

Commentary on candidate evidence

Candidate 10

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for this course assessment component.

The candidate was awarded **20 marks**.

Section B – Explaining Death to the Dog

Question: Discuss the effectiveness of the ways in which Susan Perabo presents the mother's grief in this story.

Understanding

The candidate delivers an insightful and comprehensive understanding of the presentation of the mother's grief in this response with sustained consideration of the implications of the question. The candidate makes a full and relevant exploration and recognises the 'irrational and tragic' nature of the mother's grief as well as her transference of her grief 'to others' as an act of denial. The candidate also recognises that Stu (the dog) is a 'coping mechanism' and ultimately understands that the story allows the reader to have an increased understanding of the human condition. The candidate underpins their nuanced response throughout with extensive use of textual evidence which is clearly focused on the demands of the question.

Analysis

The candidate looks at a task-appropriate range of literary techniques throughout the response: narrative voice, oxymoron, word choice, alliteration, symbolism, tone, transferred epithet, dramatic irony, juxtaposition, and characterisation. The candidate begins by looking at the narrative voice and the way it initially 'injects humour in an almost oxymoronic fashion' when juxtaposing "After the baby died" with "I found it imperative that my German shepherd Stu understands and accept the concept of death"; they then go on to look at how the author 'effectively mirrors the actions of Stu in the mother' and the dog 'almost becomes a symbol of the mother'. Importantly, the candidate then cleverly points out that the tone of the 'mother's narrative is consistently and perhaps alarmingly trivial and light-hearted' and 'doesn't match the expectations of grief of the reader' and that the word choice of "stashed" and "hid" have connotations of 'evasion, and suggest that she had to be kept away from the baby's things for fear her grief should worsen'. This pattern of apposite quotation and then relevant analysis of a task-appropriate range of literary techniques continues when the candidate comments on the 'unsettling nature of the benign tone adopted by Perabo' and the 'mumsy alliteration of "canine cookies"' which 'delivers the indifferent side to the mother's grief which alternates so readily with its counterpart of raw emotion'. The function of the dog in the mother's handling of her grief is central and the candidate

recognises this as they see Stu as a 'coping mechanism' for her grief, and as an object of transference which acts as an 'outlet for her intense denial' and is 'personified by the projection of the mother's grief'. The candidate finishes by bringing all the strands together and building a cohesive evaluation which skilfully strengthens the approach adopted by the candidate.

Evaluation

Throughout, the evaluative comments are emphatic, insightful, clear and committed and based on precise evidence, as exemplified by the comments such as: 'neither humans nor dogs – nor anyone – can truly understand death' and the comment towards the end of the response which summarises succinctly that 'the extraordinarily intricate relationships between mother and child and man and beast prove for a deeply tumultuous, disturbing, but no less emphatic portrayal of the mother's grief' and that, fundamentally, 'the meaning of death eludes us all' evaluative stance with respect to the text provided and the question skilfully discussed.

This is an essay which comfortably meets every descriptor in the band range 20-19, and is therefore awarded the top mark in the range 20 marks.