

Comments on the sample

The candidate packs a lot into her introduction (you may feel it is *too* detailed). She clearly identifies many significant areas of style and content, and her final sentence in the first paragraph shows excellent sense of the focus of the passage. Already in the introduction there is considerable awareness of literary features: of style and language, of narrator and characterization, of chronology and surprise. The language is confident and the vocabulary varied and effective.

The second paragraph provides a concise, interpretive summary, showing she has grasped the content well. This leaves her free to focus in detail later on aspects of the piece without having to constantly make the narrative line clear or proceed in a rigidly linear way. It is surprising how many candidates don't grasp the content clearly.

The next paragraph, dealing with the description of the Thames, is sensitive to punctuation, sentence structure and style, but is a little disappointing in not saying rather more about the vivid and unusual images of the Thames and particularly that these perceptions seem to be those of an *artist*. (The notes at the end of the passage helpfully reveal that the narrator was an artist. This is a good example of where such notes can affect your reading of the whole passage. Candidates quite often fail to pay attention to such notes.) Even the best commentaries are rarely if ever perfect, however, and such flaws or omissions should not blind us to how much is accomplished here. This is, after all, an *unseen* exam.

She then takes on the challenge of the allusions with an intelligent and speculative approach. She makes an analogy with *Crime and Punishment*. If such references genuinely occur to the candidate and illuminate or clarify the passage, they may be acceptable, but should be used with restraint, in passing, as it were. They should not be deliberately sought or strained for and should certainly not become dominant in the discussion: the focus must remain clearly on the passage. No aspect of the assessment criteria *specifically* rewards such analogies (though an illuminating idea will be rewarded under Criterion B).

There are some excellent insights about the narrator and Coker in the penultimate paragraph, and some implicit awareness of the irony of the presentation of the narrator here, where action takes over and he is no longer 'in control'. The conclusion brings ideas together with a fine focus and goes further, sharpening some insights about the whole passage (the contrasts and the quirky likeableness of the characters, for example). The candidate has expanded the reader's understanding and appreciation of the passage through her own fine grasp of it, which is what a good commentary should do.