

PRACTICE TEXT — DOCUMENTARY OPENING (VISUAL TEXT)

Study the practice text, then choose one question

The Tide Keepers: Opening Sequence

An original description of a fictional documentary opening, written for this practice paper. Visual and sound details are described in square brackets; spoken words are in quotation marks.

SHOT 1. [Black screen. The sound of waves, faint and slow, grows louder. A single gull cries.]

Narrator (a woman, quiet and unhurried): "Before there were names for this coast, there was the tide."

SHOT 2. [Extreme wide shot at dawn: a long, empty beach, the sky a wash of pale grey and rose. The camera is low, almost touching the wet sand. A tiny figure walks at the water's edge.]

SHOT 3. [Slow tracking shot following the figure from behind. She is an elderly woman in a faded orange raincoat, carrying a plastic bucket. The camera stays at her shoulder height, and her footprints fill with water behind her.] Narrator: "Every morning for forty-one years, Aroha Pene has walked this beach."

SHOT 4. [Close-up of the woman's hands as she lifts a small plastic bottle cap from the sand and drops it into the bucket. Her fingers are cracked and brown. The only sound is the wet clink of the plastic.]

SHOT 5. [Cut to a high aerial shot: the beach is a pale curve and the woman is a bright orange dot. The orchestral music begins, a single cello holding a long low note. The colour of the sea is steel blue, and cold.] Narrator: "The sea gives back what we give it. That is her only rule."

SHOT 6. [Rapid montage, each shot lasting less than a second: a tangle of fishing line, a child's sandal, a broken toothbrush, a bottle, a net. The cello rises, and the sound of waves is replaced by the sharp, mechanical clicking of a camera shutter.]

SHOT 7. [Sudden silence. A close-up of Aroha's face in warm, golden light. She looks directly into the camera, which does not move. Her eyes are wet. Behind her, the tide is coming in.] Aroha: "People ask why I bother. The sea is so big. And I say: I am not here to save the sea. I am here so that the sea knows somebody is listening."

SHOT 8. [Slow zoom out until the woman is again a distant figure. The title appears in white letters across the sand: THE TIDE KEEPERS. The cello falls silent, and the sound of waves returns.]

CHOOSE ONE QUESTION

About 800 to 900 words

QUESTION ONE

Respond critically to how the filmmaker uses visual and sound techniques to present Aroha Pene and develop the idea of care for the environment in the opening sequence of 'The Tide Keepers'. Support your response with evidence from the text.

QUESTION TWO

Respond critically to how the filmmaker uses sound and silence in the opening sequence of 'The Tide Keepers' to shape the viewer's response. Support your response with evidence from the text.

QUESTION THREE

Respond critically to how the filmmaker presents Aroha Pene's character through camera angles, framing and colour in the opening sequence of 'The Tide Keepers'. Support your response with evidence from the text.

Write a critical response of about 800 to 900 words. Make an argument about specific techniques and use precise evidence.

Planning space (not marked)

Camera: low angles, tracking, close-up, aerial.

Sound and music: waves, the cello, silence.

Colour and editing: orange coat, steel blue sea, montage.

How these build Aroha's character and the theme.

QUESTION ONE — GUIDE AND MODEL ANSWER

Worked solution

What the question asks

You must develop an argument about how techniques of camera, sound, colour, editing and narration present Aroha and the theme of care, with precise evidence from the sequence.

What each grade looks like for this question

Grade	What the response shows
Achieved	Describes some visual and sound techniques and links them to Aroha and the idea of care, with examples from the text.
Merit	Convincingly argues how camera, sound and editing present Aroha as devoted and humble and develop the theme, with well-chosen examples.
Excellence	Offers a perceptive, sustained argument that the sequence presents care as small, repeated acts of attention, showing how the shift from distance to the intimate close-up and from music to silence shapes the viewer's response.

Evidence you could use

- “The camera is low, almost touching the wet sand.”: low angle emphasises the scale of the beach and the closeness to the ground
- “The camera stays at her shoulder height”: the tracking shot puts the viewer beside Aroha
- “Rapid montage, each shot lasting less than a second”: montage shows what the sea returns
- “Sudden silence.”: silence directs attention to Aroha's words

Model response (about 790 words, aiming at Excellence)

In the opening sequence of ‘The Tide Keepers’, the filmmaker uses a controlled set of visual and sound techniques to present Aroha Pene as a humble and faithful keeper of the shore, and to suggest that care for the environment is built from small, repeated acts of attention. The sequence moves the viewer from a distant, almost mythic view of the coast to an intimate close-up of one woman's face, and this movement shapes our response.

The sequence opens with sound before image. In Shot 1, the screen is black, and “the sound of waves, faint and slow, grows louder”. This deprives the viewer of sight and places the sea at the centre of the film before any character appears. The narrator's line, “Before there were names for this coast, there was the tide”, adds a sense of timelessness, and the quiet, unhurried voice establishes a calm and respectful tone.

The first visual image is an extreme wide shot at dawn in which “a tiny figure walks at the water's edge”. The camera is positioned “low, almost touching the wet sand”, which makes the beach seem immense and Aroha seem small. This contrast of scale suggests that she is humble before nature. The soft colours, a “wash of pale grey and rose”, create a mood of stillness and early hope. When the camera then tracks Aroha “at her shoulder height”, the viewer is invited to walk beside her. The change from a wide shot to a tracking shot moves the viewer from observation to companionship.

Colour is used to single her out. Her “faded orange raincoat” is the brightest element in the frame, and in the aerial shot she is “a bright orange dot” against the “steel blue” sea. The warm colour suggests her warmth and visibility, while the cold blue suggests the sea's vastness and indifference. The word “faded” hints that her coat has been worn through many winters, which supports the

narrator's statement that she has walked the beach "for forty-one years". The visual details present her as faithful and ordinary rather than heroic.

The close-up of her "cracked and brown" hands in Shot 4 is the sequence's first intimate image. The only sound is "the wet clink of the plastic", which gives the action a quiet dignity. By focusing on the hands rather than the face, the filmmaker shows that care is physical work, repeated and small.

The montage in Shot 6 changes the pace. The "rapid montage, each shot lasting less than a second" of fishing line, a sandal and a toothbrush overwhelms the viewer with the quantity of waste, and the "sharp, mechanical clicking of a camera shutter" replaces the natural sound of waves. The mechanical sound makes the waste seem cold and artificial, and it contrasts with the organic rhythm of the sea.

The narration adds a further layer. The narrator's voice is "quiet and unhurried", and her statements are brief and almost proverbial: "The sea gives back what we give it. That is her only rule." The phrase "her only rule" gives the sea a personality and presents environmental harm as a moral matter, rather than a technical one. Because the narrator speaks in short, declarative sentences, the viewer receives her words as truths, and the filmmaker uses them to prepare the audience for Aroha's own, more personal, statement later.

The climax is the sudden silence and the close-up in Shot 7. The music and the sea fall away, and the camera "does not move", forcing the viewer to look at Aroha's "wet" eyes. Her statement, "I am here so that the sea knows somebody is listening", personifies the sea and defines her care as attention rather than rescue. The warm, golden light on her face contrasts with the cold colours that came before, and the viewer feels the emotional centre of the film.

Overall, the filmmaker uses scale, colour, sound and editing to move from distance to intimacy, and from the sea's vastness to a single human voice. The sequence presents environmental care as listening and as daily, humble work, and invites the viewer to take up that attention. The structure is also circular: the sequence begins with the sound of waves on a black screen and ends with the sound of waves returning beneath the title, as if the film itself were a tide. This shape suggests that the work of care never finishes, and that what matters is to continue returning to it. At the same time, the filmmaker avoids simple optimism. Aroha's bucket is small and the montage of waste is large, so the viewer is left with the tension between the size of the problem and the dignity of the small act, which is where the film's argument begins.

Why this response earns Excellence

- It analyses several types of technique (camera, colour, sound, editing, narration) and shows how they work together.
- It explains the effect on the viewer, not only the technique.
- It follows the structure of the sequence and builds one argument (care as attention) to a considered conclusion.

KEY TAKEAWAY

For a visual text, name the technique, say exactly what is on screen or heard, and explain what the viewer is meant to feel or understand.

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