

Marked Writing • Student B, Year 5

Selective style narrative, marked by Nelson Zhou against the Zhou Education 25 mark rubric.

THE TASK

Write a narrative in which a character finds something that should not be there.

30 minutes, including planning. Handwritten, no dictionary.

The doorbell was screwed into the trunk of the fig tree, about as high as my shoulder. It had a small brass button, worn smooth in the middle, the kind you see on old houses. ✓ ①

I had walked past that tree every morning for three years, I had never seen it before. ②

Mum says the park was built over an old street. Whole houses, she said, knocked down before she was born. Sometimes after rain you can see the outline of a path in the grass, going nowhere. I thought about that while I stood there, my thumb hovering over the button. ③

I was very scared. ④

"Don't" said Priya from behind me. ⑤

She had followed me from the gate. Priya never liked anything that was not on a map, she folded her arms and waited. Her shoes were already wet from the grass.

"What if someone answers," she said. ⑥

I pressed it.

Nothing happened for a moment. Then, somewhere underneath us, deep down where the old street was, a bell rings rang. ⑦ ⑧

① Strong opening.

You put the strange object in the first sentence and made it ordinary at the same time, which is why it unsettles the reader. Keep opening this way.

② Comma splice.

Two complete sentences joined by a comma. It happens twice on this page, both circled. Punctuation costs marks in Sentence Control.

Full stop after years, and after map.

③ Good planting.

The old street is dropped in early and pays off later. That is deliberate structure, not luck.

④ Telling, not showing.

You name the feeling instead of showing it, so the reader is told rather than moved. This loses marks in Language. **Replace with what your hands or breathing did.**

⑤ Speech punctuation.

The comma belongs inside the closing quotation mark. **Write: "Don't," said Priya.**

⑥ Speech punctuation.

It is a question, so the mark goes inside the quotation. **Write: "What if someone answers?"**

⑦ Tense shift.

The story is in past tense and this verb slips to present. Inconsistent tense costs Sentence Control marks. **Rings becomes rang.**

⑧ The payoff lands.

Returning to the old street here is the best structural decision on the page.

The sound came up through my shoes, thin and far away, like a bell heard from inside a house. Priya grabs ^{grabbed} my sleeve. ⑨

The fig tree's roots ran off in every direction like veins under the grass, and I remember thinking that one of them must be touching a door. ✓ ⑩

Then the ground by the roots shifted, just slightly, and a square of grass lifted about a centimetre, ⑪ it settled back down. Nobody else in the park looked up. ⑪

I felt terrified. ⑫

I did not know what to do, ⑬ Priya was already pulling me backwards.

A park ranger came around the corner with a whipper snipper and the square of grass stayed shut. He asked us what we were doing and Priya told him about the doorbell and he laughed and said it was left over from a film shoot years ago. He said they had filmed a scene where a house came up out of the ground. ⑬

But when he walked away I looked back at the tree and the button was ⑭

Response ends here. Time called.

⑨ Tense shift, second time.

Same fault as note 7, one paragraph later, which tells me it is a habit rather than a slip. Reread each sentence as you finish it, not at the end.

⑩ Best sentence on the page.

The image does real work: it connects the tree to the door underneath without explaining the link. This is the standard to aim for.

⑪ Comma splice.

Two complete sentences again, twice on this page, both circled. Four across the response, so this is the single biggest drain on your mark. Full stop after centimetre, and after do.

⑫ Telling again.

Second time you name the emotion outright. The tension you built is doing the work already, so the sentence weakens the moment. Cut it and let the next action carry it.

⑬ The ranger solves it, not you.

Your character does nothing here, so the reader stops caring what she decides. This is a Plot mark, not a punctuation one, and it is the second biggest loss on this piece. She must act before anyone arrives.

⑭ Unfinished.

The plan had an ending and it never reached the page. An unresolved narrative gives away marks the ideas have already earned. Leave six minutes for the ending and write it first if you must.

✓ Overall.

The ideas here are ahead of most of the cohort. Every point above is fixable in drafting, and none of it is a gap in what you know.

Feedback

Zhou Education 25 mark narrative rubric.

STUDENT	YEAR LEVEL	TASK
Student B	Year 5	Timed narrative, 30 minutes
MARKER	PREPARING FOR	RESULT
Nelson Zhou	Selective and scholarship	17 of 25

Results by section

CRITERION	WHAT DECIDED THE BAND	MARK
Ideas and plot	Specific, unusual premise. Loses a mark because the problem is resolved by the ranger rather than by the character.	5 of 6
Character and voice	Consistent narrator with a distinct friend beside her. Emotion is named twice instead of shown.	4 of 5
Structure and pacing	Planted detail pays off well. The response is unfinished, which is where the marks go.	3 of 5
Language and description	One outstanding image. Elsewhere the description thins out under time.	3 of 4
Sentence control and punctuation	Four comma splices, two tense shifts and two speech punctuation errors across 344 words.	2 of 5
Total		17 of 25

Three strengths

1. The premise is specific and strange, and the opening sentence makes it ordinary, which is what makes it unsettling.
2. The old street is planted early and paid off when the bell rings underneath, which is deliberate structure.
3. The roots image at note 10 does real work rather than decorating the sentence.

Three priorities, by marks lost

1. Sentence boundaries. Four comma splices is the largest single loss on this piece.
2. Finishing inside the time. The ending existed in the plan and never reached the page.
3. The character must solve her own problem. The ranger currently ends the story for her.

Follow up work

This work is set and marked in lessons, in the order of the priorities above. Sentence boundaries come first because the rule is already known: the corrections at notes 2 and 11 were made without further explanation once they were pointed out.

Model ending

Written at the level a strong Year 5 could reach in the time. It shows the character deciding, rather than being rescued.

The grass lifted again. I could have run. Instead I knelt down, pushed my fingers under the edge and pulled, and the square came up like a lid. Underneath there was a step, then another, going down into the dark where the old street was. Priya said my name once. I put my foot on the first step.