

Paper 1 – Example Prose Commentary
Standard Level
May 2003

This extract from the 'Idea of Perfection' by Katie Grenville is an omniscient narrative of a girl's exploration of a local bridge over which there is a conflict. Through her change in opinion and development through the passage Grenville reveals to the audience the importance of looking past the initial impression and explores the conflict of appearance with reality. Furthermore, through the setting which the extract is placed in and the similes which draw parallels between nature and man, the power of nature is revealed.

The main character is developed throughout the piece and we are presented with a conscientious if somewhat isolated person. Our first main indication to her character comes when 'she laughed aloud, suddenly, a noise like a bark' this use of short clause in this sentence provides auditory image which brings the sudden sound aloud for the reader and therefore drawing them into the passage, and the description of her laugh being akin to a 'bark' depicts how she is somewhat unusual and separated from other humans. Indeed even her dog seen as 'man's best friend' doesn't accept who she is as illustrated when he looks 'up at her in surprise'. Despite her isolation from/by society the main character displays a desire for their approval which is depicted as 'she glanced around, as if someone might have heard her'. The long sentence with several clauses coupled with the long vowel sounds of 'around' and 'laughing' serve to slow the pace of the action and illustrate her cautionness and the importance of other peoples' opinion. Indeed, her actions continue to reveal more about her values and character as seen when 'she wanted to go down there', this illustrates how she is not only curious but law-abiding as she 'would not have actually forced her way through anyone's fence'. Moreover, her guilty conscience is displayed though the short sentences which speeds up the pace as she frantically attempts to justify her actions to herself. Generally, the main character is portrayed as a fairly average person enabling us to relate to her easily and this is reinforced by the fairly colloquial diction of the narrator.

The description of the setting allows not only for the reader to image the situation but also portrays the power of nature. The image of the opening paragraph of 'two birds flying together, drawing a straight line' illustrates the unity of nature and the 'straight line' connotes the idea that they are taking the correct path. Furthermore, the age of the natural formations encountered illustrates the steadiness of nature. This is depicted through the 'rounded rocks' in line 22 the alliteration of 'r' emphasises their smoothness and roundness; they are a product of the gradually wearing away and perfecting of nature. Moreover, through the use of light the ability of nature to make oneself re-examine who they are is illustrated as light is seen as a symbol of truth. The 'Cascade Rivulet glinting metallically' portrays how the light is being reflected back up almost like a mirror, forcing an observer to look at themselves with the truth. The power of nature to do this is displayed as the rivulet has this effect even from 'between the trees' indicating how you cannot escape or hide from the truth. Indeed as there is not light in the river in line 24 it is described as being 'secretive'. Grenville is illustrating how everyone has something they desire to hide. The simile of the birds being "like aircraft in formation" in lines 2-3 reiterates not only the power but the glory and beauty of nature as the aircraft symbolise the technology and advancement of society Grenville is implying that nature is more advanced than anything we can create for ourselves. As well as the

Comment [KH1]: Clear focus on the text and writer straight away

Comment [KH2]: Good use of literary terms throughout

Comment [KH3]: First Organising Principle identified

Comment [KH4]: Connectives used to link ideas together and develop them

Comment [KH5]: Second Organising Principle identified

Comment [KH6]: Topic sentence at the start makes clear the subject of this paragraph. You will notice that every paragraph starts in this way by clearly outlining

Comment [KH7]: Clear quotation to support every point. This happens throughout the essay

Comment [KH8]: Literary terms

Comment [KH9]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH10]: A second point about the same quotation is identified. The first point was about the shortness of the clause, the second about the connotations of 'bark'. This is developed a little further by the point about the dog

Comment [KH11]: Connectives to join ideas up – notice, not just the obvious Furthermore, However, etc

Comment [KH12]: This time the order of points is reversed and instead of having Point / Quotation we have Quotation / Point

Comment [KH13]: Literary terms – variety of details discussed

Comment [KH14]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH15]: Clear effect on the reader

Comment [KH16]: Nice smooth inclusion of quotations in the sentence

Comment [KH17]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH18]: Connectives used to join points together

Comment [KH19]: Clear topic sentence to indicate the subject of this paragraph

Comment [KH20]: Clear link back to the second Organising Principle established in the introduction

Comment [KH21]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH22]: Literary term

Comment [KH23]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH24]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH25]: Relation back to the first Organising Principle established in the introduction

Comment [KH26]: Relation back to the first Organising Principle established in the introduction – although the link to the idea of appearance vs. reality is more implicit than explicit

Comment [KH27]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [Kev28]: Relation back to the second Organising Principle

power of nature Greenville illustrates how we can destroy it very easily as shown through the 'rip down the dirt of the bank' as "someone's heels slid". The **soft sibilance** created juxtaposes the **harsh sound** of "rip" highlighting how an apparently harmless act can have grave consequences for nature; despite its power we can affect and destroy it.

Through the exploration of the bridge over the river the **conflict between appearance and reality** which is established only on closer evaluation is established. The main character's first impression of the bridge is "a humble little thing" whose insignificance is emphasised by the juxtaposition with the fact that it had been "in the paper". This is emphasised through the **personification** of the bridge having "an apologetic look" which implies a sense of **ashame**ment for itself. Indeed the **cacophonous sounds** used in its initial description in lines 32-3 illustrates the clumsiness and apparent age of the bridge. However the bridge when look at closely is clearly something special- "close up, each timber had its own colour and personality", and the change in the **author's tone** towards it is clear, referring to the "underbelly" rather than underneath. Indeed, it has become almost attractive as it "drew the eye back to look again". We are shown how to appreciate it. You must become intimate with it, give a part of yourself, just as the character "stood with shoes sinking slowly in the damp sand". The **sibilance** used enables the author to feel as if they are sinking with them, furthermore, it is not until you give part of yourself, become involved as the girl does by "drawing it" that can understand the reality of something, and "how complicated it really was".

The importance for people to look closely at each other and get to know each other more intimately in order for them to know the strength of the relationship is established through the symbol of the bridge and the use of **personification**. The **simile** in line 35 "It was like two people holding hands" portrays how even somewhat frail limbs like the "primitive timbers" can be extremely strong and powerful when united, the power of them coming together is depicted through the **sharp sounds** of "locked tightly together" Furthermore, the **personification** of the pieces of time portray how it is not the lack of darkness and pain or troubles but the intermingling of "light and dark" and the effect this has in creating complex and beautiful structures. **Indeed**, the word highlight through the use of italics in the passage is "interplay" which illustrates the idea of interacting with other people and how different (and opposing) issues and feelings are inseparable is the central message of the passage.

Comment [KH29]: Literary terms

Comment [KH30]: Literary terms

Comment [KH31]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH32]: Clear topic sentence to indicate the subject of this paragraph

Comment [KH33]: Clear link back to Organising Principle identified in the introduction

Comment [KH34]: Connectives used to join ideas up and develop them more fully

Comment [KH35]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH36]: Literary terms

Comment [KH37]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH38]: Connectives to join ideas together

Comment [KH39]: Literary term

Comment [KH40]: Perhaps a link back to the first Organising Principle – although the idea that you have to 'give something of yourself' is not clearly present in the text. The key thing is surely looking closely

Comment [KH41]: Literary term

Comment [KH42]: Clear effect on the reader identified

Comment [KH43]: Link back to the first Organising Principle

Comment [KH44]: Possible link back to the first Organising Principle, although the extract is not *really* about *people* not judging each other on first appearances

Comment [KH45]: Clear topic sentence for this paragraph – note that its position has been varied and it is not right at the start

Comment [KH46]: Literary term

Comment [KH47]: Clear effect on the reader – although once again there may be some over-interpretation here

Comment [KH48]: Connectives to link ideas together and allow them to be developed in more detail

Comment [KH49]: Connectives to link ideas together and allow them to be developed in more detail

Comment [KH50]: A new potential Organising Principle, is identified here following the discussion of the passage

Key:

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| | Topic sentences – to indicate subject of a paragraph |
| | Organising Principles or points relating to them |
| | Connective words used to join ideas together |
| | Quotations |
| | Analysis – considering the effect on the audience |
| | Storytelling |
| | Spelling / Grammatical mistakes |

Examiner's Comments:

- Good, correct use of literary terms throughout
- Some good interpretation of the text – beyond just the 'story' of the girl investigating the bridge these ideas show that the candidate has engaged with some of the deeper ideas in the text, such as isolation and the beauty and power of nature

- Good use of connectives throughout give clear structure to the essay and show how points link together. Note that, in addition to the obvious connectives like 'Furthermore' and 'Moreover' other connectives such as 'Indeed' and 'Despite' are also used.
- Clear structure – each paragraph has a definite topic which is explored in detail. The two organising principles introduced at the beginning would have been a better way to structure the text.
- Almost every quotation has a section of analysis after it. This often starts with verbs like 'portrays' 'depicts' 'enables' 'implies' 'highlighting' 'reiterates'. Talking about the effect created on the audience in this way is what makes this a good essay.

Marks Awarded:

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| Understanding of the Text | 5 | Clear understanding of the basic story and also an identification of some of the more subtle themes / topics / ideas e.g. the idea of the power and beauty of nature. Good use of relevant quotations throughout |
| Interpretation of the Extract | 5 | Generally good – this is clearly personal and original work. Sometimes things seem to be taken a bit too far: the idea that the 'secretive' river shows how we all hide things from each other seems a little too much, the idea of interaction as the central message could be explored more |
| Appreciation of Literary Features | 5 | Excellent identification of a wide range literary features, correct terms used and the effect of these features is always pointed out and related back to the major themes / ideas being discussed. Note how developed points are with lots of different features working together to create an effect |
| Presentation | 4 | Generally well organised and clear. Quotations smoothly included in the text. 2 points clearly introduced in introduction and these are revisited. Otherwise clearly structure using the Guiding Questions. Each paragraph focuses on a clearly different point. |
| Language | 4 | Generally good language, some mistakes but only really one or two. Good use of Literary Terms throughout |
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