

Level of requirement II

operative words ¹	definitions	examples
analyse, examine	describe and explain in detail	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyse the way(s) in which the atmosphere is created in ... 2. Examine the opposing views on social class held by the two protagonists. 3. Examine how the author characterises ...
explain	make something clear show causes and effects in a given context	Explain the protagonist's obsession with money.
illustrate	use examples to explain or make sth. clear	Illustrate the way in which school life in Britain differs from that in Germany.

https://nibis.de/uploads/1gohrgs/operatoren_2021/EN_2021Abi_Operatoren.pdf [downloaded 4th December 2022]

Assignments:

1) **Summarise** the short story *Passing* by Langston Hughes (50%)

2) (50%)

a) **Explain** what Jack means when he states that "I guess in looks I'm sort of suspect-proof, anyway." (l. 10)

b) **Illustrate** the prejudices black people were faced with back then.

c) **Analyse** two of Jack's contradicting¹ feelings towards his mother.

d) **Explain** the double meaning of the title in the context of the story.

In your exam, do always use the **P-E-E** structure for the analysis in task two. I insist on **direct quotes**. **BUT** don't quote the quote in your explanation.

point (→ analysis)	example/ evidence from the text (→ quote/ line reference)	explanation (→ How are your point and your evidence connected?)
a)		
a)		
b)		
b)		
c)		
c)		
d)		
d)		

¹ widersprüchlich

Information on the text: This short story was published in 1934 in a book of short stories titled "The Ways of White Folks". It is a letter from a young African-American man named Jack addressed to his mother whose name is not specified. The short story is shortened.

Passing by Langston Hughes

Chicago,
Sunday, Oct. 10.

DEAR MA,

- 5 I felt like a dog, passing you downtown last night and not speaking to you. You were great, though. Didn't give a sign that you even knew me, let alone I was your son. If I hadn't had the girl with me, Ma, we might have talked. I'm not as scared as I used to be about somebody taking me for colored any more just because I'm seen talking on the
- 10 street to a Negro. I guess in looks I'm sort of suspect-proof², anyway. You remember what a hard time I used to have in school trying to convince teachers I was really colored. Since I've begun to pass for white³, nobody has ever doubted that I am a white man. Where I work, the boss is a Southerner and is always cussing out⁴ Negroes in
- 15 my presence, not dreaming I'm one. It is to laugh! Funny thing, though, Ma, how some white people certainly don't like colored people, do they? (If they did, then I wouldn't have to be passing to keep my good job.) They go out of their way sometimes to say bad things about colored folks⁵, putting it out that all of us are
- 20 thieves and liars, or else diseased⁶ - consumption⁷ and syphilis⁸, and the like. No wonder it's hard for a black man to get a good job with that kind of false propaganda going around. I never knew they made a practice of saying such terrible things about us until I started passing and heard their conversations and lived their life.
- 25 But I don't mind being "white", Ma, and it was mighty generous of you to urge me to go ahead and make use of my light skin and good hair. It got me this job, Ma, where I still get \$65 a week in spite of the depression⁹. And I'm in line for promotion to the chief office secretary, if Mr. Weeks goes to Washington. When I look at the colored boy
- 30 porter¹⁰ who sweeps out the office, I think that that's what I might be doing if I wasn't light-skinned enough to get by. No matter how smart that boy'd get to be, they wouldn't hire him for a clerk¹¹ in the office, not if they knew it. Only for a porter. [...]

2 **suspect-proof:** über jeden Zweifel erhaben

3 **to pass for white:** to be mistaken or accepted as (white)

4 **to cuss out:** to criticize severely

5 **folks:** (informal) people

6 **diseased:** ill

7 **consumption:** old word for tuberculosis

8 **syphilis:** sexual disease

9 **depression:** a long period of serious economic trouble and high unemployment in the 1930s

10 **porter (AE):** a person who does cleaning work

11 **clerk:** an office worker

35 But, Ma, I felt mighty bad about last night. The first time we'd met in public that way. That's the kind of thing that makes passing hard, having to deny your own family when you see them. Of course, I know you and I both realize it is all for the best, but anyhow it's terrible. I love you, Ma, and hate to do it, even if you say you don't mind.

40 But what did you think of the girl with me, Ma? She's the kid I'm going to marry. Pretty good looking, isn't she? Nice disposition. The parents are well fixed¹². Her folks are German-Americans and don't have much prejudice about them, either. I took her to see a colored revue last week and she thought it was great. She said, "Darkies are so graceful and gay¹³." I wonder what she would have said if I'd told her I was colored, or half-colored - that my old man was white, but you weren't? But I guess I won't go into that. Since I've made up my mind to live in the white world, and have found my place in it (a good place), why think about race anymore? I'm glad I don't have to, I know that much.

50 I'd be glad, though, if I could get away from Chicago, transferred to the New York office, or the San Francisco branch of the firm - somewhere where what happened last night couldn't ever occur again. It was awful passing you and not speaking. [...] Maybe it would have been better if you [...] had stayed in Cincinnati and I'd come away alone when we decided to move after the old man¹⁴ died. Well, Ma, I will close because I promised to take my weakness¹⁵ to the movies this evening. [...] I will take a box at the Post Office for your mail. Anyhow, I'm glad there's nothing to stop letters from crossing the color-line. Even if we can't meet often, we can write, can't we, Ma?

60 With love from your son,
Jack.

(734 words)

12 **to be well fixed**: to be financially secure

13 **gay**: cheerful, happy

14 **the old man**: He means his father.

15 **weakness** (here): sweetheart