May 2011 Paper 1 Texts 3b and 4b

What happens after death? What is dying? Where do people go after they have passed away? These are some of the most complicated questions that human existence has opened. Particularly children who are new to their life have a hard time realizing and accepting the finite nature of life. It is this theme which both passages deal with – exactly how to deal with the sensitive topic of death in front of children. Text 3 is an excerpt from the novel “Believe Me” by Patricia Pearson. It was released in 2005. Text 4 on the other hand is a guide or statement of advice on “Explaining Death in a Child’s Terms”, published by the Nemours Foundation/Kids Heath between 1995 and 2005. Both passages differ in their purpose, tone, organization and outcomes, while still addressing a similar theme.

Text 3 and 4 share the theme of searching for child-appropriate answers regarding death. In text 3, a boy Lester has asked his mother “how do people get to heave, do they walk?” He also wants to know whether “they float in the lake?” These absurd questions highlight the child-like thinking of younger people. They are “literal” learners as text 4 suggests, meaning that they perceive the world in basic and concrete terms. Both texts are certain of the one thing that it is impossible to answer questions regarding the afterlife of death. Text 3’s speaker says that she doesn’t “think they walk to heaven.” This shows that she doesn’t really know any more than her son does. Text 4 supports this idea by stating that “you may not have all of the answers.” However, still the approach both texts take is significantly different.

Text 3 and 4 have different approaches and purposes. While in text 3, the mother simply feels as though she has to answer her son’s questions even though she has no idea how to do so, text 4 actually makes an attempt to lok for the psychologically best way to comfort and convince children that life is finite and death is a natural process. Text 3 admits that “I haven’t got the faintest idea on how people to go heaven” and “I am simply unaware.” Text 4 takes the approach of giving other parents advice on how to deal with their children’s questions. Unlike text 3, which gives little encouragement to solve the issue, text 4 suggests that “calmly reiterat[ing] that the person has died and can’t come back” is a good approach. It also warns parents of using “euphemisms, such as telling kids that the loved one ‘went away’…”, seeing that this may scare children to some extent. The purposes of both texts are appropriate to the speaker’s position and type of text. While text 3 is a novel, in which the writer simply tries to explain her feelings and the true occurrences, including her difficulty to answer the questions, text 4 is an actual advice article, thereby being well suited to perform its purpose of advising parents on how to deal with the situation.

The organization and progression is a further aspect that causes the texts to differ. Text 3 seems somewhat hectic, thoughts (lines 7 to 14) are intermixed with Lester’s questions (6,22,24) and stumbling attempts at coming up with an answer (line 17,23). Text 4 on the other hand is well-structured, following through lines of argument fully and advising to remain calm, as when it says that “as frustrating as this can be, continue to calmly reiterate that the person has died and can’t come back.” The organization of the texts reveals that deal may or may not be a sensitive topic depending on the way it is thought through. Furthermore the first lines of both texts indicate the direction that they will take and how the theme will be addressed, similar to a thesis statement. Text 3 unsure and hectic, therefore it begins with the appropriate contradiction: “Lately, I’ve been thinking about death. Actually I haven’t.” Text 4 on the other hand is keen to calm parents, the prime audience, down. It begins by saying: “Be honest with kids and encourage questions.” Progression is fundamentally different as well. While text 3 ends with the open-ended question “Where, up?”, leaving more questions than were solved, text 4 suggests that “kids might be satisfied hearing that someone who died is now in the cemetery.” This ending brings a close to some of the questions answered and may actually the kids “satisfied.” Tone and diction also \_\_\_\_\_\_ aspect that interlinks with the way in which the texts are set out and the result that is achieved.

Tone and diction generally differ in text 3 and 4 to suite the text’s purposes and way in which they deal with themes. The mother in text 3 has no idea how to deal with the questions, fearing death herself. She describes thoughts as “scary” and says that they should “go away.” She does not want to be confronted with the issue. Consequently she will not be able to provide sufficient answers for her son. Text 4 on the other hand calls for the need to create an “atmosphere of comfort and openness.” Rather than referring to death a “finite existence” as text 3 does, text 4 takes a more friendly approach, referring to death as the situation in which “the person’s body wasn’t working anymore”, something which the child will be able to imagine better. The uncertainty and fear of text 3 is reflected in diction with a scared connotation such as “tremulous”, “clutching”, “throbbing” and “shivering.” The mother also feels that Lester has taken “nothing” from the grandmother’s talk about death. In text 4 on the other hand, a comforting mood is established through the author’s objective and unbiased descriptions. Here, for example, parents are urged to “send the message that there’s no one right or wrong way to feel” and are warned of making their children uncomfortable when they hear things such as that the loved one “went to sleep.” The tone here is friendly, more suggestive than demanding (“You may have to […]”)

Both text 3 and 4 are attempting to find ways to deal with the complex theme of death and teaching children to accept it. However, the way in which they ultimately succeed is different. Text 3 fails to deliver concrete answers, it’s hectic tone, muddled organization and mother’s inability to answer without getting worried herself make this an unsuccessful attempt at comforting the child. Text 4 on the other hand succeeds in its purpose to comfort and answer questions to children in the right manner. Its comforting tone, helpful suggestions, organized and coherent structure, and apparent result that “kids might be satisfied” reveal the success of this text. The success is likely to derive from the fact that the type of text is an article of advice, which is able to psychologically and intellectually provide the best possible solutions to questions that initially seem impossible to answer.

Score: low 7

Comments:

Positives:

* Clear introduction with a thesis statement
* Concrete conclusion
* Great compare/contrast organizational model
* Good identification of a relevant theme and smooth inclusion of many examples

To improve:

* Tones could be more clearly identified. Be sure to describe the tone in each text and then use the examples to prove them
* Could include more transition sentences between paragraphs and transition words to link ideas
* Link ideas about diction back to theme and purpose a bit more closely
* Watch comma usage