

4.10 Details, diction, and syntax reveal perspective

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 18 marks

KEY WORDS tone 语气

Objective

Build the skills to explain **tone** 语气.

You must be able to:

- state what shapes the tone a narrator conveys
- state what descriptive words do beyond modifying
- define tone in the CED's terms
- identify tone from adjectives and adverbs

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ What shapes tone

The narrators', characters', or speakers' backgrounds and perspectives shape the tone they convey about subjects or events in the text. Tone comes from perspective.

■ Descriptive words

Descriptive words, such as adjectives and adverbs, not only qualify or modify the things they describe but also convey a perspective toward those things. Every adjective is a small judgment.

■ Tone

The attitude of narrators, characters or speakers toward an idea, character or situation emerges from their perspective and may be referred to as tone. Tone is attitude made audible.

■ How to find it

Underline the adjectives and adverbs in a passage and ask what attitude they share. "Merely", "a little", "finally" are as revealing as any noun.

2 Practice

2.1 State what shapes the tone a narrator conveys. [2]

2.2 State what descriptive words do beyond modifying. [2]

2.3 Define tone in the CED's terms.

(a) State the definition. [2]

(b) State a practical method for finding it. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Tone emerges from [1]

- A perspective
- B page count
- C genre
- D publication date

3.2 Every adjective is [1]

- A a small judgment
- B neutral
- C decorative only
- D grammatically required

3.3 A narrator describes a gift as “adequate”.

- State the attitude conveyed. [1]
- Explain how a single word carries it. [2]

3.4 Full free-response task. In a short story, a narrator describes clearing out her late mother’s flat. She catalogues the contents precisely — twelve teaspoons, a coat with a missing button, a receipt for milk dated the previous Tuesday — and comments on none of them. Only once, mid-list, does she write “*the good scissors*”.

Write an essay that analyses how the narrator's tone is conveyed and what it reveals about her.

Marked on the AP 6-point rubric: **Row A — Thesis (1), Row B — Evidence and Commentary (4), Row C — Sophistication (1).**

[6]

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AP English Literature and Composition • 4.10 Details, diction, and syntax reveal perspective (4)

Solutions

2.1 the narrator's, character's or speaker's background and perspective.

2.2 they convey a perspective toward the things they describe as well as qualifying or modifying them.

2.3 (a) the attitude of a narrator, character or speaker toward an idea, character or situation, emerging from their perspective. (b) underline the adjectives and adverbs and ask what attitude they share.

3.1 A. perspective.

3.2 A. a small judgment.

3.3 (a) faint disappointment or withheld approval. (b) "adequate" states that a minimum was met, which implies more was expected and not given.

3.4 Row A — Thesis (1). A defensible claim about **tone**, which is the attitude *towards* the subject, not the mood of the scene. **Earns it:** "The narrator's refusal to comment is itself the comment: her flat inventory is grief performed as competence, and the two words she cannot keep neutral give her away." **Does not:** "The tone is sad because her mother has died."

Row B — Evidence and Commentary (0–4). Tone must be built from evidence, and here the evidence is largely **what is absent**. The precision of the counted teaspoons reads as control, not indifference. The receipt dated the previous Tuesday is the story's cruellest detail and is delivered flattest — the ordinariness of the date does the work no adjective could. "*The good scissors*" is the single evaluative phrase in the list, and it is her mother's judgment, not hers: the narrator has slipped into the dead woman's idiom without noticing. A response that identifies the tone as "detached" and stops there caps at 2; the 4-point response explains what the detachment costs to maintain.

Row C — Sophistication (1). Earned by recognising that the reader's emotion is produced by the narrator's refusal to supply any, and that this places the reader in exactly the position the narrator is avoiding. The point rewards a complex reading sustained across the essay.