**‘The Child In Time’** is an incredibly well-crafted piece of writing. Ian McEwan creates a very mundane and everyday situation and transforms it into a devastating account of a child’s disappearance. In order to appreciate the intricacy of the piece, complete these close-reading activities.

In paragraph 2 McEwan shows that Stephen has ironically noticed a range of trivial yet striking details from his walk to the supermarket. It is ironic because he recalls all of these minute details, yet cannot remember if he was followed around the shop.

What is effective about the detail in the description of the ‘busy’ dog and the tree? Explain your ideas fully, referring to word choice and detail...

McEwan uses intricately detailed descriptions of the dog and the tree. The sentences are long and complex. The shocking image of the ‘shitting dog’ stands out in the reader’s head- as it did in Stephen’s- but McEwan takes this further, adding detail about its ‘quivering haunches’ as well as its ‘dreamy expression’.

The description of the tree is full of contrasts: the tree is ‘tired’ yet ‘looked freshly carved’; its ridges are ‘sparkling’ yet the ruts are ‘in blackest shadow’. The tree description is more sinister, suggesting a lurking threat... hinting at the kidnapping of Kate.

It would be easy to judge the character of Stephen, as careless and unobservant for losing sight of his daughter and the person who took her. What action does McEwan include in paragraph 2 to prevent the reader from condemning him?

He stops Kate from picking up the straw from the flattened Coca-Cola can

In paragraph 2 McEwan uses the weather and atmosphere of the busy city streets to reflect the mood of the text (pathetic fallacy)- what details does McEwan use to represent the busyness and the cold clarity of the day?

Busyness:

As though into a storm/ arterial route south (busy road)/ traffic rushed with adrenal ferocity

Cold clarity:

a light of brilliant explicitness, a cynical eye for detail

In the opening paragraph, McEwan establishes the closeness between the father and daughter. Identify three actions that the characters do which reflects their closeness:

* Holding up the scuffed donkey

* He loops scarf around her neck

* She checks his coat buttons

He abandoned all propriety, filled his constricted lungs and shouted Kate’s name.

he walked past all the tills, ignoring the girl at this who was irritably trying to attract his attention

Unhurriedly he pushed the trolley clear, thinking she had ducked down

In paragraph 8 McEwan shifts the focus to show the whole supermarket becoming aware of the missing child. Write down a sentence which shows this.

‘There was no mistaking him for one of the drunks…’

‘Within moments all shopping around him had ceased.’

‘…it was generally known that she was three, that she was last seen at the checkout, that she wore green dungarees and carried a toy donkey.’

In paragraph 7 McEwan uses sentence structure effectively to capture the moment where Kate disappears. Explain how he does this...

‘Kate was gone’ The single simple sentence sits strikingly amongst the complex and rambling list of events that surround it. It is also buried within the long paragraph, capturing the idea that the moment passes before anyone is aware of it.

In paragraph 7 McEwan once again reminds us of the closeness between Kate and Stephen. Note down the action which shows this...

He winks at her and she tries to copy- she wrinkles her nose and blinks with both eyes.

In paragraph 4, McEwan describes the ‘tribes’ which occupy the supermarket. Why does McEwan list the people so specifically? What is he trying to show about the environment of the supermarket?

By making the supermarket seem like a tribal place with

groups with predictable behaviours, it makes the setting seem

less threatening. It creates a relaxed, pattern of behaviour-

one in which we would not expect a kidnapping.

Stephen’s reaction to Kate’s disappearance is gradual and slowly mounts in tension. Along the timeline beneath, for each of the ‘states’ of his reaction, write down a supporting quotation from the story which exemplifies this.

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Initially calm and undaunted

More active and involved response

Physical reaction and sense of foreboding

Increasingly focused

Reserved panic

Sheer desperation

His immediate worry was the traffic

a sickness and a tightening at the base of the throat

At a controlled run- he was not yet past caring how foolish he looked

After the hints of paragraph 5, paragraph 6 is full of normality again. List some of the typical taking-child-to-the-supermarket events...

He joins the queue- suggesting that the journey and chore of shopping is almost over.

She complains when he lifts her out of the trolley- she hooks her foot around the seat.

He notices she’s getting tired.

After being so specific about the details in earlier paragraphs, in paragraph 5 McEwan shows Stephen’s uncertainty.

How does he do this?

He asks questions – What else did he buy? Who was there when...?

How does this hint towards the vanishing of Kate?

Because this is a recount of an event, it suggests that, at this point, Stephen might have noticed that someone was following them and planning to take Kate.

How does McEwan show Stephen’s frustration and create tension?

In paragraph 3 Stephen protects Kate from two potentially dangerous situations. What are they?

1. The crossing is shown to be threatening with ‘snarling’ cars
2. He holds her hand tightly as they go into the supermarket through the crowds

Why does McEwan show this?

It reminds us that Stephen is a protective father, aware of the risks that he and Kate face. It is also ironic when we consider that she is kidnapped despite his protective efforts.