

## Analytical Writing Practice

Critic Roland Barthes has said, "Literature is the question minus the answer." Considering Barthes' observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers answers. Explain how the author's treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**Intro:** Innocence and inquisition differentiate children from adults. In the post-apocalyptic wasteland of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* everything has changed—besides the love between a father and son, who maintain some semblance of normalcy through the boy's innocent questions. Though the man and the boy's names are never revealed, the man cannot shelter the boy from many harsh truths. The best he can do is ensure the boy is "Okay," a word that seems to be both the central question, and answer, of the novel. In McCarthy's *The Road*, the question of what is "okay," with or without the actual question mark, explores the extent to which man finds comfort in questions alone, and finding answers irrelevant.

Based on the introduction above and the central question "Okay," or more specifically, "We're going to be okay, aren't we Papa?" (McCarthy 83), write at least one body paragraph using the following passage of the novel. Be sure to organize your thoughts and ensure you're supporting the supplied thesis.

83

coming quiz on physical & mental reality

memory = loss/pain

He woke in the night and lay listening. He couldn't remember where he was. The thought made him smile. Where are we? he said.

father questioning = taking on boy's role → dependence

What is it, Papa?

we = present

Nothing. We're okay. Go to sleep.

going to be = future

↳ boy wants assurance of future/hope

We're going to be okay, aren't we Papa?

Father continues to use present v. boy's use of future

Yes. We are.

And nothing bad is going to happen to us.

That's right.

hope, technology, civilization, warmth, creation, destruction

repetition = only purpose of conversation is assurance

Because we're carrying the fire.

Yes. Because we're carrying the fire.

human reason

but circular & redundant → comfort in echo chamber

morality father's code

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→ third bullet wasn't used in self-defense

→ matter of fact → father's moral code = certainty; lack of choice

→ rinsed the empty tin with water and gave it to the child to drink and that was that. I should have been more careful, he said.

→ not a question, still necessitates an answer

→ father still focused on the past / hindsight → regret

The boy didn't answer.

You have to talk to me.

Okay.

→ natural human desire for occupation

You wanted to know what the bad guys looked like.

→ certain v. uncertain

→ future = death

Now you know. It may happen again. My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you. Do you understand?

→ Father figure

Yes.

→ religious honor → mandate of heaven

→ job to give know- ledge / understanding

He sat there cowed in the blanket. After a while he looked up. Are we still the good guys? he said.

Yes. We're still the good guys.

And we always will be.

→ being "the good guys" = only certainty in life

Yes. We always will be.

Okay.

→ fulfills same function

→ Boy wants answers b/c they provide comfort / certainty

→ music / creation effort

→ loss of innocence

→ assurance, consistency, comfort, support, security



**THE ROAD**

+had = 'd

night light - night  
some resemblance to man  
normal childhood

ate their poor meal cold and lay down in their bedding with the lamp between them. He'd brought the boy's book but the boy was too tired for reading. Can we leave the lamp on till I'm asleep? he said. Yes. Of course we can.

active v. passive (took)

He was a long time going to sleep. After a while he turned and looked at the man. His face in the small light streaked with black from the rain (like some old world thespian. Can you see his nose? clean?)

I ask you something? he said.

Yes. Of course.

Positive words be "yes" always repeated from all else

Are we going to die?

death = isolated & protected

Sometime. Not now.

And we're still going south.

+acc = 're

time separate -> boy wants to find future

So we'll be warm.

dark / warmth =

Yes.

Okay. Usually something

Okay what?

to ask you also hope

Nothing. Just okay. passive -> acceptance

Go to sleep.

boy move like mother

Okay.

I'm going to blow out the lamp. Is that okay?

Yes. That's okay.

And then later in the darkness: Can I ask you something?

use of "okay" v. "O.K."

"All correct"

Any actual meaning behind words?

Repetition: follows script

McCarthy says this is a conversation he had with his 11 year-old son. father attempts to provide assurance/ security. Yes. Of course you can. What would you do if I died? -> first asks/ views them as a writer. If you died I would want to die too. repeats desire from action/ actuality. So you could be with me? repeats desire from action/ actuality. Yes. So I could be with you. Okay? = father turns question into answer. literal (and metaphorical) by logic/reason. ab. diction

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You think we're going to die, don't you?

I don't know.

*certainty* We're not going to die.

*neutrality* Okay.

But you don't believe me.

I don't know.

*attempt to neutralize logic/reason* Why do you think we're going to die?  
I don't know.

Stop saying I don't know.

Okay.

*father objects to passivity*

*lack of belief / hope (in future) / lack of knowledge*

Why do you think we're going to die?  
We don't have anything to eat.

We'll find something.

Okay.

How long do you think people can go without food?

I don't know.

But how long do you think?

Maybe a few days.

And then what? You fall over dead?

Yes.

Well you don't. It takes a long time. We have water. That's the most important thing. You don't last very long without water.

Okay.

But you don't believe me.

I don't know.

He studied him. Standing there with his hands in the neon pockets of the out-sized pin-striped suitcoat. Whole encounter

Do you think I lie to you?

No.

But you think I might lie to you about dying.

Yes.

Okay. I might. But we're not dying.

Okay.

*Boy's monosyllabic responses = refusal to engage in father's system*

*language = lie / medical knowledge*

*father has taken over boy's role as questioner - forcing*

*like a mock negotiation / witness transaction*

*boy's refusal: to believe father - to admit knowing a little about in appropriate, but too young/small for the role*

*demonstrates basic plain language*