

## Prose: Sample response two

This response was chosen for the candidate's ability to construe multiple readings from the extract and explain these with precision and strong analysis. It is certainly much more detailed than most close readings and you would not be expected to write a reading of this length. The candidate's ability to discuss multiple reading strategies, such as contextual, Marxist and ecocritical approaches is impressive. The response consistently demonstrates strong close textual analytical skills; the candidate selects a range of evidence and deconstructs the effect of language techniques in relation to their readings. The candidate demonstrates a strong comprehension of how the passage engages with contemporary issues and considers the impact on modern-day readers. Though the candidate provides excellent analysis of language features, a discussion of the generic features of prose, such as characterisation, setting and point of view, is lacking.

Los Angeles is a city synonymous with wealth, prestige, glamour and ostentation, and is the encapsulation of the elusive 'American Dream.' American author A.M. Homes seeks to expose the fallacies behind the human desire to seek materialistic gratification to condemn the consumerist culture, to warn of the detrimental ramifications of humanity's hedonistic actions, perennially relevant issues explored in his 2006 novel, This Book will Save Your Life. Set in Los Angeles, the novel can be read as a scathing social commentary of humanity's incessant pursuit of fame and fortune, conducting an investigation into the emptiness of the ever 'elusive' desire for more. Through the employment of a myriad of narrative techniques, including alliteration, symbolism, asyndeton and epizeuxis, Homes explores the cracks in the façade of the American dream, condemns consumerism and warns of humanity's need to heal the natural world.

Homes explores the shallowness of the consumerist culture, and the excessiveness of the western world's daily existence through the use of poignant lexical choices, symbolism and punctuation. The primary character of the novel runs daily, a ritualistic activity, which can be read as an attempt to run away from the mundane and banal reality that is his daily existence. While running he is "typing while he trots,

This candidate reads the text as a social commentary and demonstrates a sound understanding of the text's engagement with contemporary issues.

The devices listed here are language features, not narrative techniques. This reading would be enhanced by an analysis of generic devices related to prose fiction, such as characterisation, setting, and/or point of view, and how they are constructed through language.

This topic sentence clearly introduces the issues that the candidate will explore in the paragraph and signposts the textual features that will be analysed.

placing his bets, going long and short, seeing how far up or down he can go." The use of asyndeton gives the text a hurried, stress feel, emulative of the immense stress the character feels as they attempt to survive and keep afloat amidst a world of consumerism. The persona's unhappiness and discomfort with his life is again evident when the author writes: "he hears nothing, feels nothing...he wakes up, puts on his noise cancelling headset." The use of epizeuxis and lexical choice of 'nothing' reflects the emptiness of the character's existence. The fact that he seeks to drone out his senses speaks to his desire to numb himself, and this can arguably be extrapolated to be condemning of the attempt by the western world to placate their emotions through materialistic means. The character has a coffee machine that is "automatic - he doesn't even drink coffee." The use of hyphen creates a fracture, highlighting the paradox and futility of having a coffee machine - a useless object which he runs everyday, with no need to. This coffee machine running every day despite no one drinking it echoes of Ray Bradbury's *There will Come Soft Rain*, a similarly dystopic text that highlights man's dependence on technology, and warns of the detrimental ramifications of a consumerist culture. A reading of the novel as a scathing social commentary on mankind's dependence on technology and the fallacy of the consumerist culture can be understood through the syntax, symbolism and lexical choices made by Homes.

When read with a Marxist lens, Homes' novel seems to delineate the emptiness of a rigid class structure. The character notes that "above and below, a chain of houses climb the canyon wall: a social chain, an economic chain, a food chain." The use of binary opposites and "above and below" creates a sense of suffocation - the character is surrounded with people attempting to climb the social ladder. The cacophonous alliteration of the 'c' in "chain" and "climb" evokes a hostile, inhospitable emotion in the reader, with the

The candidate demonstrates an impressive knowledge of specific language devices, such as asyndeton and epizeuxis, which makes for a refreshing read.

The candidate has experimented with intertextuality by mentioning another prose text from a similar genre. This demonstrates a sound understanding of the text's dystopic themes.

This linking sentence is repetitive and adds little to the discussion. A better strategy is to synthesise the content of the paragraph, or end with analysis, rather than including a redundant statement.

The candidate continues to show a strong understanding of the passage and the myriad of ways it can be interpreted. This response would be more cohesive if the candidate signposted this alternate reading in the introduction.

harsh 'c' sound reflective of society's ruthless attempts to usurp the above social class' position. The use of analogy, comparing the ascent up the social stratum to the "food chain", exposes humanity to be primal, and animalistic, as predators ready to devour those lower than them in order to maintain their status – and yet at what cost? The persona continues, stating "each person looks down...thinking they have it better, but there is always someone else either pressing up from below or down from above. There is no way to run." The use of bilabial plosive alliteration in 'better' and 'but' creates a sound of futility, of ruthlessness. The long structure of the first sentence starkly juxtaposes against the short, jarring "there is no way to win," highlighting the futility of humanity's attempts to climb the social ladder. Karl Marx's opening lines of his Communist Manifesto is "let the ruling class tremble at a communistic revolution," and indeed, the extract captures the essence of the bourgeois' fears – usurpation of their position. When read with a cultural, Marxist lens, the text exposes the fallacies and emptiness of the class system, a system which facilitates systemic disenfranchisement and provides little contentment, highlighted once more when the author writes "he stands – captain, lord, master, prisoner of his own making." The use of asyndeton again creates a hurried, staccato beat to the sentence, and the lexical choices of the author initially appear paradoxical – how can one simultaneously be a master and a prisoner. Yet, when read with a Marxist lens, one can observe that it is the character's slavery to the class system that makes him both a wealthy master, and a prisoner, for he is trapped in the prison of the social hierarchy.

The use of despondent visual imagery explores the agony of the natural world, suffering at the hands of mankind's relentless exploitation. The novel opens with a description of the city "blanketed in a foggy slumber." The lexical choice of 'fog' instantly connotes images of pollution and the diction choice of 'slumber'

Excellent analysis and deconstruction of language techniques to support the Marxist reading of the extract. The candidate draws on a range of techniques and discusses the effect of the chosen evidence.

This linking sentence is much more effective than that of the previous paragraph. The candidate is able to succinctly synthesise the content of the paragraph and draw conclusions about the evidence utilised.

This paragraph discusses an ecocritical reading of the excerpt. The candidate makes interesting and valid observations, though the response would benefit from a smoother transition between paragraphs.

can be read as mankind's blissful oblivion of the agony of nature. The passage continues, detailing how "clouds roll over the hills, seeping out of cracks and crevices as if the geography itself is sending smoke signals." The description of the clouds as "seeping out of cracks and crevices" seems to imply that the clouds, a *synecdoche* for nature, is unwanted, and must fight to permeate the city of Los Angeles' atmosphere. The sibilance of 'sending smoke signals' creates a hissing tone, as if nature is attempting to warn humanity of an impending fire. The opening passage links with the final sentence: "brush fire, or simply dawn in Los Angeles?" The rhetorical question resonates with the reader, and highlights the inability of the character to distinguish between natural disasters or merely another day in the city. The inability of the persona to distinguish between the two highlights mankind's oblivion to nature, and their attempts to replace authentic, real nature with synthetic counterparts. This is again evident when the author writes "men are installing a lawn where there would otherwise be nothing." Rather than attempting to recuperate the ground, men are replacing it with a man-made alternative, and making no attempt to heal the barren land, or respect the natural terrain of Los Angeles, a symbol of the oblivion of mankind, and the blissful ignorance that the western world survives in.

The novel also explores another subversion of nature – though the employment of symbolism and lexical choice – the subversion of mankind's innate need for human connection. The primary character watches a "woman swim...her suit is a bright red...a rare tropical bird." The almost sacred lexical choice and the metaphor of "bright bird," as well as the bilabial plosive alliteration creates a tone of veneration. "He takes comfort in her swimming, in her determination, rhythm, routine, in the fact that she is awake when he is awake." The fact that he is so enamoured with the woman and that he relishes her company, even if she

This response continues to showcase strong close textual analysis of the language techniques that operate in the passage in order to develop and support their reading. This metalanguage is incorporated in a fluent manner.

The candidate's vocabulary and varied syntax creates a strong sense of personal voice and style, making the response engaging for a marker.

The candidate has discerned yet another reading from the passage. The scope of this response and the range of reading practices is impressive. However, it is not essential to do so; as other responses in *Good Answers 2019* demonstrate, a single, well-explained reading can score just as highly. In fact, responses which attempt to offer multiple readings can suffer from a lack of detail to justify each reading, or a lack of cohesion within the response.

is little more than a 'dot', speaks to his isolation. The asyndeton creates a sense of urgency, as if he needs to see her, as if she is his sole human connection in a "vacuum of silence." "She is his confidante, his muse" and is his one human connection. In a world that is attempting to substitute human connection with technological alternates, the novel serves to warn of the emptiness of a life absent and devoid of human connection. The need for human connection is a perennially relevant issues, resonating across time and place, and the novel serves as a vessel, warning contemporary society of the need to establish genuine human connections.

The candidate integrates textual evidence seamlessly into their syntax, which continues to elevate the quality of the reading.

ultimately, This Book Will Save Your Life explores the fallacy of the American Dream, mankind's exploitation of the natural world, the emptiness of the class hierarchy and the need for human connection. Through the employment of a myriad of narrative conventions, the novel resonates with contemporary readers, with its dystopic world reflecting readers' own reality back at them, imploring readers to establish human connection, to bridge the chasm between the classes, to heed nature's warning and to be present, warning of how a refusal to listen to the message of the book may result in a life devoid of love, laughter and contentment.

The conclusion mirrors several elements of the introduction, creating a sense of cohesion. The response ends in an interesting manner, speculating on the impact of the text for contemporary readers.

#### Hint: Less is more – the cake metaphor

It can be tempting to 'show off' in this section, offering multiple readings or employing particular ideological reading practices in the belief it will gain higher marks. You do not need to do so! A unified and cohesive response that deals thoughtfully with a single reading, even one focusing on the text's themes and construction, can be just as impressive.

Imagine all the possible readings as a cake – you can't possibly eat it all in one sitting, so don't try. But rather than attempting to cover all your bases and only managing to eat the surface layer of icing (which may look tasty but is ultimately unfulfilling), cut a nice big slice. That is, focus on just *one* way (or, at most, two ways) the text can be read, but dig through all the layers and explain this reading in depth.