

MAIN IDEA

There is a story with the name “Poker Flat” in the title. Poker Flat is a town that reminds me of a western you see on tv. That’s because its a community where a gambler called Oakherst lives. Like alot of westerns from a long time ago in American history, Poker flat has good guys and bad guys.

- 1 Both sentences are irrelevant to the prompt.
- 2 The main idea is simplistic and poorly stated.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

1 Getting kicked out of town was major event in the beginning of the story that had a significant impact on the community but a more major event happens that has an even bigger effect on the six people who are now all stuck together. They camp out for the night and then a major snow storm hits. Now this part of the story reminds me of disaster movies because the storm is so terrible and just gets worse and worse. Then the snow stops but the weather gets so cold that everyone might freeze to death or starve. **2**
This event changes the way the members of the community acts and the way they treat each other.

- 1** This is mere plot summary and not an example of supporting details.
- 2** These details are unconnected and do not support a unifying thesis.

ORGANIZATION

Even though Oakherst is a gambler and probably cheats at playing cards he turns out to be a nice person anyway because he doesn't want anyone to die. He doesn't act selfish and tries to cheer everyone up and protect the members of the small community. One of the ladies who is kicked out of town for bad morals shows she isn't all bad. She starves herself so Tom's sick girlfriend can have food instead. By the end of the story all three of these people wind up dead. The snow storm changes Oakherst and the lady more than anyone else in the story because you see how kind they are.

- 1 The writer has some sense of organization, but the paragraph jumps from idea to idea.
- 2 The last sentence could be a thesis statement, but it comes at the end of the essay without having appeared before.

COHERENCE

The people in Poker Flat want to get rid of some bad people who live there, so they throw out Oakherst. They also kick out three other people. Two ladies who have low morals and a man named Billy who is a robber. These four people start travelling to find a friendlier place to live that's far away from Poker Flat. On the way they meet a man named Tom and his girlfriend. They are running away to Poker Flat to get married because the girlfriend's father won't allow Tom to be her husband. Then these six people form a group that's like a small community.

- 1 The transitions between sentences are weak or absent.
- 2 The flat sentences and lack of transitions make the paragraph unfocused and lifeless. The sentences are barely connected to each other, and they do not develop any main idea.

MAIN IDEA

... The townspeople force out four people who they believe are making the town corrupt. Mr. Oakhurst, a gambler, Uncle Billy, a thief, and Mother Shipton and The Duchess, two women with wicked reputations, are the outcasts who are on their way to the next town. During their journey, they encounter Tom Simson and Piney Woods, an engaged couple who are running away to get married against the wishes of Piney's father. Various circumstances unite these people into a kind of miniature community. 1

- 1 The main idea is stated weakly. Vague words, such as “various circumstances” and “these people,” make the statement seem unfocused.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

Days pass, the storm worsens and the supplies begin to run out. Mother Shipton sacrifices her own life to save Piney. She stores her rations of food and starves herself to death so that Piney will have enough to eat. This unselfish act shows that Mother Shipton is not the wicked person that the townspeople of Poker Flat made her out to be. Instead she proved how caring and generous she is. After the group buries Mother Shipton, Mr. Oakhurst sends Tom to get more supplies. That night the storm and strong winds continue. Imagine the snow drifts piling higher and higher, and the temperature falling way below zero.

- 1 The supporting details provide accurate description. However, the writer sometimes simply restates the plot.
- 2 Even though the detail is accurate, the shift in voice breaks the tone of the essay. In addition, the writer should explain the effect of this plot development, rather than leaving it up to the reader to “imagine.”

ORGANIZATION

1 Very often in literature a significant event occurs that alters the lives of the characters and the community in which they live. In the “Outcasts of Poker Flat,” the blizzard and bitter cold weather effect the group of characters in the story. **2** In real life, the way people react in a crisis situation such as a hurricane or earthquake reveal the way they really are. The same is true of the characters in the “Outcasts of Poker Flat.”

- 1** This broad, general statement is more appropriate for the introductory paragraph than for this body paragraph.
- 2** This general statement is closely related to the first sentence in the paragraph and should logically follow just after it. The writer’s ideas are difficult to follow.

COHERENCE

Throughout the dangerous blizzard, Mr. Oakhurst acts somewhat like a hero and behaves unselfishly too. Because he's a gambler, he may seem reckless and unreliable. However, he shows a different side when he treats Tom and Piney kindly and assumes

2 *responsibility for the welfare of the entire group. Nevertheless, the story has an unhappy ending, since the impact of the major event, the snowstorm, leaves four of the people belonging to this tiny community dead.*

- 1** Sentences are logically connected and the ideas in this paragraph are clearly stated.
- 2** Smooth transitions connect the sentences and ideas here and throughout the essay.

MAIN IDEA

In many works of literature, an outside event affects the lives of characters and the community in which they live. Often this outside event functions as a turning point, after which characters reveal their true natures and behave accordingly.

Ultimately, their actions not only change the way others think but also change the course of events. In Bret Harte’s story “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” such an event is a snowstorm that traps a group of people in an isolated mountain cabin. Their behavior resulting from the storm and subsequent entrapment reveals the true character of these outcasts, banished from Poker Flat because of their so-called immoral behavior.

- 1** The writer clearly responds to the prompt by stating the main idea.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

The outcasts include Mr. Oakhurst, a gambler; Mother Shipton and the Duchess, two sinful women; and Uncle Billy, a thief. All have questionable backgrounds and reputations. Had they left Poker Flat and continued over the mountains, they would most likely have reached Sandy Bar and continued to live as they had previously. However, three of the outcasts become intoxicated along the way, and are forced to stop for the night.

1

- 1 The writer provides specific relevant details. The details are necessary for explaining the writer's thesis.

ORGANIZATION

The storm stops but the weather remains freezing. No escape is possible. The storytelling and forced cheerfulness cannot substitute for physical necessities, as food and fuel supplies run dangerously low after a week. Here, the characters continue to reveal their true selves. Instead of forced merriment and good spirits, the older three fully realize the finality of the situation.

- 1 The paragraph has a clear beginning, middle and end.
- 2 The writer presents supporting details of the plot and explains their significance.

COHERENCE

1 *Thus, the snowstorm and its aftermath in “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” show how the characters’ actions affect the characters themselves and the life of the community.*

Without the snowstorm that traps them, the outcasts would have gone ahead to Sandy Bar, Piney and Tom would have gone to Poker Flat, and Mother Shipton, the Duchess, and Mr. Oakhurst would not have revealed the depth of their goodness and compassion nor revealed their true strengths and weaknesses.

2

- 1** The writer effectively connects the developed ideas to the thesis.
- 2** The writer uses a compound sentence with parallel structure to state this complex idea clearly.

MAIN IDEA

1 The short story “Rain Music” by Longhang Nguyen focuses on Linh, a college student with a bright future. The character of Linh becomes more fully developed as the story unfolds. We see various facets of Linh’s personality through the eyes of her younger sister, **2** the first-person narrator of the story.

- 1** The writer identifies the feature of the story on which the essay will focus.
- 2** The writer responds to the prompt and clearly states the main idea.

SUPPORTING DETAILS

Although Linh's life might seem perfect, she does have a problem. She confides in her sister, who in turn, shares the details of Linh's romantic troubles with the reader. Linh already has a boyfriend, Thanh, who matches her parents' picture of the ideal son-in-law—a brilliant college graduate and a Vietnamese American. Linh, though, is somewhat fickle.

1

2 Her feelings toward David, an African American and an aspiring writer, force Linh to reconsider what she wants in a relationship.

- 1** The writer elaborates the main idea with vivid details, but avoids simple summary of the story.
- 2** The writer chooses details that contribute to the thesis to describe the characters Linh, David, and Thanh.

ORGANIZATION

... Moreover, since Linh's parents are already impressed with Thanh, Linh would continue to show her devotion and respect to them if she became his bride. In contrast, Linh's attraction to David suggests that perhaps the roles she plays—honors student and dutiful daughter—are just a facade. The “real” Linh wants a more romantic life and enjoys being in the company of someone who is different from her. David is friendly and playful and seems to bring out Linh's loving and carefree side. ②

1

- ① The essay develops the thesis throughout without digressing or getting off topic.
- ② The writer organizes the essay by discussing a specific aspect of Linh's character in each paragraph.

COHERENCE

...Her relationships with David and Thanh force her to contend with family pressures and examine her cultural values. She wants to be a dutiful daughter, **1** but feels trapped in the expectations her parents have for her. Finally, Linh submits to **2** social pressures when she apparently chooses Thanh over David. In this choice she shows her respect for her parents by putting away her own wishes and obeying the wishes of her parents.

- 1** The writer repeats an idea developed in a previous paragraph and connects it to the thesis.
- 2** The writer uses smooth transitions to show how ideas connect to one another.