

# Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for the portfolio-writing component.

## Candidate 1

The candidate was awarded **7 marks**.

### Genre

Poetry – ‘Chasing Shadows’

### Content

This poem, entitled ‘Chasing Shadows’, is about a sibling relationship in which the speaker watches their elder sibling grow up and away from them.

The poem opens with the image of the younger child being in ‘the quiet shadow’ of their sibling and the idea of shadows is one that they return to in stanzas 5 (‘shadows closed’) and 7 (‘a shadow stretched thin’) suggesting that the speaker is somewhat overawed by their sibling’s more dominant personality. The speaker sees themselves as a ‘small ship drifting’ while the sibling is described as having the confidence to ‘sail forward’. These images of water are repeated in stanza 6 (‘The years flow like rivers’) and stanza 8 (‘the leaf adrift on the stream’) suggesting the passage of time and the idea that the speaker is without direction, moving through life without being able to steer.

In stanza 3, the candidate introduces the image of light with reference to ‘a dying star’ and this celestial reference is repeated in stanza 4 (‘the sun’). The candidate develops this further by linking light to time with ‘the lantern fading’ and ‘dusk’, which is an idea repeated in stanzas 4 (‘burning brightly’ and ‘twilight’), 5 (‘the flame’) and 7 (‘your future’s light’) suggesting the persona sees their sibling as powerful and strong

while the persona is diminished and overshadowed. This is further developed with the reference in the final stanza to the persona seeing themselves as ‘a whisper’ contrasting with the ‘laughter’ of their sibling in stanza 5 and, from the same stanza, the idea of being ‘unseen, unheard’.

The picture the candidate has built of themselves as a shadowy figure ‘struggling’ to keep up with their more self-assured sibling but never able to compete is one they return to throughout the poem, and this demonstrates **some imagination and thoughtfulness**.

## Structure

The candidate has structured their poem into eight stanzas of mostly quatrains, although stanza 2 is one line on its own (which may suggest the idea of separation) – but this has **limited impact**. There is a sense that the candidate has made an attempt to shape the poem, switching from past tense in stanzas 1 to 5 to present tense for stanzas 6 to 8. The final line recalls the title (‘a younger sibling chasing what’s already gone.’) and, as previously identified, there are metaphorical elements that link back and forth in the poem.

Taken as a whole, however, the structure has **limited impact**. In spite of the quatrains there is no sense of rhythmic pattern and the line breaks and punctuation do not always have a sense of purpose, nor do they help to elucidate meaning. In stanza 4, the candidate writes, ‘The pages of your story illuminated, // mine untouched, waiting in the distance.’ In stanza 6, the image of the river ‘swift and cold’ is marred by the structure of the following lines: ‘I, a stone, ... clinging to the remnants, // and fragments of a childhood that slips through my fingers.’ which appears as an accidental noun phrase. The phrasing is similarly unhelpful in stanza 7: ‘a younger heart struggling, // lost in the race we never ran, the path you know.’ These examples demonstrate that the candidate is not fully in control of their material as they begin each of these stanzas with a promising image which they are unable to sustain.

## Tone/mood

The candidate creates a yearning tone in the poem with the speaker always being left behind. For example, in stanza 1, 'I stood...//watching...//I remained' and stanza 4 'while I linger in the twilight, soft and grey' and stanza 8, 'And still I watch...'. Their imagery and lexical choices support the creation of a diffident and reserved character standing in awe of their sibling. There is an attempt to create an authorial voice in this poem and we get a sense that this candidate has an emotional connection to the subject, but this is **unsustained**. The voice is a little repetitive without the clear sense of growth or change that we might expect. The candidate struggles to go beyond the idea of being in the shadow of the sibling and they do not fully articulate their emotional connection to their topic. This results in a poem which has a **discernible mood** but with a **limited authorial voice**.

## Expression

The candidate has made an attempt to use imagination with **some originality** and this is sometimes successful. In stanza 6, the opening line ('The years flow like rivers, swift and cold') suggests time passing inexorably, but unfortunately, they abandon the metaphor halfway through the stanza. This can also be seen in stanza 4, where the 'you' is addressed as 'the sun', but then the imagery shifts, and continues with 'The pages of your story illuminated', rather than the addressee being the thing which illuminates.

The opening line of stanza 7 in which the speaker is a 'shadow stretched thin' suggests growing up but also points to the pressure that the speaker feels to measure up to their sibling. Again, this promising idea is not fully realised, and the candidate moves to the less original idea of a 'race we never ran'.

The opening line of stanza 8 ('And still I watch as you rise and unfold') has the potential to be developed in an interesting way but unfortunately the candidate mixes their metaphor and returns to the water imagery.

The candidate sometimes sacrifices meaning to a turn of phrase. For example, in stanza 3, 'I, the remnant of a world that still feels alive' and in stanza 8, 'a whisper in a world that no longer feels like ours'.

## **Range**

The candidate just meets the standard described in the 9-7 band range and is therefore awarded the mark from the bottom of the band range.

## Candidate 2

The candidate was awarded **9 marks**.

### Genre

Poetry – ‘Colours of Originality’

### Content

This poem, entitled ‘Colours of Originality’, explores ideas of identity, individuality and creativity. The candidate opens the poem by considering who they are (‘What is distinctive about me?’ [page 1]); moving on to consider the impact of outside influences (‘It’s how we mix them’ [page 2]); the forces that pull in different directions (‘It’s who people/Want me to be’ [page 3]); and finally their own individuality (‘I want to be myself’ [page 4]) and their own vulnerability (‘Unprotected gash’ [page 5]). The vacillation and constant questioning give the poem a sense of teenage angst as the persona struggles with their burgeoning adulthood and desire to become their own person. This feels like a genuine attempt at using the creative process as a reflective tool. These thematic concerns demonstrate **some thoughtfulness and insight**.

The title – ‘Colours of Originality’ – is appropriate as the candidate uses colour as a metaphor for their individuality. Specifically, they see red as representing their identity (‘I want to be red in a river full of scarlets’ [page 5]). The candidate demonstrates their imagination by developing the metaphor of colour and art throughout the poem as they try to unpack what defines them. There are references to ‘acrylics’ (page 1) and ‘oil paint’ (page 1); the ‘colour wheel’ (page 2); ‘vivid hues’ (page 3); ‘flicks of a paintbrush’ (page 4); the ‘canvas’ (page 5). Other metaphors, for example the ‘pair of shoe laces’ (page 3) and the ‘barren soil’ (page 4) are less convincingly insightful, but the idea of the ‘cigarette smoke’ (page 3) has some merit as the candidate makes use of contrast (‘Strong yet weak // Present yet foggy’) to explore their contradictory emotions and their search for self. This is a candidate attempting to harness poetic technique to express something elusive and abstract, so the metaphor of smoke feels appropriate.

At the end of the poem, the candidate returns to the power of art to express their singularity ('I want my handprint on the back of the // Canvas' [page 4]) and their introspective imagery in the final stanza reveals how vulnerable this search has left them: 'Shredded wound; carving, as it // Pierces through // Like open flesh. Raw.' [p5]. This shows **some insight**, and the link the candidate makes between the colour red and the idea of an '...invitation into its // Unprotected gash' (page 5) suggests they are embracing exposure and vulnerability.

## Structure

The candidate's use of free verse has **some impact**. Each stanza is seven lines long and, although there is no rhyme scheme, there is a sense that the candidate has made an attempt to shape and sequence these in an appropriate way. The looseness in the structure has some strengths and weaknesses. The uneven line lengths, use of caesura, dashes, questions and enjambement all add to the sense that the candidate is using the poem to explore and reflect on their identity and define themselves. But, at times, the stanzas feel a little randomly chopped up. For example, on page 2 'But being scarlet is: // A fragment of things in-between and I think this world has // Too many scarlets.' Also, on page 2 'Somebody is me. I am somebody // But I am not me.' On page 3, 'Yet so far // From my // True soul self'. On page 4, 'I want to look in the window of the // Soul, see the version I've // Mastered, without any unnecessary // Echoes and glimpses of passers-by.' These examples jar and break the flow of the poem without creating the impact the candidate has perhaps intended.

There are stanzas and lines that are more successful, for example the use of repetition on page 2 of the candidate's response, 'Create more // Unearth more' and similarly on page 4 of the candidate's response with the repetition of 'Lacking'. In the final stanza, the candidate returns to the colour imagery from earlier and this builds to an appropriate ending to the poem. Overall, the structure has **some impact**.

## Tone/mood

This poem begins with a rhetorical question and, at times, the candidate employs this technique to good effect for example, 'Why not be oil paint, allowing yourself // Time for development?' [p1] and 'A glimmer in my eye when // I finally see myself' [p4]. The candidate makes use of this reflective and questioning tone throughout the poem and this creates an **identifiable and appropriate authorial voice**. The use of contrast and rhetorical question gives the sense that the candidate is exploring and examining the contradictions of their own personality and identity in a very genuine way. There is a **discernible** energy and verve in terms of **tone and mood**.

## Expression

There are some interesting metaphors in this poem. The idea of the 'mind like a cloth' 'wringing out/individuality' (page 2) works well with their extended metaphor of art as they extend this idea to the 'Drops of reds bleeding' (page 2) that recall the paint from earlier in the poem. Similarly, the 'flicks of a paintbrush dragging // Ink to a smudge' (page 4) suggests the candidate's attempts to define their elusive identity. Perhaps less well integrated are the images of the shoelace (page 3) and the seed (page 4), which are at odds with the imagery of the paint and the colours.

There are some infelicities in the word choice and this mars the confidence of their expression. For example, 'provided intensity' (page 2), 'Lines; fragments; spirituality' (page 4). Overall, the candidate demonstrates **some originality** and, although there are missteps, the poem has an engaging authenticity in terms of the expression.

## Range

The candidate fully meets the standard described in the 9-7 band range and has been awarded the highest mark in the band range.

## Candidate 3

The candidate was awarded **6 marks**.

### Genre

Prose Fiction – ‘A Guide to Being Remembered’

This piece of writing is a fantasy narrative where the protagonist Anne wakes in a mystical library. Anne encounters the ‘ghostly figure’ (page 1 of the candidate response) of the librarian who reveals that the library “‘holds the story of everyone who ever lived.’” (page 2) Anne overcomes her initial shock – “‘I refuse to believe this’” (page 2) – to accept that she has died, ‘*this is what’s after life then*’. (page 3) Then, over the course of a pot of tea, Anne retells her life to the librarian who ‘filled in the blanks where she’d forgotten herself.’ (page 4) and together they finish the book of her life.

### Content

The library setting is briefly developed at the beginning of the story with Anne ‘a mere speck amongst the seemingly endless rows of library books.’ (page 1 of the candidate response) This is returned to with the librarian ‘gesturing to the infinite selection of stories.’ (page 2) However, the librarian’s assurance that “‘Once the time is right, the books will open for you.’” (page 3) is left unexplored in the abrupt conclusion of the story.

The characterisation of Anne as an elderly woman suffering from dementia is superficial – ‘She recognised the name to be hers, something she hadn’t done in a while.’ (page 1) Equally, the relationship with her pre-deceased husband Peter is underdeveloped, ‘he’d never have gotten to make as many memories in his life if it wasn’t for you.’ (page 4) However, there are moments where the candidate successfully creates a sense of a life well lived when ‘everything felt like the greatest adventure.’ (page 3), and of an empathetic nature, ‘Anne gave a pitiful smile back.’ (page 3)

The candidate attempts to give the figure of the librarian an enigmatic quality. However, the candidate's repeated reference to this character as a 'ghostly figure' is indicative of the **limited** nature of this piece.

The piece of writing demonstrates **treatment of the central thematic concerns and feelings which reveal limited thoughtfulness, insight and imagination throughout.**

## Structure

This piece has a linear structure which uses an omniscient narrator to portray Anne's swift journey from confusion to acceptance. The candidate displays **shaping and sequencing** that has a **limited impact**. For example, the candidate makes use of italics to illustrate Anne's inner thoughts which is often unsuccessful '*Where am I?*' (page 1), and the shift from Anne's 'fear taking over' (page 2) to the description of her sipping tea as she 'contemplated this reality' (page 3) is discordant. The ending of the piece is unfulfilling. However, the candidate does present the reader with a complete narrative.

## Tone/mood

**The tone/mood is unsustained revealing a limited authorial voice.** The depiction of Anne as 'The woman' (page 1) in a library where 'an eerie silence blanketed the air' (page 1) shows initial promise in creating a sense of mystery as do the books which are 'stuck fast.' (page 1) Equally, Anne's initial description of the librarian, 'When the woman tried to focus on the ghost in any great detail, it was as though they became more distant and translucent' (page 1) shows thematic potential in exploring the ethereal nature of the afterlife. However, the disproportionate level of overly expository dialogue combined with the didactical nature of the librarian character undermines any potential dramatic tension – "I'm afraid you were also suffering from dementia at that time." (page 2)

## Expression

The candidate's control over their paragraph and sentence structure is **limited**. For example, '*Anne. Is what this figure had called me.*' (page 1) The candidate's layout of direct speech undercuts the flow of the narrative, and there are also occasional slips in phrasing, such as 'the suggestion she was dizzying the person opposite her with just her thoughts.' (page 2) This candidate's piece is marked overall by **a use of style, technique and language with limited originality**.

## Range

This piece of writing fully meets the standard described in the 6-4 band range and is awarded the highest mark in that band range.

## Candidate 4

The candidate was awarded **14 marks**.

### Genre

Drama – ‘White Noise’

### Content

In this drama script we are introduced to the Smith family. The mother, Sarah, is a politician who is currently campaigning whilst also hosting extended family members who are visiting. **Thematic concerns** include control, denial and abuse, which **reveal sustained thoughtfulness, insight and imagination throughout**. It becomes apparent to the audience that the daughter, Zoe, is being abused by her father, Eric. This play shows maturity from the candidate in dealing sensitively with such a serious topic.

The play begins with the arrival of Aunt Neeve, Uncle David, Grandma O and Grandpa O. Everyone seems to be in good spirits, but subtle tensions are already present: ‘Careful with that, the last time you carried a pie we had to repaint the hallway,’ (page 1 of the candidate response) ‘Right, shoes off everyone, unless you want to vacuum later,’ (page 1) and ‘Careful now Eric! We don’t want a repeat of last Christmas do we!’ (page 1) The stage directions indicate that these lines be delivered by the various characters with a smile, however, the theme of control is implicit.

As the family settle, daughter Zoe appears from upstairs. Her age is undisclosed, but she is described as ‘little Zoe’ (page 2) suggesting a young child. As she sees her father, ‘*she pauses for a moment, hesitating before walking past him,*’ (page 2) and the candidate effectively uses small details like this to foreshadow the later revelation of abuse at the end of the play.

In scene 3, there is a change of setting as Sarah is called into school for a meeting with Zoe's teacher. Zoe has recently become withdrawn and has also drawn a concerning picture of her and Sarah with, '*a taller dark figure with its face slashed out to the point where a hole is cut through the paper.*' (page 4) The teacher wants to discuss these issues, but Sarah interrupts her and leaves. Throughout this scene the white noise intensifies, signifying both Sarah's distress and her denial. The candidate's decision to make Sarah a politician is effective – it has been made clear from the outset that image is important to her, and this is reinforced by her telling the teacher, 'Do me a favour and don't tell anyone about this okay? I really don't need this spread during my campaign.' (page 4) The candidate thoughtfully considers the difficult idea that on some level Sarah does not want to know about the abuse and this idea is **sustained throughout** the play until the very end.

The final scene returns to the Smith home where we can sense strain between Sarah and Eric as they go to bed. The candidate deals with the revelation of the abuse quietly and carefully: rather than finding her husband in her daughter's room, Sarah finds her frightened child alone saying, 'Please don't let him in again...' (page 6) This moment, although by this point expected by the audience, still feels shocking as the truth is confirmed. The play ends – not with a dramatic showdown between husband and wife – but rather with a hurried phone call to the emergency services and a chilling hand grasping Sarah's shoulder as the white noise falls silent.

## Structure

This play is in four scenes and shows skilful shaping and sequencing which contributes significantly to impact.

The use of stage directions – particularly sound – contributes effectively to the build-up of tension throughout the play. In the exposition when all seems well the sound is described as, '*an ambient hum of family chatter*' (page 1). This pleasant sound shifts in scene 2 to a '*gentle buzz of a ceiling fan*' (page 2). But when Eric places a hand on Zoe's shoulder, '*the ceiling fan explodes with sound, overflowing the room with a static sound.*' (page 3) This direction, accompanied by the use of a '*dark red light,*' (page 3) and a '*dark red liquid on the floor*' (page 3) successfully highlights to the

audience that something is terribly wrong. In the denouement of the play, as Sarah walks into Zoe's bedroom, '*The white noises coming from the TV static in the room suffocates any kind of sound*' (page 6) which indicates that Sarah's realisation of what she knows she will discover is overwhelming her.

The play builds pace throughout the four scenes until we reach the climactic ending. There are a number of moments which hint at what is happening to Zoe, but it is not really until scene 3 with the visit to the school that it really falls into place for both Sarah and the audience. This turning point shows Sarah in a state of increasing panic: '*laughing nervously*,' (page 4) '*smiling awkwardly*,' (page 4) and eventually, '*scrambling to stand up*.' (page 4) The composed woman we saw in scene 1 – '*She bursts in warmly greeting all the family members*,' (page 1) – is beginning to crumble. This contrast is stark in the final stage directions in scene 4 where, '*She holds the phone up to her ear. A hand grasps her shoulder*.' (page 6) She is no longer in control: really, she never was.

## Tone/mood

The candidate has created a **tone/mood which is skilfully created and rigorously sustained revealing a committed and clearly distinctive authorial voice.**

On the surface, the mood of the play initially seems joyful: '*The sky is crystal clear*' and '*laughter is mixed with greetings and footsteps*' (page 1), but a taut undertone is present: '*not a single cloud dares to sabotage the conformity of the neighborhood*,' and '*greetings a bit too bright like glasses clinking*.' This picture-perfect scene has a suggestion of perhaps *The Stepford Wives* or *Edward Scissorhands*: a darkness is lurking beneath the polished public veneer.

This casting of subtle doubt is also evident with the characterisation of Eric early in the play – '*Made a fool of yourself didn't you Ricky?*' (page 1) Exactly what Eric did last Christmas is left to the audience's imagination, but this idea is continued in scene 2 when Grandpa O suggests a game of Monopoly and Eric refuses because there had almost been a fight between them the year before. Eric appears to be a man who is often involved in conflict.

In the final scene, Eric is paranoid about Sarah's visit to the school. He asks, 'Did the teacher say anything in particular? Anything out of the ordinary?' (page 5) He knows he is going to be caught. The tension reaches a climax with the sudden blackout at the close of the play. Just how dangerous is Eric? What will he do to Sarah, and Zoe, now that the abuse has been uncovered? The candidate deals with the closing of the play **skilfully**, leaving these questions in the minds of the audience.

## Expression

This piece shows a **high degree of originality**. Considering the subject matter, the candidate shows restraint and economy of language in dealing with an emotive topic.

In scene 2 it is Eric who suggests they play a game of Snakes and Ladders. Later in the same scene, when he touches Zoe's shoulder, the red liquid '*slithers all over the carpet.*' (page 3) The mention of snakes and slithering in the same breath as Eric's actions successfully infers that he is sinister in some way. The prominence of the colour red is also suggestive of danger or violence.

Seemingly small details are often important in this piece. The picture Zoe has drawn has '*three big stars*' (page 4) on the back. At the time, this detail is meaningless to the audience. But in scene 4, Eric takes his shirt off and '*uncovers a familiar tattoo depicting three stars on his lower obliques.*' Of course, the audience has understood the likelihood of the dark figure in the picture being Eric, but this confirmation is vital, particularly for Sarah who is now staring at the reality in front of her and can no longer deny the truth.

At points, the dialogue is a bit stilted. The teacher tells Sarah, 'For the last few months she [Zoe] has been acting very introverted. And it all seemed to just emerge out of nowhere rather than being a progressive personality change.' (page 4) And Eric asks Sarah in scene 4, 'What's wrong honey? You're usually very involved and personal with this matter.' (page 5)

But overall, this piece is very well written and shows a **skilful use of style, technique and language**.

## Range

This piece of writing is best described by the 15-13 band range but does not fully meet the standard described and so has been awarded a mark from the middle of the band range.