

Writing Feedback Sheet

STUDENT

Mia

DATE

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The Task

A locked door.

At the end of the upstairs hallway there is a small door. For as long as you can remember it has been locked. This morning you find it standing slightly open. Write a story about what is on the other side. A sample response, written for this sheet rather than taken from a student.

WHAT THE PROMPT ASKS FOR

- A door that has meant something for a long time
- The decision about whether to open it
- What is on the other side, and what that costs

WHAT A MARKER REWARDS HERE

- Resisting the obvious fantasy on the other side
- A narrator whose feeling is shown by what they do
- An ending that chooses, rather than explains

The Student's Response

The lighthouse had not been lit for thirty years, and everyone in the town agreed that was for the best. It stood at the end of the point like a chimney somebody had forgotten to knock down, and the paint came off it in long grey curls whenever the wind got up.

Nan told me the story once and then refused to tell it again. A ship went down in 1974, she said, and the keeper had been asleep. That was all. She said it the way you close a door.

So when I saw the light come on, I did not run home. I stood on the wet sand with my shoes in my hand and I watched it swing out across the water, once, twice, patient as a person looking for someone they know. Somebody was up there. Somebody had climbed all those stairs and cleaned the glass and waited for dark.

I did not tell Nan. Some doors you leave shut, and some you knock on, and I have not decided yet which one this is.

Marking Breakdown

CRITERION	STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Ideas 5 / 5	- The lighthouse is doing real work as an image rather than sitting there as scenery. A chimney nobody knocked down tells us how the whole town feels about its own history in eight words. - You resisted the obvious answer. Nothing supernatural comes through the door, and the piece is far stronger for it: a person climbed the stairs, and that is enough. - The title's door and Nan's door are the same door by the last line, and you never point at the connection.	- The middle paragraph hands us the shipwreck as information. Let the narrator find it out instead, from a plaque, a photograph, the way the adults stop talking. - We never learn what the narrator wants. One line of that, early, and the ending would cut deeper.
Structure 4 / 5	- Four paragraphs, each with a job, and the last one turns rather than summarises. - The piece opens on the thing and closes on the narrator. That movement is the shape of the story and you found it.	- Paragraph two stops the story to explain. Move Nan's refusal to the end of it so the scene keeps moving while we learn. - Paragraph three carries two beats, the watching and the working out. Split it and the second one lands harder.
Language 5 / 5	"She said it the way you close a door" is the best line here. It is a comparison that tells us about Nan, not about doors. - The shoes in the hand does more than three adjectives about being cold and wet would have. "once, twice" is doing rhythm work. The sentence slows exactly where the light slows.	"patient as a person looking for someone they know" is one clause too long. Stop at patient and let the reader finish it. - Two sentences in a row open with Somebody. That is a deliberate effect, so make it three or make it one.
Vocabulary 4 / 5	- Plain words used exactly: curls, swing, wet sand. Nothing is reaching for effect, which is why the effect arrives. "grey" rather than a fancier colour word is the right call for a town that would rather not look at this building.	"stood" appears three times without meaning to. Two of them can go. - There is no verb in the piece that surprises. One well-chosen unusual verb, in the third paragraph, would lift the whole thing.
Spelling and grammar 4 / 5	- Sentence boundaries are controlled, and the long sentences stay grammatical the whole way through. - The past tense holds without a single slip, including through the reported speech in paragraph two.	"I did not tell Nan. Some doors you leave shut" is right, but earlier in the piece a comma is doing a full stop's job. Read it aloud and you will hear where. 1974 is fine unspaced, but a date dropped into a sentence usually wants commas around the clause it sits in.

TOTAL 22 / 25

Strong, held back by one paragraph of explaining

What You Did Well

Mia, this is a genuinely controlled piece, and the control is the point. Most responses to this prompt open the door and put something behind it: a room, a memory, a monster. You put a person up a staircase and then refused to introduce them, and that refusal is what makes the last paragraph work.

The restraint holds right up until the final line, where you stop resisting and explain the metaphor you have just made. Trust the door. Cut the second half of that sentence and this is a 24.

Three Things to Work On

1 Turn the explaining paragraph into a scene

Paragraph two is the only place where the story stops and someone tells us things. Everything in it can be shown: the year on a plaque, a photograph turned face down, the way the adults change the subject. Nothing else in the piece explains, which is exactly why this one stands out.

Try this: rewrite paragraph two with no sentence that begins with a fact. Nan can still refuse to talk. She just has to refuse in front of us.

2 Stop one sentence earlier, three times

Your best sentences end a beat before you let them. Patient as a person looking for someone they know. Some doors you leave shut, and some you knock on, and I have not decided yet which one this is. In both cases the reader had already arrived.

Try this: find the three longest sentences in the piece and cut the last clause off each. Read it back. Keep the cuts that still make sense, and you will keep at least two.

3 Give the narrator one want, in the first paragraph

We know what the narrator notices and what the narrator refuses to do, but not what they are after. A single early line about wanting the light to come on, or wanting Nan to finish the story, turns the ending from a nice image into a decision that costs something.

Try this: add one sentence to paragraph one that says what this person wants, without using the word want. Then check the last paragraph again: it should now read as an answer.