

Candidate 7

The candidate evidence used in this workshop has achieved the following marks for this Course Assessment component.

The Claus of a Predator

The candidate has chosen to write an essay on the subject of the predatory nature of Santa Claus, urging us to purge the traditions and culture of this inherently evil character. Clearly, the candidate is dealing with whimsical ideas and what she produces, ultimately, is a clever and entertaining conceit. The main body of the essay explores six fanciful proposals in support of Santa's sacking: his exploitation of 'non-humans' slaving away in his grotto; his cruelty towards reindeer, forced to circumnavigate the world on Christmas day; his violation of 'migration conventions' on this world-wide journey; Santa as burglar, breaking and entering into people's homes; his side-occupation as petty thief and forays into drink driving, and finally his devious manipulation of his appearance in order to avoid detection.

Much of the humour of this piece is created by the candidate adopting the conventions of persuasive writing – the committed stance, the antagonistic point of view, various rhetorical devices – but within this expected and familiar framework exploring ideas which are essentially absurd. The opening paragraph is a good illustration of the success of this approach. The argument is clearly established: Santa 'breaks national and international law' and for too long we have accepted his pernicious presence just because he is, well, Santa. But any notion that this might be a superficial, silly piece of writing is quickly dispelled by the realisation that this candidate has a skilful command of language and rhetorical devices. She uses alliteration ('tattered tinsel and crumpled crepe paper'); parallel sentence openings to reinforce that faux-urgency of the issue ('For too long, we. . .'); and repetition of 'we' and 'us' to pull the reader in and emphasise the inclusive nature of action that must be taken if we are to overcome the tyrant Santa. The mock-heroic call to arms – 'Let us shake off the ghosts of Christmas past, and move forward into a future of equality and cheer!' – at the end of the introduction establishes this candidate's clever use of Christmas clichés which are artfully subverted to create comic effect, a technique she returns to throughout the essay without it ever feeling tired or overdone.

One of the striking features of this piece is the candidate's ability to write genuinely funny prose in an apparently effortless way. She often uses hyperbole to achieve this: in Paragraph 2, Santa's acts are described as 'heinous', he is a 'tyrant' and his cruel treatment of his elves is characterised by 'sheer depravity'. We see this technique again in Paragraph 3, when Santa is a 'cruel conspirator', and his reindeer are forced to 'drag a heavy sleigh, full to overflowing with toys'; in Paragraph 6 when he commits a 'disgusting act of theft' (which is given further comic weight by its juxtaposition with the 'drink and biscuits' which he steals); and in Paragraph 7 when Santa's crimes are described as 'horrendous' and 'nefarious'. Clearly, this is a candidate who has a confident understanding of how language works, and an impressive ability to play with

language to create humour – not an easy effect to achieve, let alone sustain, even for experienced writers.

One of the successful approaches of the piece is to take aspects of the Santa Claus mythology and consider these in all apparent seriousness in relation to the real world. In Paragraph 4, for example, Santa is attacked for his complete ‘disregard’ of the ‘world’s migration conventions’. Naturally his journey across the world in the early hours of Christmas morning involves crossing several continents, and the premise of Santa’s fantasy travel is neatly juxtaposed with the real-world concern of the violation of international borders and unregulated migration. Similarly, in Paragraph 6, Santa’s drunk driving exploits and his very existence in the air – the stuff of fancy – are given added comic value by the candidate’s tongue-in-cheek question, ‘Does old St. Nick even have the decency to let air traffic control know there will be an extra vehicle in the air that night?’ Indeed, the candidate often relates Santa’s exploits to real-world issues – the elves’ treatment mirrors the plight of sweat-shop workers; the flying reindeer are driven to near extinction. . . . Although essentially a light-hearted topic, this is a candidate with the intellectual sophistication to echo real concerns.

Many of the conventional techniques associated with discursive writing are exploited to great success in this essay. For example, the faux-outrage at Santa’s temerity is sustained throughout the piece by the candidate’s combination of the comic aside, such as ‘(and into our children’s bedrooms!)’ in Paragraph 5, the use of the exclamation mark and short declamatory sentence (‘Of course not!’ in Paragraph 6) and the question, of which there are numerous examples throughout the piece: ‘Surely there is no crueller torture for a beast than to drag a heavy sleigh, full to overflowing with toys and perched upon by a man who is not exactly light, hour after hour?’; ‘What colour are Santa’s eyes? What shape is his nose?’

The essay finishes with a sustained rallying cry to us all, and again the writer’s natural command of language is obvious from her use of varied techniques which combine to create a rousing conclusion. In keeping with the ordered structure of a more conventional discursive-type piece, the candidate’s final sentence mirrors her opening one, but this time we are urged to use the ‘most wonderful time of the year’ to ‘take a stand’ and, once and for all, eradicate Santa from our Christmas traditions. It is an effective end to what is overall a clever, entertaining and engaging piece of writing.

Despite being unconventional, this essay still has all the hallmarks of a Band 15-13 piece. There is strong attention to purpose and a real understanding of audience. It is entertaining. It’s worth noting that this is a piece written without any reference to external sources – naturally! – but is no less sophisticated and in-depth as a result. Varied language is deployed confidently and the whimsical content is effectively set against a conventional structure, enhancing the mock-gravitas of the topic and demonstrating the candidate’s clever understanding of how to manipulate language and form to create effect. This essay fully meets the criteria for Band 15-13, and is therefore awarded **15 marks**.