

## Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Read the following short story carefully. Then write an essay analyzing how the author, Sandra Cisneros, uses literary techniques to characterize Rachel.

## ELEVEN

- Line  
(5) What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't. You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are—underneath the year that makes you eleven.
- (10) Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five.
- (15) And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.
- (20) Because the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is.
- (25) You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few days, weeks even, sometimes even months before you say Eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way it is.
- (30) Only today I wish I didn't have only eleven years rattling inside me like pennies in a tin Band-Aid box. Today I wish I was one hundred and two instead of eleven because if I was one hundred and two I'd have known what to say when Mrs. Price put the red sweater on my desk. I would've known how to tell her it wasn't mine instead of just sitting there with that look on my face and nothing coming out of my mouth.
- (35) "Whose is this?" Mrs. Price says, and she holds the red sweater up in the air for all the class to see. "Whose? It's been sitting in the coatroom for a month."
- (40) "Not mine," says everybody, "Not me."  
"It has to belong to somebody," Mrs. Price keeps saying, but nobody can remember. It's an ugly sweater with red plastic buttons and a collar and sleeves all stretched out like you could use it for a jump rope. It's maybe a thousand years old and even if it belonged to me I wouldn't say so.
- (45) Maybe because I'm skinny, maybe because she doesn't like me, that stupid Sylvia Saldivar says, "I think it belongs to Rachel." An ugly sweater like that all raggedy and old, but Mrs. Price believes her. Mrs. Price takes the sweater and puts it right on my desk, but when I open my mouth nothing comes out.
- (50) "That's not, I don't, you're not . . . Not mine." I finally say in a little voice that was maybe me when I was four.
- (55) "Of course it's yours," Mrs. Price says. "I remember you wearing it once." Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not.
- (60) Not mine, not mine, not mine, but Mrs. Price is already turning to page thirty-two, and math problem number four. I don't know why but all of a sudden I'm feeling sick inside, like the part of me that's three wants to come out of my eyes, only I squeeze them shut tight and bite down on my teeth real hard and try to remember today I am eleven, eleven. Mama is making a cake for me for tonight, and when Papa comes home everybody will sing Happy birthday, happy birthday to you.
- (65) But when the sick feeling goes away and I open my eyes, the red sweater's still sitting there like a big red mountain. I move the red sweater to the corner of my desk with my ruler. I move my pencil and books and eraser as far from it as possible. I even move my chair a little to the right. Not mine, not mine, not mine.
- (70) In my head I'm thinking how long till lunchtime, how long till I can take the red sweater and throw it

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over the schoolyard fence, or leave it hanging on a parking meter, or bunch it up into a little ball and toss it in the alley. Except when math period ends Mrs.

(80) Price says loud and in front of everybody, "Now, Rachel, that's enough," because she sees I've shoved the red sweater to the tippy-tip corner of my desk and it's hanging all over the edge like a waterfall, but I don't care.

(85) "Rachel," Mrs. Price says. She says it like she's getting mad. "You put that sweater on right now and no more nonsense."

"But it's not—"

"Now!" Mrs. Price says.

(90) This is when I wish I wasn't eleven because all the years inside of me—ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one—are pushing at the back of my eyes when I put one arm through one sleeve of the sweater that smells like cottage cheese, and then the  
(95) other arm through the other and stand there with my arms apart like if the sweater hurts me and it does, all itchy and full of germs that aren't even mine.

That's when everything I've been holding in since this morning, since when Mrs. Price put the sweater on  
(100) my desk, finally lets go, and all of a sudden I'm crying in front of everybody. I wish I was invisible but I'm not. I'm eleven and it's my birthday today and I'm

crying like I'm three in front of everybody. I put my head down on the desk and bury my face in my stupid  
(105) clown-sweater arms. My face all hot and spit coming out of my mouth because I can't stop the little animal noises from coming out of me until there aren't any more tears left in my eyes, and it's just my body shaking like when you have the hiccups, and my whole  
(110) head hurts like when you drink milk too fast.

But the worst part is right before the bell rings for lunch. That stupid Phyllis Lopez, who is even dumber than Sylvia Saldivar, says she remembers the red sweater is hers! I take it off right away and give it to  
(115) her, only Mrs. Price pretends like everything's okay.

Today I'm eleven. There's a cake Mama's making for tonight and when Papa comes home from work we'll eat it. There'll be candles and presents and everybody will sing Happy birthday, happy birthday to  
(120) you, Rachel, only it's too late.

I'm eleven today. I'm eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one, but I wish I was one hundred and two. I wish I was anything but eleven, because I want today to be far away already, far away  
(125) like a runaway balloon, like a tiny *o* in the sky, so tiny-tiny you have to close your eyes to see it.

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**GENERAL DIRECTIONS:** This scoring guide will be useful for most of the essays you read; however, for cases to which it seems inapplicable, consult your Table Leader. The score you assign should reflect your judgment of the quality of the essay as a whole. Reward the writers for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by one point from the score otherwise appropriate. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than 3.

9-8 With apt and specific references to the story, these well-organized and well-written essays clearly analyze how Cisneros uses literary techniques (e.g., dialogue, repetition, interior monologue, syntax, imagery, diction, structure, choice of tense, point of view, and so forth) to characterize Rachel. The best of these essays will acknowledge the complexity of this characterization. While not without flaws, these papers will demonstrate an understanding of the text as well as consistent control over the elements of effective composition. These writers read with perception and express their ideas with clarity and skill.

7-6 These papers also analyze how Cisneros uses literary techniques to characterize Rachel, but they are less incisive, developed or aptly supported than papers in the highest ranges. They deal accurately with technique as the means by which a writer brings a character to life, but they are less effective or less thorough in their analysis than are the 9-8 essays. These essays demonstrate the writer's ability to express ideas clearly, but they do so with less maturity and precision than the best papers. Generally, 7 papers present a more developed analysis and a more consistent command of the elements of effective college-level composition than do essays scored 6.

5 These essays are superficial. They respond to the assignment without important errors in composition, but they may miss the complexity of Cisneros's use of literary techniques and offer a perfunctory analysis of how those techniques are used to characterize Rachel. Often, the analysis is vague, mechanical or overly generalized. While the writing is adequate to convey the writer's thoughts, these essays are typically pedestrian, not as well conceived, organized or developed as upper-half papers. Usually, they reveal simplistic thinking and/or immature writing.

4-3 These lower-half papers reflect an incomplete understanding of the story and fail to respond adequately to the question. The discussion of how Cisneros uses literary techniques to characterize Rachel may be inaccurate or unclear, misguided or undeveloped; these papers may paraphrase rather than analyze. The analysis of technique will likely be meager and unconvincing. Generally, the writing demonstrates weak control of such elements as diction, organization, syntax, or grammar. These essays typically contain recurrent stylistic flaws and/or misreadings and lack persuasive evidence from the text.

2-1 These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range. They seriously misunderstand the character or fail to respond to the question. Frequently, they are unacceptably brief. Often poorly written on several counts, they may contain many distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. Although some attempt may have been made to answer the question, the writer's views typically are presented with little clarity, organization, coherence, or supporting evidence. Essays that are especially inexact, vacuous, and/or mechanically unsound should be scored 1.

0 This is a response with no more than a reference to the task.

- Indicates a blank response, or one that is completely off-topic.

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Sandra Cisneros' Rachel is very wise for a girl of only eleven, even though Rachel might herself disagree. The fact that the story is titled Eleven and the repetition of her age throughout the story do not sufficiently combat the feeling the reader gets that Rachel is much older and wiser than her years. The author's choice of narrator, language and images and concepts all work together to make Rachel a well-defined character.

The story of Rachel's eleventh birthday is told to us in the first person, by Rachel herself who better to tell us how it feels to be eleven? The reader does not feel as if anything has been missed because they don't know Mrs Price's side of the story, or Phyllis Lopez's. By using the first person, Cisneros is able to show us the wise, introspective nature of a girl like Rachel. First person narration seems somehow more appropriate to younger characters - Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is also told in the first person by a youth wise for his years. By using Rachel as a narrator, we can hear her thoughts as to what it feels like when you're eleven and there's no difference from how it felt to be ten. She understands something that few adults can grasp - that we don't always have to act our age, because somewhere inside of us is someone younger, a former self that



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does not know any better. Rachel can characterize her emotions as being a certain age: when you want to sit on mom's lap because you're scared you're only five, but ~~when~~ in order to talk back to the teacher, you need to be one hundred and two. Only through the first person narration do we know how upset Rachel is by the sweater incident; she tells at the end that "I wish I was anything but eleven, because I want to be far away from today already..." We can hear her songing thoughts, the repetition in her mind of what she wants to say: "Not mine, not mine, not mine." Through Rachel's senses we learn how the sweater smells, how it feels, and can sympathize with her for not wanting to put it on. We see the unfairness of the adult world to someone who is eleven.

The author's language also contributes to the characterization of Rachel. She does not use words beyond the vocabulary of an eleven year old, reminding us that for all her ~~wisdom~~ knowledge, Rachel is still a child. The short, clipped sentences: "You don't feel eleven. Not right away." further indicate Rachel's ~~emotional~~ unexpected but appropriate ~~emotional~~ maturity. She uses slang expressions that are outside the rules of standard English grammar to show us how far Rachel has to go. Rachel's similes are all tangible: ~~feeling things~~ like onion rings, or wooden nesting dolls, or pennies rattling in a food-aid box. The author also

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utilizes repetition to show Rachel's immaturity and how caught up she is in the day's events. The concept of ages like shells is repeated from start to finish, as is the reminder that she is eleven today and several other things. Ideas and thoughts are repeated, and words inside the ideas, and thoughts are repeated with them. She tells us the exact same thing twice, with little variation of word choice: "Today I'm eleven. There's a cake..." is ~~at~~ first said around line 65, then repeated in the second to last paragraph with a few additions.

Finally, the author uses image and concept to explain Rachel and her thoughts. Rachel is able to tell us that she is not the only one who cries, Mama is sometimes Dad and also wants to cry. The image of a young daughter explaining to her mother that the reason she needs to cry sometimes is because somewhere inside she's three reinforces our concept of Rachel as a wise but immature girl. Rachel again gives us an image we can all relate to when she tells us how she feels when she cries - the noise she makes, the way her head feels, etc.

The author ~~also~~ uses various techniques to show the reader who Rachel is. She begins to take on the character of one with a ~~young~~ old soul in a young body, an idea we could not get without the literary techniques. The first person narration shows us Rachel's eye, mentally

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as old, while the language and images show us that she is still a child.

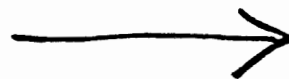
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I remember getting so red in the face when Henry ~~fell~~ spilled water on me in fourth grade and Mrs Self didn't even care. I remember being so scared of acting childish in front of my friends. And I still understand the feeling one gets when waking up on a birthday morning and feeling... nothing. Sandra Cisneros's style of writing lends itself to drawing the reader in to the predicament of the newly eleven-year-old. She speaks ~~to~~ to the reader through her informal style. She writes as though having a conversation with someone; the sentence fragments, the run-on sentences, beginning a sentence with the word "except" (line 79) all contribute to the comfortable style with which Mrs. Cisneros describes and brings life to Rachel.

The repetition ~~and~~ which exists throughout this piece serves to emphasize the child-like nature of the speaker. The simplicity of Rachel's young mind is expressed through the mention of all eleven numbers repeatedly, as children are used to counting to ten forwards and backwards. There still is a tone of bitterness towards adult figures as well; "they" are blamed for not revealing to her the secrets of birthdays, Mrs. Price "pretends like everything's okay" (115) after the whole trying red sweater incident. There is still, however, a tone of endearment towards her mother, as she mentions the occasional need to want to cry in her mother's lap. Even her mention of the "germs that aren't even" hers (95) may have been derived from countless orders to <sup>wash</sup> wash her hands and her clothes.

A sense of *maivete* pervades this piece, as determined by the aforementioned tone, repetition, and style. It is also portrayed through the mood of the piece, which gets progressively more intense as the story moves on. It is evident that Rachel is





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getting more and more upset as her role as the raconteur goes on. As her story unfolds, we see her point of view.

After beginning with some generalizations, she moves to the present tense for during which her own opinions are presented. She shows her exasperation with being so young, as she assumes that if she were one hundred and two she would be so much more experienced and ready to face Mrs. Price.

In a child-like fashion, the author presents diction such as "mine", "jump rope", "zippy-tip corner" and "balloon" to emphasize that this is a child speaking. A large number of similes are used to more accurately represent the ideas about which Rachel is speaking. For example, the grass "each year inside the next one" motif is described as being "like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk (19-20)."

Sandra Cisneros also puts forth in this piece that perhaps Rachel really is maturing, more than she thinks. The repetition and use of lists suggests juvenile stubbornness, but it also may show a little of the organization needed in adult life. Rachel's ~~as a~~ simple realization that she wishes she was invisible but she's not or she wishes she was one hundred and two but she's not shows that she has begun to accept herself for who ~~is~~ she is. But she is still troubled by the condescending attitude of Mrs. Price and the stupidity of her fellow classmates and her "clown-sweater arms", indicating that she, like other eleven-year-olds, still have a great deal of growing to do.

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The character of Rachel in *Eileen*, by Sandra Cisneros, is that of a little girl wanting desperately to be grown up but feeling so little and insecure most often. The details of her characterization are conveyed through several literary techniques very effectively.

The technique used most extensively is that of simile. In her ponderings of aging, Rachel thinks "the way you grow old is kind of like an onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other." This is very indicative of the philosophic aspect evident in Rachel; she uses things familiar to her to explain what she is not so clear on. When she is forced to put the sweater on, it "smells like cottage cheese" to her. This seems very basic, but that is the author's intent, to show that Rachel is, in most respects, an average girl showing distaste for things that she finds gross.

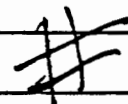
Vivid images are also used, sometimes in conjunction with simile. Rachel describes her mere eleven years "like pennies [rattling] in a tin Band-Aid box". This image evokes a very cheap and slight feeling, translating into Rachel's own poor self-image. Another descriptive image used is that of a "runaway balloon", used at the end of the narrative to indicate Rachel's desire to get away from all her troubles, also showing the young and immature instincts in Rachel to run away from problems.

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Repetition is another technique that is effectively used to expand upon Rachel's character. The key phrase "when you are eleven, you are also ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one" is very central to the character of this young girl. She sees different actions in terms of years (i.e. "crying like if you're three") which try to express themselves as if they are independent of her being ("like the part of me that's three wants to come out of my eyes"). This phrase is repeated many times, and is used to draw the reader's attention to ~~the~~ its implications.

Rachel wants to be an adult, she wishes she was "one hundred and two". She sees that age is often the determinant of who is right or wrong ("Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not") and she wants immensely to be right. She hates it when those younger parts of her keep taking over, and she desires the escape from that which she has so little control over.



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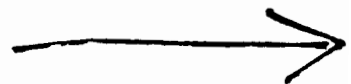
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Author Sandra Cisneros brings alive the character of "Rachel" by making each reader feel the way her character does. This is done by using very specific literary techniques.

For example, "Eleven" is written in the first person, from the viewpoint of Rachel herself. This immediately gives the reader the intimacy of knowing the young girl's thoughts, which evokes a great deal of sympathy for the girl's conflict. Cisneros helps ~~is~~ the reader understand Rachel by writing in the manner of which an eleven year old would think. She uses hyperboles to describe the sweater as being "maybe a thousand years old" (line 45), and "still sitting there like a big red mountain" (lines 70-71). This assists the reader in understanding Rachel's distaste of the sweater.

In line 59, Cisneros uses repetition to illustrate Rachel's desperation to make her teacher understand, as well as to console her own psyche. Metaphors are also used to make the reader understand Rachel, as the reader becomes more familiar with the girl's nature. Rachel dramatically describes the sweater to be "like a big red mountain", (line 70) and "like a waterfall", (line 83); as well as wishing she could be "far away like a runaway balloon" (line 125).

However, the most effective technique Cisneros uses to characterize Rachel, is her use of



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fragmented and run-on sentences Lines 105-110 is an entire sentence, and provides the reader with the overwhelming feeling that everything is happening at once, which is precisely how Rachel feels. The reader feels how upset this girl is, and they ~~are~~ may even be reminded of one of their own embarrassing incidents.

The fragmented sentences help the reader to see that Rachel is still just a simple child. In line 24, Rachel says, "You don't feel eleven. Not right away." Here the author shows the audience how Rachel thinks - simplistically, child-like, and innocent.

Through each of these technique used, it is shown that Rachel could be shy, youthful, and family-oriented girl, who goes through the disappointment that life often provides.

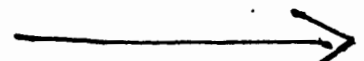
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Giving the reader a feeling that he or she is listening to an eleven year old is not easily done when written by someone who is not eleven. However, Sandra Cisneros, the author of *Eleven*, gives us a believable character in Rachel who is in fact eleven years old. Through her use of literary techniques, Sandra Cisneros creates a very realistic characterization of Rachel.

Cisneros uses the words "like", "if", and "I wish" frequently to suggest the limited and one tracked vocabulary of the younger generation. For example, in the second ~~the~~ paragraph, the first line begins, "Like some days you might say..." and "maybe you will need to cry like if you're there". The first paragraph of the story is also indigenous to the rationalization of a situation ~~as~~ many children often do. The "I wishes" also give the impression that Rachel almost believes they will come true. "Today I wish I was one hundred and two," "I wish I was invisible", and "I wish I was anything but eleven", this use of language is most likely common around the age of eleven or twelve and therefore makes Rachel a more believable character.

The comparisons made by Rachel in the story is another example of how Cisneros uses literary devices to develop the character of Rachel. "My face all hot and spit coming out of my mouth because I can't stop the little animal noises from coming out of me until there aren't any more tears left in my eyes, and it's just my body shaking like when you have the hiccups, and my whole head hurts like when you drink milk too fast." (Lines 105-110)

The use of "like" as a popular word of Rachel and



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also to use the literary device of simile is a prime example of how Cisneros uses literary techniques to characterize Rachel.

Sandra Cisneros proves herself to be very clever in her choice of terms. She uses the dialogue and thought of an average eleven year old. All of her literary devices and techniques help to create a ~~a~~ characterization of Rachel that is very realistic and believable to the reader.

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