

TEXT ONE — PROSE

Question One

The Last Customer

Mr Alvarez turned the sign on the door to CLOSED for the last time and stood very still, as if waiting for the bell above it to ring once more. Thirty-one years of Saturdays had worn the lino by the till to a pale dip, and the shop still smelled of old paper and pencil shavings, a smell that no amount of cleaning had ever shifted.

The shelves were nearly bare. A few notebooks sagged in a box by the window, labelled FREE, and no one had taken even those. Outside, the wind pushed rubbish along the footpath, and across the road a new phone shop glowed like an aquarium. Nobody looked at the stationery shop anymore. It had become part of the street the way a crack becomes part of a wall.

Then came a knock. A girl of about ten had pressed her nose to the glass, one hand held up with a coin balanced on the palm. He sighed and unlocked the door. "Do you have a pencil?" she asked. "Just a pencil?" "It is for my drawing. Mum says we cannot afford the big set." He looked at her coin, then at the dip in the lino, then reached under the counter and lifted out a dusty tin. "These," he said, "were meant for the grand opening, in 1993."

He pressed the whole tin into her hands. She tried to protest, and he waved the words away like smoke. "Draw something worth the wait," he said. Her smile was so wide that, for a moment, he forgot that anything was ending.

After she had gone, he locked the door. The key was heavy and ordinary in his fingers. He did not look back at the dark window. Yet as he walked to his car, he noticed that he was standing taller than he had for months, and in his pocket, where he had swept it from the counter, the girl's coin was still warm.

Question One

Analyse how the writer uses language features to show Mr Alvarez's changing feelings in 'The Last Customer'. Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Planning space (not marked)

Feelings at the start (sadness? stillness?).

The turning point: what changes when the girl knocks?

Feelings at the end.

Choose three language features and one quotation for each.

Question One: your response

Write your response on the lines. Use short quotations from the text as evidence.

QUESTION ONE — GUIDE AND MODEL ANSWER

Worked solution

What the question asks

You must explain how particular language features (such as simile, imagery, word choice or contrast) show how Mr Alvarez's feelings change from the opening to the ending, and support each point with a quotation.

What each grade looks like for this question

Grade	What the response shows
Achieved	Identifies feelings (for example sad at the start, happier at the end) and names some language features with relevant quotations.
Merit	Explains how language features show the change in feeling, linking each quotation to the character's mood and to the shift in the story.
Excellence	Analyses the writer's choices perceptively, showing how contrast and image patterns shape the shift from loss to a quiet sense of purpose, with well-chosen evidence woven into the argument.

Evidence you could use

- "stood very still, as if waiting for the bell above it to ring once more": stillness and a hope that something will happen
- "a crack becomes part of a wall": simile showing the shop has been forgotten
- "he forgot that anything was ending": the girl's smile changes his mood
- "the girl's coin was still warm": the warm coin is a symbol of connection

Model response (about 250 words, aiming at Excellence)

Mr Alvarez begins the story full of sadness and longing, but by the end, the writer shows that he has found a quiet sense of purpose. This change is built through carefully chosen images and contrast.

At first, the writer uses stillness to show his grief. He "stood very still, as if waiting for the bell above it to ring once more". The simile suggests that he is hoping, against all reason, for one more customer, which reveals how hard it is to let go. The mood of loss is deepened when the shop is compared to a wall: it has become part of the street "the way a crack becomes part of a wall". The simile makes the shop seem damaged and ignored, and Mr Alvarez's feelings of being forgotten are clear.

The turning point comes when the girl knocks. Her "coin balanced on the palm" is a small, hopeful image against the bare shelves, and Mr Alvarez's generous act reverses the earlier mood. The writer tells us that "he forgot that anything was ending", which shows that for the first time his sadness has lifted.

The final image of the coin, which is "still warm", links this change to a symbol of human connection. The warmth contrasts with the cold wind and dark window of earlier paragraphs. Through this contrast, the writer shows that Mr Alvarez's feelings have moved from loss to quiet fulfilment, and that the shop's end has still given his life meaning.

Why this response earns Excellence

- It names a clear change in feeling and traces it from the beginning to the end.

- Every quotation is explained, not just listed.
- It links the closing image (the warm coin) back to the opening mood, showing a perceptive reading of the whole text.

KEY TAKEAWAY

To show how feelings change, trace the mood at the start, the turning point and the end, and link a quotation to each stage.

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