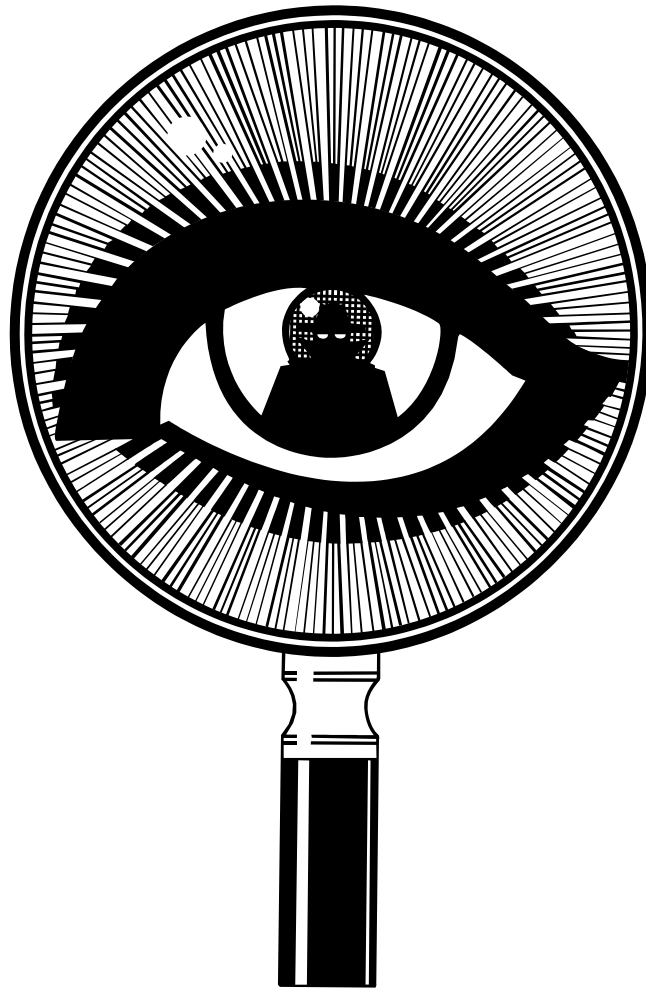


Close Reading



SQA Advice

and

Exemplar Questions by Type

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Understanding Questions – The Essentials

1. Meaning
2. Identifying Points
3. Following arguments + tracing points
4. Summarising a number of points
5. Links

Meaning

- Show understanding by using your own words.
- When asked about context show meaning and how that is related to the context.

Identifying Points

- Look throughout the line references given in order to fully explore ideas.

Following Arguments

- As above.
- Don't stop at the first idea. If a question says 'development' then follow through to the end of the section you have been given.

Summarising

- Mark off each sentence/idea in the passage before paraphrasing.
- List your points either as: sentences, bullet points or a numbered list.
- You **must** check whether you are being asked to list or to give reasons.

Linking

- Identify one word/phrase that links back + explain how it links back to relevant part of paragraph and/ or, depending on the question, how it links forwards.

Analysis Questions – The Essentials

The following are tips on how to achieve full marks in an analysis question. Each question type is dealt with separately and you should ensure that you are familiar with all of the terms noted below.

Word Choice

- denotation (meaning)
- connotation (contribution to impact/effect)

You must explain the **effect** of the connotations and may also need to analyse how the words create contrast.

Imagery

- Simile: You must show why the choice of simile creates an appropriate effect. Also explore connotations.
- Metaphor: Identify it. Comment on the effectiveness and how this metaphor adds to your understanding of the passage/poem. If there is a literal and metaphorical meaning, you must explain both i.e. “exposing the wound” (*Convergence of the Twain*, by Simon Armitage) physical and emotional wound.
- Personification: As with metaphor, i.e. how does the image help your understanding or refine your idea of what is happening.
- Metonymy/Synecdoche: “he’s lost without his wheels”, “The marketing figures kept the suits happy.”
- Symbolism – when a writer uses an object to represent an emotion or idea. A knife symbolises truth in *Bold Girls*, An onion represents love in the poem *Valentine*, a handkerchief represents jealousy in *Othello* and a dove represents peace in most cultures.

Tone

- Obtain an overview of the whole passage before picking out detail.
- Look at key words in introduction to the passage and to each paragraph/section.
- Tone = voice
- Therefore try to ‘read aloud’ to get an idea of the voice being used.

- In order to gain full marks in a tone question you must: identify the tone, give evidence, explain how appropriate this tone is or how it helped you understand the overall message in the passage.
- Types of tone you may be asked about include: sarcasm, nostalgia, humour, serious, fearful, ironic, tongue-in-cheek, doom-laden, portentous (alarming), anger.

Mood

Mood is similar to tone but you need to identify the emotion that lies behind what is being said and what is creating the tone.

Atmosphere

As above but looking for involvement of the senses. For example: ‘stench’ – decay, neglect, unpleasantness.

Sentence Structure

Overall when you read a passage you should try to identify:

- linking words
- development of an argument
- use of passage of time

To help you identify these you can look at:

- first words in paragraphs
- topic sentences to establish and trace argument
- links between paragraphs

When asked to look specifically at ‘Sentence Structure’ you will need to analyse:

- punctuation
- length
- climax/anti-climax
- repetition
- word order/syntax

Ensure you are familiar with the following punctuation:

- Full stops = point finished
- exclamation mark = *tone*
- colon = explanation or to introduce a list
- semi-colon = comes between two statements which are closely linked, or which balance or contrast one another. Also used to separate a list of phrases.
- brackets/commas/dashes = parenthesis

- inverted commas = doubt on what is being said or to identify titles.

When commenting on **lists** you must remember to:

1. identify list
2. explain the effect on the reader
3. remember, that the effect may be due to a cumulative use of one or other technique.

Short sentences can be demonstrative of a climax or anti-climax. It is not acceptable to simply note that there are short sentences. You must comment on their purpose/effect.

Parenthesis can give additional information, relevant to the topic of the sentence, or affect tone by adding a comment which might be humorous or ironic.

Miscellaneous Techniques

Rhetorical questions –

- Force the reader to react to a question.
- You are meant to agree with the writer's overall point.

Non-rhetorical questions –

- Provokes an answer, involves the reader. BUT to explain the effect of this, you must consider: does the reader have the knowledge to respond or are we going to be given that info by the writer?
- Engages the reader in a 'conversation'.
- Establishes a relationship.
- Sets up a topic.

Sound

Alliteration: It is the *quality* that creates an effect. Is the repeated sound hard or soft? Heavy or light? Is the effect depressing, light-hearted or comic?

Additional notes on Figures of Speech

Euphemism: making an unwelcome truth less harsh e.g. "he has passed away."

Circumlocution: A round about way of saying something.

Hyperbole: a deliberate exaggeration.

Litotes: opposite of hyperbole: a deliberate understatement.

Contrasts/ Opposites/ Contradictions

Paradox: appears to be a contradiction but contains an element of truth, e.g. “Teenagers today know the price of everything and the value of nothing.”

Oxymoron: Two opposites side by side e.g. “free servitude”.

Juxtaposition: side by side – can be individual words, sentences or ideas.

Evaluation Questions – The Essentials

To evaluate means to judge the effectiveness of a piece of writing. There are three main types of evaluation question:

1. Evaluation of a particular technique e.g. imagery, word choice, sentence structure.
2. Evaluation of an idea e.g. an example, an anecdote, a conclusion.
3. Evaluation of the overall effect of both passages.

Evaluating Techniques and Ideas

These questions first require analysis of the technique as you cannot evaluate effectiveness without first analysing the technique being used. So you must:

- identify the technique i.e. quote it
- analyse it
- explain how effective YOU found it in conveying the writer's purpose

Evaluating a Conclusion

You must re-read the passage, then decide and explain how effective you find the conclusion to be in terms of the whole passage. To show how a conclusion rounds off a text you should consider:

- Ideas
- Style
- Tone
- Punch-line – is there a joke or humorous comment that gives impact, a new idea that gives food for thought or a quotation?

An answer to this question could be structured as follows:

The last paragraph mentions several aspects of the passage as a whole: the idea that...; the fact that...; also the fact that...; and the fact that...So it is successful in bringing together all the strands of the argument that has run throughout the article in a final statement about the (state main idea or author's purpose). The ending rounds the article off effectively as...

Questions on understanding

Answer these as far as possible 'in your own words'. This means that you have to demonstrate that you understand the more complex words and phrases used in the passage. If you simply quote or use the words already in the passage, the marker won't know whether you understand what they mean – and will quite reasonably assume that you don't.

The number of marks allocated to an Understanding question will clearly indicate the number of points you are expected to make.

Try to make your answers to these questions fairly brief.

2005

Extract (lines 17-27)

The first thought that occurs to me is not *why* but *why not?* Our close relatives the apes enjoy climbing, so why not us? Perhaps the desire to get to the top of things is an ancient animal drive that modern society has suppressed. After all, a society geared to material gain can hardly be expected to support such an unproductive pursuit (the only material gain I've made on the hill is finding a glove that didn't fit). Then again, perhaps the act of climbing is simply too ape-like and unsophisticated for most; it is difficult, for example, to maintain any semblance of dignity while lying spread-eagled on the ground after having tripped over a clump of heather. Ironically, the freedom to adopt such a position and have no-one give disapproving looks is one of the secret joys of hillwalking... The Great Outdoors is a giant funhouse where we can cast off adult worries and become carefree kids again. It's no accident that children love climbing.

Q4. Read lines 17-27 again.

In your own words, give the **two** reasons the writer uses to explain people's desire to climb hills. Quote briefly to support each reason. 4U

Extract (lines 31-35)

Perhaps it has something to do with exercise and fitness – the feelgood feeling that comes from muscles that don't ache when you climb stairs, lungs that don't wheeze when you run for a bus and endorphins that buzz round your head and keep you feeling high even after you have returned to sea-level.

Q6. Using your own words as far as possible, summarise the **three** reasons the writer gives in lines 31-35 for returning to the hills despite all the obvious discomforts. 3U

2004

Extract

That's not what I'm worried about. What really concerns me is the fact that, in order to make this test a little more "interesting" as he puts it, Dave has decided not to tell his clients who I am. Bit of a surprise, that. After all, this course is not supposed to be the real thing. It's more of a taster, at least, that's what I thought. Now, however, I am faced by the prospect of six trusting souls who all think I'm an expert. And I am terrifyingly short of the information that I need. Don't get me wrong, Dave has done his best to prepare me for this moment. Working with a specially prepared training manual, he's introduced me to the vast range of skills that a safari guide needs. We've worked on Jeep and boat handling, plant and animal identification, tracking, safety, conservation issues and local politics. We've travelled from Dar-es-Salaam to the magnificent and undeveloped Selous Game Reserve, and then to a beachfront camp in the Saadani. And all the time, Dave has been talking.

Q4. Look again at lines 21-32.

What are the writer's two main concerns? 2U

Extract

You can imagine what the walking safari is like. There is a brief moment of triumph at the start when I manage to get an antlion to perform for us. Antlions are little grubs that live in the ground and excavate cone-shaped holes in the soil. They're expert hunters and perfect examples of how murderous the bush is, even when the animals involved are smaller than your fingernail. They also happen to be a useful way of keeping your clients entertained when there is nothing more glamorous to look at. The reason why antlions dig their holes is because they want ants to fall into them and provide them with a meal, and – lo! – just as I'm telling my group this, along comes an ant and tumbles into the miniature death-pit. He's too big for this particular grub, however, and after a struggle, he escapes. But, he's proved my point perfectly. My clients are excited. So am I.

Q6. In what **two** ways did the writer think the antlion's performance provided him with "...a brief moment of triumph..." (line 40)? 2U

The link question

This is a common question, although it's not asked every year.

You must demonstrate an understanding of each of the two paragraphs (or sections) being linked. In addition you must identify the word or words in the link sentence which connect with the preceding paragraph and the word or words in the link sentence which connect with what follows.

So there are four elements in a successful answer:

- a reference to or quotation from the link sentence which refers to the idea(s) of the preceding paragraph or section;
- an understanding of the idea(s) of the preceding paragraph or section;
- a reference to or quotation from the link sentence which refers to the idea(s) of the coming paragraph or section;
- an understanding of the idea(s) of the coming paragraph or section.

Please note: a full understanding of all four elements is not essential to gain full marks for this question.

2005

Extract (lines 17-35)

The first thought that occurs to me is not *why* but *why not?* Our close relatives the apes enjoy climbing, so why not us? Perhaps the desire to get to the top of things is an ancient animal drive that modern society has suppressed. After all, a society geared to material gain can hardly be expected to support such an unproductive pursuit (the only material gain I've made on the hill is finding a glove that didn't fit). Then again, perhaps the act of climbing is simply too ape-like and unsophisticated for most; it is difficult, for example, to maintain any semblance of dignity while lying spread-eagled on the ground after having tripped over a clump of heather. Ironically, the freedom to adopt such a position and have no-one give disapproving looks is one of the secret joys of hillwalking... The Great Outdoors is a giant funhouse where we can cast off adult worries and become carefree kids again. It's no accident that children love climbing.

Yet there must be more to it than a desire to have fun, or else why do I keep going when it ceases to be fun? When I'm cold and tired and out of breath, why do I keep putting one foot in front of the other and, when I've returned to the comfort of my home, why do I recall these times with a glow of satisfaction? Perhaps it has something to do with exercise and fitness – the feelgood feeling that comes from muscles that don't ache when you climb stairs, lungs that don't wheeze when you run for a bus and endorphins that buzz round your head and keep you feeling high even after you have returned to sea-level.

Q5. Explain how the sentence “Yet there must be more to...it ceases to be fun?” (lines 28-29) performs a linking function. 2A

2004

Extract

Actually, there's very little chance that we are going to meet anything dangerous. This is the Saadani, not the Serengeti. It's a small game reserve on the coast, north of Dar-es-Salaam, and although there are plenty of animals here – from a kaleidoscope of kingfishers to a wide range of buck, giraffes, and even lions – it's also the site of one of the oldest settlements in Tanzania. The presence of humans long ago taught the local carnivore populations who really is the king of the jungle. Just in case one of them attempts a takeover, however, we're going to be accompanied by an armed warden. Dave will be there too.

That's not what I'm worried about. What really concerns me is the fact that, in order to make this test a little more “interesting” as he puts it, Dave has decided not to tell his clients who I am. Bit of a surprise, that. After all, this course is not supposed to be the real thing. It's more of a taster, at least, that's what I thought. Now, however, I am faced by the prospect of six trusting souls who all think I'm an expert. And I am terrifyingly short of the information that I need. Don't get me wrong, Dave has done his best to prepare me for this moment. Working with a specially prepared training manual, he's introduced me to the vast range of skills that a safari guide needs. We've worked on Jeep and boat handling, plant and animal identification, tracking, safety, conservation issues and local politics. We've travelled from Dar-es-Salaam to the magnificent and undeveloped Selous Game Reserve, and then to a beachfront camp in the Saadani. And all the time, Dave has been talking.

Q3. Show how the sentence “That's not what I'm worried about.” (line 21) is a successful link between paragraphs 3 and 4. 2A

Analysis questions

Questions on imagery and on word choice

Questions on imagery and on word choice

These are questions most English candidates find especially difficult. It's not easy to 'learn' how to do them, since your ability here depends on your sensitivity to language, and this is something that has been growing gradually since you started learning to read. The following bits of advice, however, might help:

- You are unlikely to get any marks simply for quoting a word or identifying an image – the marks are usually for the 'quality of comment'.
- The comment must be specific to the word or image being asked about – vague remarks which could apply to *any* word or image will get no marks, and you get no marks for repeating the question.
- When answering on word choice, try to go beyond what a word *means*, and explore what it *suggests* (in technical terms: *connotation* rather than *denotation*).
- When answering on imagery, try to show how the *literal root or origin* of the image is being used by the writer to express an idea in a metaphorical way.

2005

Extract (9-16)

From whence comes this compulsion to climb mountains? My neighbours seem to be able to enjoy lives of quiet contentment without ever having to leave the horizontal plane. Why do I have this compulsion to get to the top of every insignificant bump on the landscape? I ponder this question not in the hope of providing an explanation for my neighbours, still less in the hope of converting them, but out of a need to explain this outlandish behaviour to myself. If I am to climb mountains I would simply like to know why. Why, no matter how breathless, bruised, battered and bedraggled I become while hillwalking, do I return with a grin on my face and a desire to go out and do it again?

Q3 (a). In lines 9-16, the writer reflects on his need to climb mountains.
By referring to **one** example of each, show how he demonstrates this need through word choice. 2A

2004

Extract

In 45 minutes I will lead a walking safari through the African bush – with only five days’ training under my belt. That’s right, dear reader: six days ago I knew as much about the fauna and flora of East Africa as I did about the contents of your fridge. Now I am going to lead six strangers into a two-mile stretch of savannah and attempt to turn this brown world of dry vegetation and nervous, secretive animals into a colourful and exciting abundance of biological complexity. And I’m going to attempt to do so without anyone getting hurt.

Q2 (c). How does the writer’s contrasting word choice in the sentence beginning “Now I am going to lead...” (lines 8-9) convey the difficulty of his task? 2A

Extract

All that lies ahead of me is one last hurdle of embarrassment, when we tell the clients who I am. Then we’ll all go down to the beach, light a big bonfire and drink a lot of beer. Occasionally, I’ll let my head drop back and look up, through the clear Tanzanian air, at the brilliant night sky. I’ll reflect on what an extraordinary week it’s been. And I’ll ask the stars to grant me one small request.

Q11. What image does the writer use in the second last paragraph (lines 70-74) to show that he felt the safari had been an ordeal, and how does it do so? 2A

2003

Extract

Back in England, I felt quite unexpectedly bereft. After a long night of confused passage making, dodging tows, skidding on boils and racing through chutes, I'd wake up in the morning and remember with a pang, that I'd lost the river and the boat. There was only one way to stop the dreams coming, and I bought a scuffed 15-foot launch which I kept moored on the Thames at Hammersmith. I took it to Lechlade at one end of the river and Tilbury at the other in a succession of soft, suburban outings.

Q5. What is the effect of the writer's use of **alliteration** in "...a succession of soft, suburban outings." (line 25) 1A

Extract

From Girvan in Scotland to Hogänäs in Sweden, they were chosen by the weather, these windfall-landfalls. It is true about any port in a storm: as you round the inner breakwater after a few hours out in a rough sea, the dingiest town seems a wonderful place to be. I've come humiliatingly close to kissing the stones of Grimsby fish dock, I was so glad to be there. The worse the weather, the more you love the town – which is useful, since you'll probably have time to learn the name of every single street before the wind will allow you to leave it.

Q9. "It is true about any port in storm." (line 63)
How effective do you find the final paragraph in elaborating on this idea?
You may wish to consider any **one** feature such as structure, word choice or illustration.

2E

Questions on sentence structure

Questions on sentence structure

Candidates find these questions difficult too. As with questions on imagery and word choice, it's not easy to 'learn' how to answer them. You have to be able to recognise relevant features of sentence structure (eg brevity, length, use of listing, climax, anti-climax, repetition, use of questions, balance, period), but the marks are given for your ability to comment on their *effect* in context.

2005

Extract (9-16)

From whence comes this compulsion to climb mountains? My neighbours seem to be able to enjoy lives of quiet contentment without ever having to leave the horizontal plane. Why do I have this compulsion to get to the top of every insignificant bump on the landscape? I ponder this question not in the hope of providing an explanation for my neighbours, still less in the hope of converting them, but out of a need to explain this outlandish behaviour to myself. If I am to climb mountains I would simply like to know why. Why, no matter how breathless, bruised, battered and bedraggled I become while hillwalking, do I return with a grin on my face and a desire to go out and do it again?

- Q3 (b). In lines 9-16, the writer reflects on his need to climb mountains. By referring to **one** example of each, show how he demonstrates this need through sentence structure. 2A
- Q 10. Look again at the sentence "In Victorian times people took to the seaside to escape dark satanic mills; now it is the countryside that beckons." (lines 61-62) Identify and give an example of **one** technique the writer uses to achieve the effect of balance or contrast. 2A

2004

Extract

That's the problem, really. Every time he opens his mouth there is something new to remember. It might be a little titbit of information that is going to liven up a dull moment out in the bust, such as the recent discovery of a whole system of low-frequency murmurings that elephants use to keep in contact with each other. There's so much fascinating stuff to learn about this place, and that's before you've got to the tricky business of remembering what everything is called. One by one, Dave throws names at me. One by one, I forget them.

Q5. Comment on the effectiveness of the structure of the final two sentences in lines 38-39.
2A

Questions on tone

Questions on tone

'Tone' is possibly the most difficult area of all. You may have to identify the writer's tone at a particular point in the passage (e.g. anger, contempt, regret, nostalgia, irony, humour) and you also may have to explain how the writer establishes the tone. The 'how' part is often done best by exploring other aspects of language such as sentence structure, imagery, and word choice (see the sections above) since these are often used to convey tone. Also, features such as sound, exaggeration and anti-climax are often used to establish tone.

2005

Extract (lines 55-60)

Perhaps it has something to do with the challenge. I am sometimes amazed by what I will attempt on the hill, but I am also amazed by what I learn about myself by doing so and perhaps this is why I do it. On the other hand, cycling around city streets is just as risky and physically challenging, so there has to be something still more to it. Perhaps it has something to do with the environment in which hillwalking takes place – outside, away from city streets, in air that has not been breathed by others.

- Q9 (b). In lines 55-60, the writer begins two sentences with “Perhaps”.
What effect does it have on the tone of this paragraph (lines 55-60) 1A

2004

Extract

In 45 minutes I will lead a walking safari through the African bush – with only five days’ training under my belt. That’s right, dear reader: six days ago I knew as much about the fauna and flora of East Africa as I did about the contents of your fridge. Now I am going to lead six strangers into a two-mile stretch of savannah and attempt to turn this brown world of dry vegetation and nervous, secretive animals into a colourful and exciting abundance of biological complexity. And I’m going to attempt to do so without anyone getting hurt.

- Q2 (b). Look again at lines 6-12.
How does the writer establish a conversational tone? 1A

2002

Extract

Though long winter nights in New Hampshire, while snow piled up outdoors and my wife slumbered peacefully beside me, I lay saucer-eyed in bed reading clinically precise accounts of people gnawed pulpy in their sleeping bags, plucked whimpering from trees, even noiselessly stalked (I didn't know this happened!) as they sauntered unawares down leafy paths or cooled their feet in mountain streams.

- Q2. “reading clinically precise accounts of people gnawed pulpy” (lines 2-3)
Considering this expression **as a whole**, explain fully how the language used makes it humorous. 2 A

Extract

Black bears rarely attack. But here's the thing. Sometimes they do. All bears are agile, cunning and immensely strong, and they are always hungry. If they want to kill you and eat you, they can, and pretty much whenever they want. That doesn't happen often, but- and here is the absolutely salient point – once would be enough.

- Q9. Read paragraph 4 (lines 29-32) again.
Identify any **one** technique used by the writer in this paragraph and explain how this technique helps him to create an appropriate tone. 2A

Questions on 'the writer's language'

Sometimes a question simply asks you to show how 'the writer's language' does something or other. This means you're not being guided towards a specific technique such as sentence structure or tone. For these questions you must find the most appropriate technique(s) and then deal with it/them in the way suggested above. Remember, however, there will usually be no marks for simply identifying a feature or quoting a word or image.

2004

Extract

70 All that lies ahead of me is one last hurdle of embarrassment, when we tell the clients who I am. Then we'll all go down to the beach, light a big bonfire and drink a lot of beer. Occasionally, I'll let my head drop back and look up, through the clear Tanzanian air, at the brilliant night sky. I'll reflect on what an extraordinary week it's been. And I'll ask the stars to grant me one small request.

75 Can I do that again?

Q12. Explain how the short final paragraph (line 75) achieves its impact. 2A

2003

Extract

But it is the wind – the endless shifting gradients of atmospheric pressure – that makes travelling in a small boat into an *adventure*, in the sense defined by the dictionary (“That which happens without design; chance, hap, luck”). The wind blows you into places that you'd never meant to visit, and keeps you pinioned there. The wind is a made travel agent, with a malicious and surrealist turn of wit. You want to go to France – the wind will maroon you for ten days in Dover. You want to go to the Shetland Islands, and the wind will make you spend a week in Bridlington as penance for your vanity. You suddenly rescheduled, headed for a destination that you hadn't heard of ten minutes ago. Every day the chart and pilot book produce surprises; and if you have any sense, you always take the wind's advice and go where it listeth, to the obscure village or small town that offers shelter. Sometimes you have to stay out at sea, missing your original destination altogether. More often, you're driven in haste into harbours you'd overlooked, far short of where you'd planned to be that night.

Q7. The purpose of lines 41-54 is to illustrate how **the wind** makes travelling in a small boat an adventure.

Giving an example to support your answer, explain how the writer has used either sentence structure or imagery to do this. 2A

2002

Extract

Nothing unnerved the native Americans more than the grizzly, and not surprisingly since you could riddle a grizzly with arrows – positively porcupine it – and it would still keep coming. Even later hunters with big guns were astounded and unsettled by the ability of the grizzly to absorb volleys of lead with barely a wobble.

Q8. Why might “positively porcupine it” (line 17) be considered an effective expression here? 2E