

Style

Figurative language: "her eyes . . . her sight seems turned in, gone down into her heart"

Setting

She is being punished like a child in a setting of older students—patience and composure

First Paragraph

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre describes two young girls: Jane Eyre and Helen Burns. Brontë expresses how strongly sympathetic Jane is by her use of highly effective diction. Jane is also portrayed as intelligent through her insightful and analytical thoughts. Through her use of questioning, her figurative language, and her sensitivity, Brontë gives us a sense of both Jane, a child, and Helen, the object of her admiration.

Analysis: "Reunion"**Sample Student Responses**

Below are two upper-level essays and a midlevel essay on John Cheever's "Reunion." Read them and determine their strong points. Which opening line do you like better? Which essay has the better closing paragraph? Remember that the essays do not have to be perfect, and that the readers are told to "reward the student for what they do well." How does your own essay compare with these? Do you think these essays were scored fairly according to the rubric on page 188?

Student Essays: "Reunion"**Jennifer (Score: 8)**

Eager to please, submissive, intimidated, proud, and embarrassed, Charlie recedes as his father dominates and leads. This reunion is hardly a meeting of mutual interest, for Charlie's youthful expectations are muted by his father's lack of control. Their encounter is a monopolized exchange orchestrated by his father. As Charlie observes, Charlie reveals to the reader the absence of a relationship. Utilizing tone, diction and perspective, Cheever conveys the intricacy of their reunion.

Interestingly, Charlie confirms their meeting through his father's secretary. One could mistake their reunion for a formal business luncheon. They are both pressed for time. Charlie admits that he would be in New York between

trains for an hour and a half. One wonders if the hastiness of their encounter is intentional.

Upon discovering his father, Charlie experiences a mixture of pride and fear. He sizes up his father, "my flesh and blood, my future and my doom, a stranger." The use of the first person here engages the reader. Charlie anticipates his father's expectations. Initially, he seeks his father's approval, recognizing that he would, "have to plan his campaigns within his father's limitations." Charlie predicts that he will probably be something like his father. He aches for his father's companionship. This is indicated by his unspoken wish that "someone would see them together." Charlie wants to experience, to etch, to soak in, his father. He sniffs his father as his "mother sniffs a rose." This metaphor and the description that follows establish Charlie's identity of masculinity, realized in his first impressions of his father. Appealing to the senses, Cheever describes the father's BO as a "compound of whiskey and a mature male." Even his father's abrupt, slap-on-the-back greeting embodies the tough guy persona of a "big, good-looking man." Charlie is overwhelmed by his father's boisterousness, his pungent odor and his big, good-looking frame.

However, Charlie grows increasingly uneasy and embarrassed in his father's presence. As they enter an empty restaurant, his father hails the waiter with a "boisterousness that seemed out of place." So begins Charlie's silent judgment. He is the withdrawn spectator.

With obnoxious commands and caustic language, Charlie's father tries to control and intimidate. He cross-questions Charlie, and orders the waiter like a trained animal. His impatience leads to derisive commands—"Get us another table," sarcastic condescension—"Chop-chop,"

and false ingratiation—"If it wouldn't be above and beyond the call of duty." Throughout this spree, Charlie follows his father from restaurant to restaurant. As his father threatens and throws tantrums, one wonders who is the adult?

Charlie's father expects the worst service with his premature, sizzling criticism. He rudely demands and he receives the response he expects: curtness instead of courtesy. He embraces retaliation with a smugness that screams, "I could've told you," for he is determined to be right.

Sparring with the waiters, he affirms his arrogant, false superiority. His boisterousness is further agitated by "Gibson Beefeaters" or "Bibson Geefeaters." Using the language of a typical hot-shot megalomaniac, Charlie's father orders his waiters to "make it snappy" or to come off it.

Despite his crudeness, Charlie's father is an intelligent man. His comments sting with the acuity of a strategically placed mine. Shrapnel. He can even communicate his acerbic comments in multiple languages, making prejudiced, cultural judgments. He wants Charlie to know that he's the man. With this argumentative attitude, he affirms his feigned authority. For his finale, Charlie's father unnecessarily instigates a clerk by insulting his merchandise. However, Charlie must leave before the act is over. His father orders him to "just wait a second. I want to get a rise out of this chap." Charlie leaves and never looks back.

By altering the setting, Cheever creates multiple opportunities to convey the boisterous arrogance of Charlie's father. Additionally, the use of interior monologue conveys Charlie's retreat from his father's abrasiveness.

Ultimately, Charlie's image is reduced to reality. Their relationship is left at the station, like a penny caught between the rails.

Reader Analysis: Jennifer (8)

While this student wrote an outstanding essay, the essay demonstrates what may well be a strength can also undermine a superbly written piece. In this case, the student demonstrates originality and an individual voice by opening with four accurate descriptive phrases before mentioning the subject's name or his situation. But what begins as a dynamic and effective sentence limps somewhat before the close because the words *recedes* and *dominates* do not convey precisely what the writer means. At least one reader felt that the jarring notes prevented the immersion necessary for the very top score.

The student presents a clear and accurate assessment of the situation, perceives the complexity of the father-son relationship, and addresses three specific elements—tone, diction, and perspective—in the development of the essay. Interesting phrasing, varied sentence structure, and a fairly impressive vocabulary range enhance the essay (“sarcastic condescension,” “false ingratiation,” “feigned authority,” and “caustic language”). The near misses, however, are distracting and prevented the reader from assigning the highest score (“recedes,” father’s “tough guy persona,” “typical hot-shot megalomaniac”). The easy, informal structure and style of the essay works in some instances, but works against itself in others. At times the student seems to lose a sense of audience.

Several ideas are well-developed and well-supported. The relationship between father and son is clearly defined and amply supported, but the essay would have benefited from reorganization and consolidation of the short paragraphs which illustrate Charlie’s growing embarrassment. The reader perceives a lack of coherent support for all the components addressed, specifically the element of tone. However, tone is implied throughout.

This is a very strong essay that meets most of the requirements for a high score, but leaves room for improvement. The student exhibits a command of a wide range of the elements of good writing.

Scott (Score: 6)

How complex can a father-son relationship be? Depending on the personality of the father and the son, a relationship develops that functions on many levels. In Cheever's short story "Reunion," Charlie is upset. After a divorce, it had been three years since Charlie had last seen his father, and he was looking forward to

Kristen (Score: 5)

"The last time I saw my father," introduces and concludes the story. After a disappointing reunion, Charlie does not see his father again. Whether the reason is death, choice, or inconvenience, Charlie regrets that his last visit had no positive effect on their relationship.

The detached tone indicates Charlie's distance from his father. The secretary confirmed the meeting as if they were business associates. The mother divorced him implying he had some kind of problem. The phrases "my flesh and blood" and "my future and my doom" are parallel structures. The genetic disease of alcoholism is within Charlie, and he fears it may find a way to control him the way it has controlled his father. The use of dialogue further describes the gap between Charlie and his father. Charlie speaks only to say he must go. He speaks to his father directly, following his short statements with "Daddy." Whereas he explains the actions of his father, "Daddy" expresses a childlike innocence of a son that looks up to his dad. The rude, ranting speech of the father indicates his lack of clear thinking. During his bar-hopping, he speaks to Charlie only to "cross-question" and order him to "Come on." He calls Charlie by his name, except for the times he referred to him as "sonny." "Sonny" is usually used by an older person toward a non-related younger one.

The contrast between Charlie's initial feelings toward his father and his feelings when he left shows how Charlie gave his father an honest chance and was disappointed. At first he was "happy to see him." The analogy of how he smelled his father demonstrated that he treated him as if he were delicate and beautiful. While he fears dependence of alcohol, Charlie is helpless around his father. He does not react to his cruel words, and he submits to his

demands. His father repeatedly commands him to come, and he repeatedly "follows him out."

"I wanted some record of us being together." Charlie wanted to have a connection with his father that he could remember. Twice he told him he had to go. He ended the reunion in order to save the good parts. The longer he stayed, the more he did not want to see. Perhaps that is why it was the last time he saw his father.

Reader Analysis: Kristen (5)

This essay, while insightful, is much thinner than the upper-level essays; hence it is a 5. The interpretation is expressed tentatively and somewhat unconvincingly. The rubric states that a 5 essay discusses the conflict between the father and the son and addresses the complexity of their relationship, but does so with less insight than essays in the 7–6 range.

Much more is needed to develop the opening paragraph. The student could have mentioned Cheever's rhetorical strategies and could have given more specific information about the complexity of the relationship between father and son. In the second paragraph, although the student introduces tone, there is no support given for it. The writer might have traced the story's complexity of tone to better illustrate its poignancy. For example, the story begins with an enthusiastic and hopeful Charlie, and then evolves into what is clearly a description given from memory by a somewhat bitter and disillusioned young man. Instead of introducing the issue of alcoholism in the second paragraph, the writer should have addressed the tonal changes throughout the story.

The organization of the essay is not as controlled or logical as it might be; however, the discussion of the short story's dialogue is apt and insightful ("Sonny is usually used by an older person toward a non-related younger one"). Diction is addressed—"Daddy," "Sonny," "my flesh and blood"—with accurate connotations assigned to those terms, but the student does not develop these ideas fully or fruitfully. While the student covers the surface aspects of the relationship, and mentions tone, contrast, and dialogue, limited evidence is provided in a sporadic way with no evident direction, and without the support of compelling logical arguments. In another instance the writer discusses the analogy of "how he smelled his father." This also could have been developed further. Why "delicate and beautiful"? At this point the essay lapses into paraphrase and borders perilously close on the merely narrative, with no new analysis or support. Some awkward phrasing ("He ended the reunion in order to save the good parts.") displays the writer's lack of sophistication and understanding of the piece, but the positive aspects of the essay ultimately outweigh the negative, thus making this a true 5.