The key skill for success on this paper is the ability to express clearly the effects of
language choices on the reader.

Look at this extract from Silas Marner, a Victorian story by George Eliot set around Christmas.

Turning towards the hearth, where the two logs had fallen apart, and sent forth only a red uncertain glimmer, he seated himself on his fireside chair, and was stooping to push his logs together, when to his blurred vision it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in front of the hearth. Gold—his own gold—brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he was unable to stretch out his hand and grasp the restored treasure. The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. In utter amazement Silas fell on his knees and bent his head low to examine the marvel; it was a sleeping child—a round, fair thing, with soft yellow rings all over its head. Could this be his little sister come back to him in a dream—his little sister whom he had carried about in his arms for a year before she died, when he was a small boy without shoes or stockings? That was the first thought that darted across Silas’s blank wonderment. Was it a dream? He rose to his feet again, pushed his logs together, and, throwing on some dried leaves and sticks, raised a flame. But the flame did not disperse the vision; it only lit up more distinctly the little round form of the child, and its shabby clothing. It was very much like his little sister. Silas sank into his chair powerless.

But there was a cry on the hearth: the child had awaked, and Marner stooped to lift it on his knee. It clung round his neck and burst louder and louder into that mingling of inarticulate cries with “mammy” by which little children express the bewilderment of waking. Silas pressed it to him, and almost unconsciously uttered sounds of hushing tenderness, while he bethought himself that some of his porridge, which had got cool by the dying fire, would do to feed the child with if it were only warmed up a little.

He had plenty to do through the next hour. The porridge, sweetened with some dry brown sugar from an old store which he had refrained from using for himself, stopped the cries of the little one, and made her lift her blue eyes with a wide, quiet gaze at Silas as he put the spoon into her mouth. Presently she slipped from his knee and began to toddle about, but with a pretty stagger that made Silas jump up and follow her lest she should fall against anything that would hurt her. But she only fell in a sitting posture on the ground, and began to pull at her boots, looking up at him with a crying face as if the boots hurt her. He took her on his knee again, but it was some time before it occurred to Silas’s dull bachelor mind that the wet boots were the grievance, pressing on her warm ankles. He got them off with difficulty, and baby was at once happily occupied with the primary mystery of her own toes.

Answer the questions on the following two pages. Pay attention to the advice given as this will help you get better marks.
1. What is the first thing Marner thinks of when “it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in front of the hearth”? (1 mark)

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2. Read from “Gold-his own gold … and grasp the restored treasure.” (Lines 5 to 9)). (3 marks)
   Explain how the language choices in these two sentences help suggest Marner’s shock. For three marks, the answer requires you to use skills of inference and deduction, and to express your idea in an evaluative, succinct way, referring in detail to the language. You will need to make three good points for all the marks.

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3. Read the end of this sentence “… but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls.” (Lines 10 and 11). Explain how this choice of language emphasises Silas’s shock. (2 marks) A really precise and evaluative answer would be required for both marks.

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4. In the last two paragraphs, how does the writer use language to build the relationship between the child and Silas Marner?

You should comment on how the writer describes:
- what takes place when the child cries
- the hour that followed (5 marks)

To get all five marks, identify important phrases and express clearly how they have an emotional effect on the reader. Labelling of techniques is always useful, but the marks are there for responding to the effectiveness of language choices.