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Honors English Nine

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My Antonia by Willa Cather

There are many scenes in this novel worth writing a critique about, but there was one that I was most impressed with. It was Christmas. Jake had just brought home the surprise tree that Ambrosch had cut down. The Burdens had sent Christmas gifts to the Shimerdas and Mr. Shimerda had come to thank them for them, but more happened than was expected. He sat down in a rocking chair and "his face had a look of weariness and pleasure, like that of sick people when they feel relief from pain." When Jim lit the tree, Mr. Shimerda went and knelt down before it, as if in awe of the brilliant light.

There is some very vivid imagery in this passage, as well as symbolism. When the candles on the tree were lit, the ends "sent up their conical yellow flames" (Cather 57). This appears to be a sign of hope for Mr. Shimerda. It showed him that in the middle of that cold, dark, miserable winter, there was something beautiful. It also said "all the coloured figures from Austria stood out clear and full of meaning against the green boughs." (Cather 57). This probably reminded him of his old home in "Bohemia" which he missed so much. Seeing this helped him realize that everything in this "kawn-tree" (Cather 23) isn't as terrible as he thought it would be. It made living here a little easier for him and also knowing he had some good friends that he could depend on.

Superior
Intro to
an essay like
this.

Remarkably sophisticated
use of text. Flows and
represents subtle connections.

The imagery in this selection also helps bring on the emotion. What makes this scene so emotional is Mr. Shimerda's reaction to the tree being lit up. Here he is, a man in charge of his family with many responsibilities. But now, he has a break from all the chaos and confusion in his stuffy, crowded, little cave. He found a place that feels a little more like home. What really finished the whole atmosphere off was when Jim's grandfather bowed his head with him "thus Protestantizing the atmosphere" (Cather 57), especially since he was "rather narrow in religious matters." (Cather 57). The whole mood of this is so peaceful and moving, all because of a simple Christmas tree. *Yes!*

Maybe discuss these more specifically.

Cather seems to be trying to tell us how much the Burdens meant to Mr. Shimerda, as well as the rest of his family and this was an example of one such instance. What makes this scene so powerful is the way Cather describes the face of Mr. Shimerda. His face, as well as the rest of him, even though he didn't smile much, showed everyone his sense of "utter content" (Cather 57). A little further down the page, Jim talks about his "deep-seeing eyes" and how he felt as if "he were looking far into the future" (Cather 57) for him.

Superb additional development.

Nice transition.
Though this experience doesn't have a lasting affect on him, it helped him hold on a little longer. Cather's powerful descriptions and strong emotions help you sense that Mr. Shimerda is a changed man, and has left all his worries behind him for the time being. For me, this is the most inspiring part in this book. It shows you that in the midst of all the confusion and turmoil around us, there can still be a flicker of hope, whether it is from a Christmas tree, or some other experience. You just have to hold on. *Sophisticated conclusion.*

Frankly, you are writing at an A+ level already. When we start literary criticism, I'm going to challenge you. 😊

Ruehl

My Antonia Scoring Rubric: Choice One - Imagery and Emotion

Deep and Justified Observations	True Honors Quality observations are unique, well considered, & powerfully explained	Acceptable Quality observations are predictable but rational; explanations are adequate but may lack full development	Not Ready for Honors observations are poorly chosen, unexplained, or unsupported
Effective Use of Quotations	True Honors Quality quotations are powerful & stylistically incorporated into text	Acceptable Quality quotations are well chosen but may reflect some awkwardness when incorporated into text	Not Ready for Honors quotations are poorly chosen or missing; improper incorporation into text
Professional Presentation <small>grammar, style, mechanics, MLA</small>	True Honors Quality virtually flawless & stylistically sophisticated	Acceptable Quality only minor errors; ordinary style	Not Ready for Honors irresponsibly edited; weak or inappropriate style

Your Score: 50 Mock Score: 50
 Comments: *It's going to be an honor to be your teacher.*

PERFECT. Thank you. "

Your other 2 were equally powerful. Most impressive.
