1.9 Literature: Unseen Prose Analysis: Test Pack

AQA 7712 · about 10 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

The Tide Line

Source written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). An extract from an original prose narrative, composed for the purposes of A-level unseen prose analysis. This text is not extracted from, and does not paraphrase, any published or in-copyright novel. Lines are numbered for ease of reference in the questions that follow.

I have not been back to Aunt Vera's guesthouse in eleven years, and yet I could still draw the front step from memory: the black iron boot-scraper shaped like a swan, the peeling sign that read VERA'S REST, the smell of vinegar and drying sea-lettuce that clung to the porch no matter how many times she scrubbed it. I was nine the summer my parents sent me to her, and I arrived at Fenwick-on-Sea with a suitcase that would not shut and a private conviction that I had been abandoned.

Vera did not fuss over me, which I resented at first and was grateful for later. She put me to work folding towels for the six guest rooms, then said, without looking up from the till, that idle hands made for long summers. She was my mother's older sister, though nobody could have guessed it from the two of them side by side; my mother was soft where Vera was all corners, her voice worn thin by decades of announcing breakfast times to strangers. She wore the same cardigan, grey with a darned elbow, on every day I knew her, and she had a way of standing in doorways with her arms folded that made the whole house seem smaller and more governable than it had any right to be.

The guesthouse itself sagged towards the sea like something reaching for water it could never quite touch. Salt had got into the window frames and swollen the paint into blisters; the residents' lounge held a piano nobody played and a stopped clock nobody had mended, its hands fixed forever at twenty to four. I used to think the whole building was simply old and tired, the way old people are tired, until the afternoon I found Vera standing at that piano with the lid

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raised, one finger resting on a yellowed key she did not press.

It happened in the third week. I had come in from the beach, wet to the knees, meaning to fetch a towel, and I stopped in the lounge doorway because something in the set of her shoulders did not belong to the Vera who barked at guests about muddy shoes. She was not playing. She was simply looking at the keys the way you might look at a door you had decided, a long time ago, never to open again. When she noticed me she closed the lid with a soft, final sound, like a book being shut on an unfinished sentence, and said only, 'Go and change out of those wet things before you catch your death.' But her voice had lost its usual flint, and for the rest of that day she moved through the house more slowly, as though carrying something she had not agreed to carry.

I did not understand it then. It was only years later, sorting through her papers after the funeral, that I found the certificate from the Fenwick School of Music, dated the year she turned seventeen, and the letter beneath it from a college in London that had never been answered. I understood, too late for it to matter to her, that the guesthouse had not been a choice so much as a substitution, one life quietly folded away to make room for the running of somebody else's breakfasts.

What I remember most, though, is not the discovery but the tide line itself, that ragged brown seam of weed and broken shell the sea left along the sand each morning, always in a slightly different place, as though the water itself could not decide where it had meant to stop. Vera used to make me sweep it clear from the guesthouse steps before the first guests came down, grumbling that visitors did not pay good money to look at other people's rubbish. I swept it without asking why the sea kept leaving the same debris in different places, or why a woman who claimed not to care for order spent every morning restoring it. I know now that some people build their whole lives along a line like that: drawn fresh each day, never quite in the place it was the day before, and swept clear before anyone else can see what the tide has left behind.

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1 Refer to the extract as a whole. In each part below, identify one technique the writer uses and briefly explain its effect.

(a) Identify one technique used in lines 1 to 6 to establish the narrator's retrospective viewpoint, and briefly explain its effect. **(2)**

(b) Identify one technique used in lines 8 to 15 to characterise Vera through physical description, and briefly explain its effect. **(2)**

(c) Identify one technique used in lines 17 to 22 to create a sense of decline in the description of the guesthouse, and briefly explain its effect. **(2)**

(d) Identify one technique used in lines 41 to 49 to extend the tide-line image into a comment on Vera's life, and briefly explain its effect. **(2)**

(Total for Question 1 is 8 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.9 Literature: Unseen Prose Analysis: Test Pack

Question 1

(a) Identifies a valid technique with accurate textual reference, e.g. the time marker 'in eleven years' (line 1), or the claim to detailed recall 'I could still draw the front step from memory' (lines 1 to 2) (oe) **B1**

(a) Gives a plausible, text-supported comment on effect, e.g. signals that events are filtered through adult hindsight rather than told as they happened (oe) **B1**

(a) Answer: The time marker 'in eleven years' (line 1) and the claim to be able to 'draw the front step from memory' (lines 1 to 2) establish a retrospective adult narrator looking back on childhood, signalling that the account is shaped by hindsight rather than told in the moment.

(b) Identifies a valid technique, e.g. the repeated cardigan 'grey with a darned elbow' (lines 12 to 13), or the physical posture 'standing in doorways with her arms folded' (lines 13 to 14) (oe) **B1**

(b) Gives a plausible comment on effect, e.g. suggests thrift and unchanging habit, or watchful authority (oe) **B1**

(b) Answer: The repeated, darned cardigan (lines 12 to 13) characterises Vera as thrifty and fixed in her habits, suggesting a life lived without indulgence or much change.

(c) Identifies a valid technique, e.g. personification ('sagged towards the sea', line 17), or the cluster of decay details (swollen paint, unplayed piano, stopped clock, lines 18 to 20) (oe) **B1**

(c) Gives a plausible comment on effect, e.g. presents the building as tired and in slow, ongoing deterioration (oe) **B1**

(c) Answer: The personification of the guesthouse as 'sagged towards the sea' (line 17) presents the building as tired and in slow decline, reinforced by the cluster of decay details that follow (lines 18 to 20).

(d) Identifies a valid technique, e.g. the extended metaphor of the tide line, or the generalising shift to 'some people' (line 47) (oe) **B1**

(d) Gives a plausible comment on effect, e.g. broadens Vera's private situation into a wider comment on how people manage what is unresolved in their lives (oe) **B1**

(d) Answer: The shift from 'Vera' to 'some people' (line 47) extends the tide-line metaphor from Vera's specific situation into a wider, generalised comment on how people conceal what is unresolved in their lives.

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