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Example Answer

'Neutral-tinted' literally means not strongly or brightly coloured, like a beige cardigan. Used to describe Miss Harby, it could refer to her clothes, but it is more likely to refer to her manner – how she seems – or to both.

2

This suggests that Miss Harby does not make a strong impression on Ursula, unlike the man doing the copying. Ursula has no particular reaction to her. She is not in any way a 'colourful' character.

2

Total:

4

Guidance

This question asks you to explain just one phrase. However, it is important to bear in mind that it asks you what the writer means, not just what the phrase itself means. In other words, you have to analyse the phrase in the context of the passage, and explain what impression it gives of Miss Harby. Also, the whole passage is from Ursula's viewpoint, so the phrase also reflects how Ursula perceives this woman.

Marking

There are 4 marks available – 2 marks for each main point. To be sure of earning full marks, you must show that you understand what 'neutral-tinted' literally means, and what it suggests about Miss Harby in the context of the passage. It could also benefit you to suggest alternative interpretations if you think there are any.

Top Tip

If a question asks you what 'the writer means' by a particular word or phrase, do not just give a dictionary definition of it. Analyse it in context and think about the effect the writer wanted it to have.