

Commentary on candidate evidence

The candidate evidence has achieved the following marks for each question of the SQA 2021 critical reading (section 2 – critical essay) assessment.

Candidate A

4. Choose a novel or short story or work of non-fiction which deals with an important human issue. By referring to important techniques, explain how the writer explores this important human issue.

The candidate was awarded **10 marks** for this response.

The candidate's line of thought, expressed in the initial stated intention of 'exploring the theme of loneliness,' is carried on throughout essay. In this way, relevance is a relative strength.

In the first paragraph of the essay, some familiarity with the text is shown: there is identification of George and Lennie as main characters; their journey as migrant workers to a ranch in Soledad; their relationships with a few key characters there. The extent of the familiarity shown is at the lower end of the 13-10 mark range, coming close to 'familiarity with some aspects of the text' (9-5 mark range).

However, as the essay progresses, some understanding of central concerns is apparent (13-10 mark range), especially in paragraph 3 with a discussion of the relationship between George and Lennie, and how they differ from the other ranch workers.

The candidate demonstrates 'an awareness of the writer's techniques' with 'some appropriate quotation' (13-10 mark range), in the treatment of setting, the character of Curley's wife, the reference to foreshadowing. This is only ever 'an awareness,' and at no point is it ever a 'sound awareness' with 'detailed explanation.' This points to a mark at the lower end of the 13-10 mark range.

At the end of the essay there is a 'brief commentary of what has been gained from the text' (9-5 mark range), with the candidate stating 'I think as readers we can relate too the characters in the novel. I do agree that some of the issues still are around to this day.'

The essay is structured in an appropriate way, using sufficiently accurate paragraphing to reflect the stated purpose and scope of the response. There are some errors in the candidate's use of language, but a line of thought is communicated at first reading.

Overall, there is a thinness to the essay, placing it at the very low end of the 13-10 mark range. There are some indications of the 9-5 mark range, but the candidate does stick tightly to the task and purpose; there is some familiarity with

the text, some understanding of central concerns and some awareness of the writer's techniques. The candidate does just enough to be awarded 10 marks.

Candidate B

3. Choose a novel or short story or work of non-fiction which contains a memorable character. By referring to appropriate techniques, explain why this character is memorable.

The candidate was awarded **15 marks** for this response.

The essay question calls for a response on a ‘memorable character,’ and an exploration of why the character was memorable. The candidate sticks tightly to this task. The line of thought is ‘relevant to the task’ (17-14 mark range), the candidate giving a detailed picture of the character of Piggy, his relationships with Ralph and Jack, and his significance to the central concerns of the novel.

The candidate clearly has a good understanding of the central concerns of the text (17-14 mark range). At the very start of the essay, the candidate explains: ‘Golding makes it very clear that Piggy’s different from the rest.’ The candidate demonstrates further understanding with this comment on a key incident from the later stages of the novel: ‘Piggy and the conch both destroyed, resembling no more democracy.’ In a concluding paragraph, the candidate neatly sums-up how the character of Piggy plays an important role in communicating the central concerns of the text.

Characterisation is the main technique analysed. There is detailed explanation of Piggy’s character (17-14 mark range), and how he relates to other characters in the novel: ‘Piggy wants fairness, and democracy, unlike Jack who wants to rule and have fun.’ This analysis is supported by appropriate references to the text and/or quotation:

“Give me the conch Ralph, I’ll show him one thing he doesn’t have.” This brings out the naivety of Piggy, as he thinks Jack cares for the conch but he doesn’t, he doesn’t care about rules or democracy.'

Language is used to communicate a relevant line of thought clearly, and the essay is well structured: it comes to a reasonably powerful concluding paragraph.

Overall, this essay is described well by the statements in the 17-14 mark range. As such, it is placed in the middle of the range. There is no real hint at all of the category above: there is not a ‘thorough awareness of the writer’s techniques’ (20-18 mark range) or a ‘well-developed commentary’ (20-18 mark range); therefore the essay was placed on the lower side of mid-range.

Candidate C

4. Choose a novel or short story or work of non-fiction which deals with an important human issue. By referring to important techniques, explain how the writer explores this important human issue.

The candidate was awarded **13 marks** for this response.

The candidate's opening statement, that this 'is a short story that tells us about a married couple with a horrible husband that treats his wife like trash' shows some understanding of the central concerns of the text (13-10 mark range). Not, perhaps, a deep understanding, but some understanding, certainly. The candidate then states that 'this story goes on to talk about important human issues of abuse and problems in a relationship.' This shows a line of thought which is relevant to the task (an indication of the 17-14 mark range), but the relative vagueness of 'problems within a relationship' is more indicative of the 13-10 range.

In the body of the essay, the candidate deals with four episodes from the short story. Characterisation is the main technique analysed, the candidate showing awareness of how characterisation is used by the writer to convey themes (13-10 mark range). The candidate's explanation is supported by appropriate references and quotations from the text (13-10 mark range):

'Brian isn't having it and he starts off with telling Peggy that he is "not a big fan of herbs, you know" hinting that she should take out the herbs from the meals and making it to his liking.'

There are glimpses of a 'good understanding of the central concerns,' and a 'sound awareness of' characterisation (17-14 mark range), for example:

'This is one of the cruellest things Brain does in the story, as a married couple both people should have equal choices of what they want to do and have the middle ground to argue why they want to do what they want but as we see Brian doesn't care, he ignores her and refuses to give her reason why he doesn't want to have a family.'

But, these are glimpses only; they are not developed or sustained. Some of the analysis is more narrative description than analytical comment:

'This concludes with Peggy missing the phone call and Brian bringing it up. She explains to him that she was out with the old friend Di but Brian shrugs that off and implies that Di is a bad influence on Peggy and it stops her from getting her duties done in time for him.'

There is evidence of engagement with the text: the candidate offers some commentary on what has been gained from the text (13-10 mark range), for example:

'This was a big point that shows us how bad Peggy has got it between Brian and how she is struggling to have her own choices in life.'

The candidate's line of thought is relevant to the task (17-14 mark range), but it is not developed enough to show a good understanding of the central concerns of the text or to demonstrate familiarity with the text as a whole; only some familiarity (13-10 mark range) is apparent.

Language is used to communicate a line of thought (13-10 mark range), and although there are some errors, spelling, grammar etc is sufficiently accurate.

Overall, there is some familiarity with the text, some understanding of the central concerns, some awareness of characterisation, some appropriate references (all 13-10 mark range). Occasionally, a good understanding is shown, and the line of thought is relevant to the text. By far the majority of these observations come from 13-10 mark range. As there are a few indications of 17-14 mark range, the essay is placed at the top end of 13-10.