

Scoring Rubric for Question #2: From Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*

- 9-8 These papers not only feature a keen, inferential understanding of the feelings that Carrie experiences as a newlywed bride, but also a clear perception of how these are established via such elements as syntax, diction, figurative language, and tone. Well-conceived, well-developed, and well-organized, these papers are marked by frequent and accurate references to the selection from *Main Street*, by an admirable ability to synthesize thought into a persuasive response, and by a mature control over the elements of composition. Though not perfect, they clearly indicate the students' ability to read prose skillfully and incorporate such elements as tone, diction, syntax, and figurative language in a fluent and cogent fashion.
- 7-6 These essays feature a solid understanding of Carrie's feelings and of how they manifest themselves in the speaker's tone, diction, syntax, and/or figurative language, but they are less adept at using them to form a persuasive response to the question. This may be due to a more limited recognition of Carrie's feelings, to less significant or less frequent references to the text, and/or to less control over the elements of effective composition. Though these essays reflect the writers' abilities to convey their points clearly, they feature less fluency, cogency, or development than the 9-8 papers.
- 5 These essays respond to the selection from Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* in superficial, formulaic, inconsistent, or insufficiently supported ways. They may rely primarily upon paraphrase but may still suggest an implicit understanding of the passage and the task. The papers are generally written in a satisfactory way, with occasional errors in composition or mechanics that do not impede the reader's understanding. Nevertheless, these essays lack the organization, persuasiveness, and development of upper-half papers.
- 4-3 These lower-half essays generally suggest an incomplete understanding of Lewis' passage or an inability to show how Carrie's feelings are manifested by the speaker's tone, diction, syntax, and/or figurative language. Their arguments generally lack conviction due to a misreading of the text, a failure to provide supporting references, or an insufficient control over the elements of composition. In some instances they may consist entirely of paraphrase and, in the worst cases, may feature problems in organization, clarity, fluency, or development.
- 2-1 These essays are marked by an egregious misreading of the texts or of the prompt, by many serious and distracting errors in grammar and mechanics, and in many cases by an oversimplification that precludes any successful response to the prompt. Though these essays may attempt to address the diversity of Carrie's feelings, they are severely limited by gross deficiencies in organization, clarity, fluency, or development.
- 0 Papers scored a zero make no more than a passing reference to the task.

Student Response #1:

In this passage, Carrie, a newlywed on the first day in her new home, experiences many different feelings. While her husband Kennicott is with her, she tries to please him and hide her true feelings. The reader can tell this through her rushed, quick responses. Alone, however, Carrie's feelings come through. First, she has feelings of distaste and boredom, then a feeling of being trapped, and finally a feeling of foolishness. These feelings are mainly shown through the descriptions of the items she sees in the house. The things that are already there when they move in bore her and make her feel trapped, and the items she brings with them to her new home make her feel foolish. Moreover, the words and images chosen to describe these items express her distaste toward the marriage in general.

While her husband is home with her, Carrie seems to put on an act. When he asks her if she minds if he goes to work for a while, she responds "Why, no. Of course not" quickly and simply, as if to trick him into believing that she really doesn't. Again, when he asks if she's sure, she says, "Not a bit. Out of my way. Let me unpack," as if to demonstrate that his absence will have no effect upon her. The quick tone of her responses, however, seems too understanding, leading the reader to believe she will only say what Kennicott wants to hear even if she really feels otherwise.

After Kennicott leaves, Carrie feels bored with the home and expresses her distaste for it. This is seen in the words chosen to describe both her and what she sees. First, Carrie is personally described as a "drooping bride," a very sad and dull description. The bedroom, whose "dismalness crawled over her," is a dry, dreary room that is awkward in shape. The imitation bureau and plain pine washstand, both pieces of drab furniture, hint at her growing distaste, while the "petticoated pin-cushion" that sits uncomfortably on the marble counter "like a gravestone" connotes death. The words chosen to describe what Carrie sees give the reader a mental image of an old, tired room, a room filled with items that are ugly and dull. This depiction mirrors Carrie's own feelings of boredom and dislike.

Her next feeling, and one that repeats later on, is one of being trapped. Surveying her new surroundings, Carrie shudders, asking herself how people could live with such items. She views the furniture as "elderly judges, condemning her to death by smothering." This line is loaded with feelings of being trapped and suppressed forever. She thinks the furniture is calling out "Choke her—choke her—smother her," again emphasizing the fact that she feels suffocated by the house. She then pictures herself among the shadows of "dead thoughts and haunting repressions," an image that reveals her feelings that only death can take her away; that until then she is trapped. Later, her feelings of being trapped surface once more when, looking out the window, she finds her view blocked by the drab, "sour liver" wall of a neighboring church, an "ashpile," an "unpainted stable," and an alleyway. Disillusioned, she thinks that

the terraced garden below will be the only scenery for the rest of her life. The dash that follows the word “for” suggests that this is a reality which she does not want to face. The double trauma of first, being physically enclosed within the home, and second, stuck there forever, displays her feelings of entrapment even further.

Finally, as she looks over the items she had purchased prior to the wedding, Carrie feels foolish. For example, the once desirable luxury of a “chintz-lined, silver-fitted bag” now seems an extravagant vanity; the “daring black chemise of frail chiffon and lace” now turns her into a hussy that even the personified bed seems to reject. Everything she bought prior to the wedding now makes her feel foolish, to such an extent that she feels the need to hide the chemise beneath something more conservative, “a sensible linen blouse.” Once again, the reader senses Carrie’s vacillating feelings toward the marriage as well.

Surprisingly, though Carrie’s feelings change throughout the passage, her mood does not. She carries on with a stoic reassurance, continually checking herself (“Stop it! They’re perfectly comfortable things”) or rationalizing her feelings (“I’m nervous this afternoon”). Even so, the details and images foreshadow a miserable scene for her, one in which she will find no comfort. One can tell through the way she sees these objects that she is upset with her decision to marry and that the “home” to which she has been brought makes her regret it even more.

Student Free-Response Assessment Sheet

1. Restate the essential parts of the free-response question. What is it that the question asks the student to do?

2. Identify what this student did well. In what ways did this response answer the question? What details and/or arguments did you find most convincing?

3. Was there anything about this student's essay which did NOT answer the question? Any part of this student's argument which you did not find convincing? How fluently and clearly did you think this paper was written?

4. On a 0-9 scale, what do you think this paper might receive?

Student Response #2:

In the passage, Sinclair Lewis's choice of diction, tone, figurative language, and syntax shows the reader that Carrie does not have the classic positive feelings of a newlywed. The diversity of feelings range more along the lines of depression, disappointment, and anxiety. These feelings are so intense that Carrie feels as if she is dying.

Lewis's choice of diction shows the sharp contrast between how one should be feeling as a newlywed (through Carrie and Kennicott's conversation) and how Carrie is truly feeling (her innermost thoughts). In conversation, the Midwestern dialect is emphasized in Kennicott's phrases such as "folks" and "squarest people on earth." Carrie answers brightly in the same manner, her diction only changing when she is left to herself. Now her words connote smothering, discomfort, distortion ("the awkward, knuckly L-shape"), depression, and death ("the deep-bosomed bed stiffened in disgust" and "She was alone in this house among the shadows of dead thoughts and haunting repercussions"). The syntax is used in the same manner. When speaking, Carrie uses short, even fragmented responses in order to show her outward nonchalance and happiness. However, her thoughts are long-winded, marked by run-on sentences that show her internal brooding. The overall tone conveys her depression and claustrophobic feelings of smothering.

It is the figures of speech in the passage, however, that do the most to show Carrie's diversity of feeling. The simile comparing a pin cushion to a gravestone suggests that Carrie feels as if she is dying, trapped forever in a life that she doesn't want. When the furniture is personified as a "circle of elderly judges, condemning her to death by smothering," this shows Carrie's feelings of being stifled, caged in, and even killed by her new life and surroundings. Even the olfactory imagery brings in death as "The old linen smelled of the tomb." The distortion is apparent in lines 45-51 where all of her more luxurious items from St. Paul become personified or are described as things that are extremely out of place.

In short, Sinclair shows the reader through the aforementioned literary devices that Carrie's thoughts and feelings belie a much darker reality than a nervous adjustment to a new environment. She is depressed and fixated upon death and suffocation, and the last sentence prophesies what would be, for her, the worst entrapment: to have a child.

Student Free-Response Assessment Sheet

1. Restate the essential parts of the free-response question. What is it that the question asks the student to do?

2. Identify what this student did well. In what ways did this response answer the question? What details and/or arguments did you find most convincing?

3. Was there anything about this student's essay which did NOT answer the question? Any part of this student's argument which you did not find convincing? How fluently and clearly did you think this paper was written?

4. On a 0-9 scale, what do you think this paper might receive?

Student Response #3:

The passage shows the diversity of feelings that Carrie experiences as a newly-wed bride. The author uses the tools of diction, tone, figurative language, and syntax to show how Carrie is beginning to realize the finality of marriage and how she feels unsure and almost doomed by it, although she tries to deny it.

The author uses dark diction to help us understand how Carrie feels doomed or trapped by the new marriage. She claims the room is an “awkward, knuckly L-shape” (line 18); she uses figurative language to show the reader that an L-shaped room is a room of love (e.g. a bedroom), but her choice of “awkward” shows her discomfort, and “knuckly” is a word associated with getting old. Thus, one can clearly see that Carrie feels the marriage is confining. The author also uses a lot of dark and deathly diction. The bed is “black walnut, “a color associated with death; a scent-bottle and pin cushion are set “like a gravestone” on a countertop; and she smells “Florida Water” (Florida is a place where old people go to retire and die). Carrie is worried that she is just going to be in this marriage and never do anything except die. She probably thinks this because at the beginning of the passage her husband leaves her to go to the office. This probably set off these thoughts because she probably thinks that soon their marriage will become dull. He’ll be able to run off to the office while she sits at home cooking dinner, never making anything of her life. In lines 28-30 she feels like the furniture will smother her, and the chair is personified to say “Smother her.” The passage is full of more death-related diction: she thinks the linen smells like a “tomb,” and the furniture in the house is from Lac-qui-Meurt, or the “lake who kills.”

The author also uses symbolism. Carrie hides her “daring black chemise,” which shows that not only does she feel doomed emotionally but that she feels doomed sexually.

Throughout her thoughts and worries about marriage, Carrie tries to stop herself from thinking these things. On line 38, she tells herself to “Stop it!” and tries to deny what she’s thinking. She says multiple times on lines 62-63, “I mustn’t...Not now!” She knows she’s already married and that there’s nothing she can do about it, so she’s trying to forget that her life is doomed because of her marriage.

Student Free-Response Assessment Sheet

1. Restate the essential parts of the free-response question. What is it that the question asks the student to do?

2. Identify what this student did well. In what ways did this response answer the question? What details and/or arguments did you find most convincing?

3. Was there anything about this student's essay which did NOT answer the question? Any part of this student's argument which you did not find convincing? How fluently and clearly did you think this paper was written?

4. On a 0-9 scale, what do you think this paper might receive?

Authors' Commentary and Evaluation**Student Response #1:**

This high-level response identifies three separate feelings—boredom, entrapment, and foolishness—and examines them with meticulous reference to the passage’s detail. Though the writer never directly addresses the elements of diction, tone, or figurative language, this examination is implicit in the text. For example, in her examination of the bedroom furniture, the dismal, dreary tone that is being established is clearly comprehended and the simile of the gravestone duly noted. Moreover, the discussion of choking and smothering suggests that the student is zeroing in on significant and meaningful diction. The writer of this essay also recognizes the embarrassment which Carrie feels upon unpacking her fine lingerie in such a simple and drab environment and also the disillusionment she feels upon seeing the confined view from her bedroom window. In addition, the writer of this essay clearly extends the disappointment that Carrie experiences upon moving into her new home, complementing it with the growing uneasiness Carrie clearly feels about her new marriage. As the student artfully describes, “The imitation bureau and plain pine washstand, both pieces of drab furniture, hint at her growing distaste, while the ‘petticoated pin-cushion’ that sits uncomfortably on the marble counter ‘like a gravestone’ connotes death. The words chosen to describe what Carrie sees give the reader a mental image of an old, tired room, a room filled with items that are ugly and dull. This depiction mirrors Carrie’s own feelings of boredom and dislike.”

Moreover, the student introduces words such as “foolish” and “vacillating,” which capture the reality that is slowly dawning upon Carrie, that this union may have been a grave error. As the student notes, “For example, the once desirable luxury of a ‘chintz-lined, silver-fitted bag’ now seems an extravagant vanity; the ‘daring black chemise of frail chiffon and lace’ now turns her into a hussy that even the personified bed seems to reject. Everything she bought prior to the wedding now makes her feel foolish...”. An essay of admirable unity and deep perception, this is clearly a very perceptive and eloquently written paper.

AP Score: 9**Student Response #2:**

This is also an insightful response, one that sets out to deal with literary elements such as diction and tone in a much more straightforward way. For example, the student notes how Carrie’s “words connote smothering, discomfort, distortion (‘the awkward, knuckly L-shape’), depression, and death (‘the deep-bosomed bed stiffened in disgust’ and ‘She was alone in this house among the shadows of dead thoughts and haunting repercussions’).” Though this paper does less to show the changes in Carrie’s feelings, it nevertheless mentions accurately Carrie’s sense of anxiety, depression, claustrophobia, and death. The writer also picks up on some new items such as the difference in Carrie’s dialogue and thought and the shifting syntax in her spoken and unspoken thoughts. For example, the student observes how “When speaking, Carrie uses short, even fragmented responses in order to show her outward nonchalance and happiness. However, her thoughts are long-winded,

marked by run-on sentences that show her internal brooding.” Also impressive is this student’s mention of the morbid smell of the linen, and of (quite perceptively) Carrie’s dread of a possible pregnancy: “She is depressed and fixated upon death and suffocation, and the last sentence prophesies what would be, for her, the worst entrapment: to have a child.”

This short, at times implicit, but undeniably dense paper is clearly an upper-half response, perhaps not developed with the expansiveness of the previous paper, but showing an incontrovertible understanding of Carrie’s response to her relocation and the devices Sinclair employs to convey it.

AP Score: 7 to low 8

Student Response #3:

This is a paper whose insights and organization move it toward the upper half and whose syntax and lack of development work against it. Though the introduction is accurate but formulaic, the observations in the body range from solid to spectacular. The writer’s attention to traditional symbols of death (the dark walnut bed color, the simile of the gravestone) are elevated by her astute recognition of the town’s name (Lac-qui-Meurt, the “lake who kills”). Similarly, the student’s awareness of the salient theme of suffocation is embellished by her suggestion that Carrie’s decision to hide her chemise is an indication of the sexual death of her marriage. As the student effectively summarizes, “He’ll be able to run off to the office while she sits at home cooking dinner, never making anything of her life.” At the same time, the writer’s connection of “Florida Water” to the present day retirement communities that pervade that state is both distracting and detracting.

Overall, though this writer makes a valid assessment of Carrie’s marital disillusionment and makes generally accurate references to the text, the development and fluency of the argument is inferior to that of the previous two samples. Though it is better than average, we did not view this as an upper-tier paper.

AP Score: 6