 The Fringe Benefits of Failure

Speech analysis task

Task 1 – questions

Answer the following questions with detail and evidence from the speech. Your responses may be useful in forming your extended responses down the track.

Note – italicised words and phrases come directly from the rubric!

1. ‘Of all the subjects on this planet, I think they would have been hard put to name one less useful than Greek mythology when it came to securing the keys to an executive bathroom.’ How does Rowling question what motivates us as humans? How do her motivations differ from her parents and why?
2. Rowling confidently proffers the statement “poverty itself is romanticised only by fools.” How does this challenge assumptions about poverty?
3. She provides her individual experience of poverty, but also links this to the collective experience. Find evidence to reflect this idea.
4. Rowling uses storytelling to share stories from her past. She provides a powerful anecdote about the African torture victim who she described as “a foot taller than I was, and seemed as fragile as a child.” In what way does this capture a paradox of humans?
5. Following this story, Rowling reveals that she had “literal nightmares” about the things she “saw, heard and read”. Opening her sentence with the striking “And yet”, Rowling explains that “I also learned more about human goodness at Amnesty International than I had even known before.” What does this say about the qualities of humans to see experiences in different ways? How was her experience working at Amnesty International paradoxical?
6. What human qualities does Rowling discuss in her speech? List three and include a quote for each.
7. ‘Climbing out of poverty by your own efforts, that is indeed something on which to pride yourself…’ How could this message be linked to one or more of the interviewees in Waste Land?
8. “Unlike any other creature on this planet, humans can learn and understand, without having experienced. They can think themselves into other people’s places.” Write a response to the quote by Lucy Walker. Would she agree/disagree? Why?
9. Rowling states that some people refuse to “hear screams or to peer inside cages”. How do texts enable us to enter into different worlds and see things differently?
10. The composer makes references to philosophers, paying homage to her education in classics. She quotes Plutarch: “What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality”. How does this align with Vik Muniz’s view of his art project? How does this reflect the powerful experience of the pickers who were represented in his portraits?

Task 2 – table of evidence

| Quote | Literary device | Link |
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Task 3 – thesis and essay plan

Using ‘Waste Land’ and ‘The Fringe Benefits of Failure’, write a thesis and essay plan in response to the following question:

‘Life is difficult, and complicated, and beyond anyone’s total control…’ How is this reflected in the experiences of individuals in both ‘Waste Land’ by Lucy Walker and ‘The Fringe Benefits of Failure’ by J.K. Rowling?