

TEXT ONE — PROSE

Question One

The Last Picking

By the time Rewi reached the orchard, his father had already set the ladder against the oldest of the Braeburns. It leaned there at its familiar angle, the aluminium dull from forty harvests, one rung wrapped in tape that had gone the colour of tea. His father did not look round. He was working the way he always worked, with an economy so complete that it passed for indifference: reach, twist, lower, reach. The apples dropped into the canvas bag at his hip with a sound like a soft knock on a door.

“You came, then,” he said, to the tree.

Rewi had not meant to. He had told himself, on the long drive south, that the sale was a thing done on paper, and that paper could be signed in a lawyer’s office, a hundred kilometres from the smell of cut grass and windfall. But the gate had been open, and the dogs had come out to meet him with their ancient, ridiculous joy, and the orchard, in the late light, had looked at him the way a face does when it has been waiting.

They worked until the sun slid behind the shelter belt and the rows turned from green to a deep, blue shadow. Neither of them spoke of the buyer, a company with a name like a medication, or of the diggers that would come in March. His father talked, instead, about wind and frost and the year of the hail, in a voice that had worn smooth with use, like a stair. Rewi listened, and picked, and understood that the talk was the only form of apology that his father had.

At dusk, his father came down the ladder rung by rung, favouring his left knee. He stood with one hand on the trunk, and Rewi saw the hand clearly: split nails, a scar where a pruning saw had once bitten, skin the texture of bark. It was the hand that had taught him to graft, patiently, a cut of one tree bound into the body of another until the two forgot they had been separate. “She’ll go on a while after we’re gone,” his father said, nodding at the Braeburn. “Trees don’t read contracts.”

Rewi laughed, and it came out wrong, cracked down the middle. Then he took the canvas bag from his father’s shoulder, and hung it on his own, and went up the ladder in the dark, because there was one more apple he could just see, pale and unreachable, at the very top.

Question One

Respond critically to how the writer presents the relationship between a father and a son, and the loss of a way of life, in ‘The Last Picking’. Support your response with evidence from the text.

Planning space (not marked)

The father’s speech and silence.

The orchard as a character (personification, simile).

Hands and grafting as symbols.

The final image and what it suggests.

Question One: your response

Write your response on the lines. Make a clear argument and use precise quotations as evidence.

QUESTION ONE — GUIDE AND MODEL ANSWER

Worked solution

What the question asks

You must develop an argument about how the writer presents the father–son relationship and the end of a way of life, using specific techniques (such as symbol, imagery, tone and structure) and precise quotations.

What each grade looks like for this question

Grade	What the response shows
Achieved	Describes the relationship and the loss, with some techniques named and supported by quotations.
Merit	Explains convincingly how silence, the father's speech and the orchard imagery show an unspoken love and a sense of loss, with well-chosen evidence.
Excellence	Offers a perceptive, sustained argument that the writer presents inheritance as work and care passed in silence, showing how symbols (hands, grafting) and the final image resist the idea of an ending.

Evidence you could use

- “with an economy so complete that it passed for indifference”: the father's manner hides feeling
- “the talk was the only form of apology that his father had”: talk is the father's way of speaking love
- “a cut of one tree bound into the body of another until the two forgot they had been separate”: grafting as a symbol of father and son
- “Trees don't read contracts.”: the father's understated protest against the sale

Model response (about 390 words, aiming at Excellence)

In ‘The Last Picking’, the writer presents the relationship between Rewi and his father as one of unspoken love, and presents the loss of the orchard as the loss of a way of life that still, quietly, goes on. The writer's use of restrained dialogue, symbolism and a hopeful closing image builds this argument.

The father's character is revealed through what he does not say. His work has “an economy so complete that it passed for indifference”, and the paradox in this phrase signals that his apparent coldness conceals feeling. His greeting, “You came, then,” is addressed “to the tree”, which suggests that he cannot face his son directly. The writer then tells us that “the talk was the only form of apology that his father had”. The word “apology” reveals that the father's weather-talk is a way of expressing regret, so the relationship is presented as deep but wordless.

The orchard is presented almost as a living character. It looks at Rewi “the way a face does when it has been waiting”, and the personification suggests that the land has a claim on him. The company that will buy it has “a name like a medication”, a simile that reduces the buyer to something cold and clinical. By contrast, the father's hand, with its “split nails” and “skin the texture of bark”, is part of the orchard itself, showing how closely his life and the land are joined.

The central symbol is the graft. The writer compares it to “a cut of one tree bound into the body of another until the two forgot they had been separate”. This describes the father's teaching of his son and suggests that inheritance is not a transaction but a joining of lives. For this reason, the father's line, “Trees don't read contracts”, is both a joke and a quiet protest: the bond between people and

place cannot be signed away.

The ending resists simple loss. Rewi's laugh "came out wrong, cracked down the middle", but he takes the bag and climbs the ladder to reach the last apple. By taking up his father's work, he shows that what is being inherited is care itself. The writer therefore presents the end of the orchard as the end of a place, but not of the love and skill that were passed on there.

Why this response earns Excellence

- It builds one argument (love expressed through work and silence) and develops it through the whole text.
- It uses precise quotations and comments on individual words such as "apology" and "paradox".
- It reads the symbols (graft, hand) as part of the theme and links the ending back to the argument.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A critical response argues a single idea; every paragraph should prove it with a quotation, a technique and an explanation.

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