in the argument, and *Lady Lazarus* which are presented as unsettling and allow Plath to compare her father and husband, and introduce her obsession with suicide. The individual analysis is appropriate but their place in the whole could be more fully integrated. We have “her poetry goes from one extreme to another in each poem” which is clearly not true. The statement that she could be seen as “an inspiration, helping

people struggling ....” is a naïve attempt to show she is more than a bi-polar poet. That is the final focus of the conclusion but is not made a clear central concern throughout. What the candidate does do though is show how Plath is susceptible to extreme moods in her poetry, indicative of a discernible evaluative stance.

### Expression

The style and language are appropriate enough to allow the central argument to be delivered, although there are some inappropriate clichés e.g “rollercoaster”, “without her child, she would collapse.” The structure is essentially serial in its approach with occasional reference back to the central concern. Greater awareness of the whole of the task would have been of benefit to the candidate. The use of critical terminology, despite the odd simplification, is appropriate and relevant to this task. This dissertation just meets the standard described in the 15-18 range which justifies the award of 15 marks.