

In Cormac McCarthy's excerpt from his novel The Crossing the reader sees a ~~dominant~~ main character who has undoubtedly been through a dramatic experience which has not only changed his life but also his character. I believe this change is reflected metaphorically through the change that the wolf has also experienced. We also see how both have been taken out of their natural element ~~(lost)~~ ~~and~~ ~~depend on the other~~ ~~and~~ ~~for~~ ~~supportive~~ ~~purposes~~.

Both the main character and wolf seem out of place in this scene. The author narrator explains how the wolf who <sup>is now dead, was once</sup> ~~was~~ ~~once~~ ~~a~~ ~~huntress~~ and "the wind itself [was] in terror of it." She has sadly left the world of which "she was one among and not separate from." In this same way ~~as~~ the boy is separated from his society: he may not be dead but is obviously alone. However, it is this exclusion which has enabled him to realize that ~~the~~ the same human condition can be reflected in nature.

~~The strength which the wolf once exhibited~~  
In the same way the wolf had <sup>once</sup> ~~lost~~ his <sup>strength</sup> ~~strength~~ ~~so does the boy have now.~~ We see him as self-reliant and ~~is~~ brave - the sound of the coyotes don't bother him, only the cold makes him shiver. He doesn't seem to have any fear of nature as he ~~touches~~ touches the wolf's fur and teeth but rather he has gained a deeper respect for nature. ~~and~~ The boy has strengthened his soul in this manner and being able to

connect with nature may enable to understand himself. He also see the ~~see~~ joy the wolf felt in being independent and maybe <sup>the boy no</sup> longer worries about being alone. We see this is true when the horse leaves. The boy doesn't become worried because he knows that the horse wants to be with nature and will therefore be contented.

~~The~~ The finally similarity is how the wolf is depending on the boy to bury him in the same way the ~~boy~~ boy has been able to bury his fears and weaknesses within the wolf. They have both aided each other in this ~~unconventional~~ <sup>unconventional</sup> manner. ~~the boy never gives anything~~ The wolf would never receive this gift in nature and the boy would never have received this gift among civilization.

This excepts ~~always~~ creates an image of union between nature and man and how <sup>the true value of what</sup> ~~it~~ can be shared. It has created a strong bond which ~~will~~ will enable the boy to continue on with strength and understanding.

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## Nature's Creations

This excerpt from Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Crossing* is describing a dramatic experience the main character in the passage has a deceased wolf, and he, through the animal, has a spiritual experience. By using techniques such as syntax, tone, and imagery, McCarthy conveys the impact of the experience on the main character.

The syntax in this excerpt is very interesting. The author either connects his thoughts using "and" or constructs very short sentences. This technique shows the main character's dismay at the death of this creature and confusion of what to do next. He performs the necessary tasks mechanically, almost in bewilderment, before his spiritual experience.

Throughout the passage, one can detect a tone of spiritualism, of man communing with nature and finding himself. The imagery helps to convey this tone. McCarthy describes the ~~rest~~ Coyotes "yapping along the hills to the south," along with the creeks and ~~escarpments~~ "escarpments" surrounding the main character and the wolf. His description of what he sees when he touches the wolf is very powerful. The man places his hand on the wolf's "bloodied forehead" and imagined her "running in the starlight where the grass was wet and the sun's coming as yet had not undene the rich matrix of creatures passed in the night before her. "The wolf is one



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Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the examination.

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with nature, and both are beautiful in their singularity

Using syntax, tone, and imagery, McCarthy conveyed the strong impact the experience with the wolf had on the main character. It was very spiritual, and he realized what a wonder nature and her creations are.

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In the selection from *The Crossing*, author Cormac McCarthy uses a third-person narrative to show how the related experience <sup>makes</sup> an impact on the main character. McCarthy never gets into the character's head or relates his thoughts directly to the reader, but through his use of imagery and detailed description of the meticulous actions of the man, he conveys to the reader the sense of the man's quiet sense of loss and intangibility of the powers of a beautiful natural creature.

From the very beginning, the reader gets a sense of the care with which the main character handles his cargo, a dead and bloodied ~~she~~ wolf. It is not quite dawn when we meet him "cradling the wolf" in his arms. She is wrapped in a sheet that is covered in blood, as are his trousers. He "lifts" the wolf out of the sheet and places her on the ground with the utmost care and tenderness. This is all done silently. In fact the only sound that the reader is <sup>made</sup> aware of is the "yapping" of coyotes in the hills, but other than that it is as quiet as a cemetery or a church.

Without the use of any dialogue, McCarthy describes the character's isolation. He is cold and shivering in the dark, even more so when he wakes up to find that his horse is gone, although he doesn't seem to mind much. From the beginning of the passage, the reader feels that the character has a specific task, which we later find out is to bury the wolf. But he falls asleep to wait for dawn with his "hands up before him like a dozing penitent." This suggests that he is doing this out of "penitence," out of a desire for a catharsis and relief.

The greatest impact on the main character seems to come in the third paragraph. The first thing he does, before looking for his horse, is that he reaches over to the wolf and touches her fur, her eyes, and her "cold and perfect teeth." He closes her dead eyes, and then closes his own.



so that he can imagine her in her once-glorious natural state, "running in the mountains." He imagines her as a queen or goddess of sorts, for whom all other wild animals are "richly empaneled on the air," though she feels that she is one of them. He reaches for her and wants to see and understand the thing of "beauty and terror" that he holds. He feels obviously humbled by the fact that he cannot, nor will he ever be able to, grasp the power and "swiftness" of the wolf, the now-dead "huntress."

This is not at all passive description. Though the main character never says anything explicitly, he acts with such tender, humble affection toward the dead she-wolf, that the impact that it has on him cannot be missed. He wants to be part of a world that is glorious and natural and all-inclusive, and that is not a desire to be taken lightly.

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Certain writing techniques can often accentuate a story that has been written. In the passage, from Cormac McCarthy's novel, The Crossing, ~~some~~ <sup>certain</sup> techniques are used to convey the impact of the experience on the main character. These techniques that convey the impact of the main character's experience include pathos, philosophy, and remembrance.

First, the author uses pathos to convey the impact the wolf dying had on the main character. The pathos, which are supposed to elicit feelings of sorrow in the reader, help the reader feel just as affected as the main character. Where the author writes, "The eye turned to the fire and gave back no light and he closed it with his thumb," ~~the~~ ~~the~~ McCarthy is trying to convey how sad the main character is ~~so~~ over the wolf's passing. By shutting the wolf's eyes and acknowledging that they give back no light, the main character realizes that the wolf is gone. It ~~is~~ <sup>will be</sup> dead ~~for~~. This powerful part makes the reader feel sad and even sorry for the man who has lost his wolf. Pathos is a technique employed by McCarthy to make the reader feel the main character's pain and realize the impact of the main character's experience.

In addition, some philosophical insight is used by McCarthy to show the magnitude of the main character's loss. The author comments, philosophically, about what a living thing really is, "He took up her stiff head out of the leaves



and held it or he reached to hold what cannot be held." Even though the main character is holding the dead wolf's body, he is really holding nothing at all. This ~~amusing~~ statement by the author is ~~very~~ deep, much like the main character's feelings for his wolf. The philosophical ~~insightfulness~~ insightfulness helps the reading understand that the story does not deal with just another animal dying. Instead, like the main character, the author puts the wolf's death on a higher scale, one that philosophically and intellectually deals with what death really means. By using the technique of philosophy, McCarthy is able to make the wolf's death seem very important; helping the reader to understand the impact the experience had on the main character.

Furthermore, McCarthy slows the impact of the experience by recalling events from the main character's and the wolf's time spent together. The technique of remembrance helps to ~~also~~ highlight the fact that the two have spent much time together, and the loss of the wolf is grave. "... Sat by her and put his hand upon her bloodied forehead and closed his own eyes that he could see her running in the mountains, running in the starlight where the grass was wet and the sun's ~~was~~ coming as yet had not unclose the rich matrix of creatures passed in the night before her." By ~~she~~ remembering fond times, the author slows how dear the wolf <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ to the main character. In utilizing the





technique of remembrance, McCarthy conveys the impact of the experience on the main character. The wolf was very dear to the main character, and by ~~showing~~<sup>reading</sup> how well he remembers the wolf, it is easy to see the gravity of the wolf's death.

In the excerpt from The Crossing, Cormac McCarthy uses pathos, philosophy, and remembrance to convey the impact of the wolf's death on the main character. This feat is accomplished by eliciting feelings of sorrow in the reader and seriously thinking about the wolf's death. In addition, the slow of fond memories also helps to show how much the main character cared for his wolf. Through the combination of the three techniques, the impact of the experience on the main character is clearly conveyed.

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In Coen McCarthy's novel, The Crossing, a young boy has a dramatic experience with a wolf after he has crossed the border between Mexico and Texas. The effect that this experience has on the boy is <sup>conveyed through</sup> ~~expressed through~~ the technique of McCarthy. His personification of the wolf and his use of <sup>imagery</sup> ~~metaphors~~ helped to express the effect that the wolf's murder had on the boy.

~~The wolf's murder had a significant impact on the young boy.~~

The young boy treated the wolf as if she were a person instead of simply an animal. He brought her with him to buy her instead of allowing her to rot away. He held her head tenderly and imagined her roaming in her mountain, free and true. He also imagined her returning to her creator, as one of the actions of the world ordered by God. The young boy felt that the wolf was a person and gained a better respect for animals during this experience.

<sup>to depict the impact of this experience on the boy.</sup>

The other technique that McCarthy uses is the central image of blood. Blood is associated with injury, death, and war. By consistently utilizing the image of dried blood, on both the wolf and the boy's trousers, McCarthy continues to emphasize the wolf's death. Also, he uses her stiff body, cold teeth and fur, and unshining eye to further illustrate the wolf's ~~death~~ demise.

The wolf's murder has drastically affected the young boy. It has forced him to deal with death at an early age. ~~The~~ McCarthy's use of personification and images of death, continue to express the everlasting impact that the wolf's death will have on the young boy's life.

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## Question 2 — Overview

This question presented students with a passage from Cormac McCarthy's 1994 novel, *The Crossing*. The novel's narrator describes a beautifully self-contained scene: a boy (or man, as many students labeled him; they had no way of knowing), remote and isolated from humankind in harsh natural surroundings, keeps a night watch over the bloody carcass of his beloved wolf. The external action appears static rather than dramatic. However, dramatic activity occurs within the mind and spirit of the grieving and guilty boy. Internal transformations result from new understandings of life and death that are gained as he comes to terms with the persistent, if elusive, power of nature. Students were asked to write a well-organized essay that demonstrates "how McCarthy's techniques convey the impact of the experience on the main character." This assignment proved to be all but ideal for this text.

The choice of the McCarthy passage for this exam was made over mild protests from some members of the AP English Development Committee. If McCarthy has his enthusiasts, he also has his detractors. But on balance, the committee agreed that regardless of idiosyncratic judgments about McCarthy's ultimate literary merit, this linguistically rich passage held particular promise for the purposes of the AP Exam. General satisfaction with the question confirmed the wisdom of selecting a writer whose exposure on this national test might help promote works that secondary students would henceforth enjoy reading.

The Cormac McCarthy passage posed immediate problems of context, vocabulary, and tone for less talented students. Probably many of these considered the question daunting when they initially confronted it. It provided the same challenges of textual analysis as poetry, compounded with its own complexities of narrative structure. Furthermore, the stem of the question did not suggest appropriate techniques that might be discussed; students, in fact, were provided little guidance for their essays.

Indeed, the one consistent suggestion that was offered by evaluators on this question was the need for additional information in the stem. They were particularly sensitive to the fact that students were left guessing as to the factors that resulted in the death of the wolf. They felt that knowing that the boy played a role in his own loss was important to understanding his state of

mind. Student writers are not held accountable on the exam for expertise on either the specific work chosen for the text or for its author's canon. Nonetheless, it is apparent in retrospect that had they been informed of the protagonist's age and his culpability in the wolf's death, they might have jumped to fewer conclusions which evaluators had to forgive.

Perhaps because no suggested techniques were named in the directions of the questions, some students strove desperately and often all too creatively to come up with strategies to discuss. Some of these, like "pathos building" (a noble effort?), seemed more identified with outcome or intent than with specific technical tactics. Many students focused on familiar concepts such as setting, imagery, character development, diction, and — remarkably but appropriately — syntax; however, others struggled hard with little coherent result or seemed stymied altogether. Numerous options were possible, however, and sophisticated commentary about point of view, tense, pace, and religious and mythical allusions enlivened these essays for readers.

This essay question thus seemed the best on the exam for eliciting strong writing and for student and reader satisfaction. Talented and well-trained students provided extraordinary responses. Even weaker students worked well to extract meaning from contextual clues, even if they did not grasp fully the boy's awe at the wolf's transfiguration from life to larger than life. The question produced an impressive range of scores and proved to be an especially reliable discriminator of student abilities.

