*The Road* Higher English

Key Incident critical essay plan

Task

Choose a novel or short story in which an incident is significant in relation to the central concerns of the text.

By referring to appropriate techniques, explain why the incident is significant and discuss how it adds to your appreciation of the text as a whole.

**Incident selected – discovery of plantation house with cellar containing humans kept as sources of food.**

Para 1: **Intro:** title, author, considered opinion, link to the question and some indication of awareness of central concerns.

Para 2: **Context** – what has led the characters to the point they reach on page 111? Character, plot and setting development so far? Reference to the juxtaposition of the opposing values of the barbarians and the man and boy (“Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women…and lastly… catamites… fitted in dogcollars.”) and discussion of the man and boy as ‘pilgrims’ and the boy as ‘God’s own firedrake’ would work. Make sure that your marker understands the key plot and character developments. Explain the man’s inner conflict. Make this brief and clear.

**Para 3:**

**Now to the key incident…**

Point: Comment on McCarthy’s development of tension as the man and boy approach the plantation house. How is the exterior of the house described; consider what the house signifies.

Evidence: “The house was tall and stately with white doric columns across the front… Chattel slaves had once trod those boards.”

Analysis: the significance of the plantation house. Once grand, what is it now? Discuss the way in which it represents the darker side of humanity that has always existed, not only in this post-apocalyptic world. Struggle between good and evil within humanity, etc.

**Para 4:**

Point: Comment on McCarthy’s revelation of horrific sub-floor discovery. How are the man and boy’s characters developed in this incident?

“Huddled against the back wall were naked people, all trying to hide… one by one they turned and blinked in the pitiful light… he’d dropped the lighter.”

Analysis: To what state have the prisoners been reduced? Compare now the values of the man and boy, who literally possess the light required to see – they are literally and metaphorically ‘carrying the fire’. Why does the man not want to help these people? Why is he horrified / terrified? What is his priority? How does the sheer inhumanity of the actions / way of life of the cannibals contrast with the values of the man and boy?

**Paragraph 5:**

Point: point out that character and plot development reach a significant moment here.

Evidence: “I was going to run. To try and lead them away. But I can’t leave you. Can you do it? When the time comes?... What if it doesn’t fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock?”

Analysis: How does the man’s inner conflict develop here? Explain the promise made by the man. Discuss the consequences of this for the main protagonist over the course of the remainder of the novel. Explain how the promise develops central concern – civilization versus barbarism / good versus evil (commitment to protect the purity and sacred goodness of the boy – possibly the last vestige of goodness on Earth – from barbarism and dehumanisation). How does the protagonist’s capacity for hope conclude in the denouement?

**Para 6:**

Conclusion:

Sum up the ways in which the incident at the plantation house is significant to the central concerns of the text. Essentially, summarise the points you have already made, and ensure you once again link them to the central concerns.