Grace Chua’s poem, “(love song, with two goldfish)” describes a basic love story that yields no happy ending. In this “song”, male wants female, but the female wants more than what the male can provide. A difference in desires is established. Although the characters of this song are both goldfish, I believe this story represents and can act as a metaphor for numerous relationships in which a female feels trapped or closed in and the male that loves her if not capable of satisfying her desires. Through Grace Chua’s use of punctuation and hints of theme, the reader can sense why this “song” has no happy ending. It can be seen through the perceptions and desires of the characters involved.

In this passage, I think the use of parenthesis have several meanings. Each of the meanings pertains to one of the two characters. My initial assumption was that the parenthesis supported the idea of the male fish’s shyness. Chua does not let the reader whether or not the male fish has told his love of all he would do. “He would take her to the ocean, they could count the waves.” By doing this, I receive the impression that his fish does not have a robust personality. Also, through phrases and sentences like “He wishes she would sing, not must just the scales; or take some notice,” and “swallows his charm hook,” I see a timid male fish. By saying “take some notice”, it’s almost as if the female fish doesn’t know he exists. In addition, by the use of the work “hook” in the second phrase given, not only is he trying to catch her, but he also attempts to catch her at a distance. When casting a sinking line, the hook is very far from the fisher. When using parenthesis in the text, the words enclosed are normally just side notes not meant to be said aloud or not as important as the other text. Seeing that this poem is mostly the male fish’s thoughts through third person, I took the sue of parenthesis as the male fish’s thoughts that he felt were not worth saying aloud and only thoughts to keep to himself.

On the other hand, I feel the parenthesis symbolize how the female fish felt in the bowl. She felt enclosed and trapped. The parenthesis enclose words just as the wish bowl does to her. The shape of the parenthesis also support the idea of the shape of the fish bowl. In the poem, the goldfish are “bounded by walls” and in this poem the words are bounded by round brackets.

There are only four words unbound by the round brackets, “a life beyond”. These words are not closed in and that is where the female goldfish wants to be. After analysis up to this point, the desires of each goldfish has been made clear. The male loves the female, but the female just wants to get out. She is ready to move up and explore what is beyond her boundaries. “He’s a drifter, always floating around her...” and seems content with where she is. Here is a conflict in desires. He wants her, but she wants someone who can offer her a way out. These conflicting interests are also shown through a theme of dimension. Numerous times up and down are referred to. Up represents the female and down represent the male. In the poem when referring to the male or his thoughts, the following phrases are used: “submarine silence,” “dive for pearls,” and “his heart sinks.” All these phrases involve some form of going deeper into the water, deeper into the bowl in which they live. However, when the female is mentioned, words like “darts” or “belly up” are used. “Darts” implies that she is ready to move fast into a new life, moreso than a “drifter” and although “belly up” in context refers to her love towards the male (that has died), it still means moving upward.

This story has no happy ending because the two characters in this “love song” do not end up together. Neither of the desires each goldfish has is satisfied. The female has not found a way out and the male does not get the female. Through Chua’s use of punctuation and theme it is easy to assume that the goldfish wanted different things. Due to these different desires and perceptions, I have come to find out why this cure “love song” has no happy ending.

This paper received a 9 out 20 A=2 B=2 C=2 D=3
This shows some understanding, although it does not constitute a very close or detailed reading and the interpretation it puts forward is rather superficial. There is some analysis but this is not always convincing and is mainly milted to a discussion of the use of parentheses. There is a recognizable structure to the commentary, but the ideas lack development. The language is clear with an adequate degree of accuracy.
Example B

Hopes of love can sometimes be coupled with the sting of rejection. A male may try to woo a female with candy, flowers, or in this situation, scaly lips. In Grace Chua’s poem, “(love song, with two goldfish),” she satirizes the lovesick male with the stereotypically coy (not the fish) female. By reducing humans to fish, as well as her use of a myriad of puns and double entendres, Chua effectively produces a social commentary on the pitfalls of unrequited amour.

Chua begins her piece with the universal characters “he” and “she.” The two animals she is referring to are goldfish, probably the least likely candidates for true love. By describing the “love” between two fish, she is really saying the magnitude of human love is just as insignificant. However, I do not believe Chua is overly cynical. Instead, she is realist, especially when she describes the lengths the male goldfish went to impress his bowl mate. He exhibited all the socially required behaviors: promises of fancy “ocean” vacations and jewelry (“pearls”, line 16). Unfortunately, their romance couldn’t set sail, and ended with his broken heart.

This story has been told and retold a thousand times, but the gem of this piece is the presentation. The poem is literally ensconced like the bowl, with parenthesis cupping the beginning and end of every stanza. The reader feels physically ensconced in the piece, and by extension emotionally attached to their situation. The only line free from parenthesis is line 26-27, where the author indicates physically and by the meaning of the phrase there is something “beyond”. Chau also separates this last stanza further from the rest of the piece by not capitalizing the first word or putting punctuation at the end. Instead, Chau leaves this sentence open ended, signaling the universal theme of rejection and heartbreak. This stanza is by far the most serious in the poem. Chua quite cheekily reminds readers throughout the poem how light-hearted, whimsical and generally love seems from the outside.

A human watching two fish in a bowl would never suspect their darting about and puffy lipped pouts as flirting. But, according to Chau, this is the case. Chau thereby chides the fantasies of human males when she reveals the “kissy lips” and “fish eyes” do not mean the woman is interested. She further pokes fun of her subjects through her repetitious use of fish puns (“scales” line 4, “hook, line and sinker” line 11, “bowled over” line 12 and “belly up” line 19). The double entendre of “scales” is particularly effective when combined with the ironic thought that the other fish would “sing.” But perhaps Chau’s most striking commentary on men comes with her diction and use of simile and metaphor.

Chau’s diction throughout this poem indicated the irony of love and how men are wishful thinkers. First, in line 1-3, she states that the male, “always float[s] around her.” This in itself is a quaint statement, conveying admiration and faithfulness. However, Chau then qualifies that he “has nowhere else to go.” Ironically, love blooms out of forced contact. Chau obviously doesn’t believe that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Chau also shows the one sidedness of this relationship by first only telling the male’s perspective until the last stanza, and second her use of conditional verbs. Each stanza is about the male, his experiences and how he perceives the female. However, Chau does alternate the subject of the stanza from male to female, giving us a biased look at how she is “leading him on.” In the second stanza, the female’s behavior is similar to that of a typical girl who shies away from affection. Then in the fourth stanza, she is portrayed as a heartbreaker. However the male in stanzas 1 and 3 is show to only wish he had her affections. He hopes maybe she “would sing” and he “would take her to the ocean” where they “could count the waves.” The conditional tense is Chau’s way of pointing out how this “love” is only in one person’s head. After line 15-16 where another conditional verb “would” is used, Chau contrasts with the direct statement “Dive for pearls like stars” to alert the reader to the fantasy of the male fish. Ultimately, Chau is stressing through the final stanza how a relationship needs both perspectives, which is why she chooses to give the female her say in the last line.
Chau also uses humor in the form of similes. In lines 20 and 21, the male fish’s “heart sinks like a fish”. This is possibly the most overt reference in the the piece that this poem is not about fish. Further he “drinks like a stone,” which is also ironic given fish “drink” water for their survival. Irony is also present in lines 21-22 when the fish “drowns those sorrows.” Chau conveys the male’s heartbreak in line 17, when she likens the fish to “stars,” perhaps alluding they are the famous star-crossed lovers of Shakespeare’s ultimate love story. The light hearted tone of this poem is cemented by her blend of tragedy and humor, insinuating how naïve humans are in the game of love.

The grand theme of this piece, and the point Chau is making is shown through the hyperbole of the goldfish as a person. The goldfish are personified repeatedly as “charming” (line 11) and flirtatious (see stanza 2). Chau uses the goldfish, an unelegant, dim creature to satirize the ungracefulness of and stupidity that accompanies love. Apparently, only an animal with a three second memory could describe a male in love. In addition to her almost damning comparison, Chau further likens love to being a trap. Why else would the piece take place in the claustrophobic, not to mention, unromantic atmosphere of a round and inescapable bowl? The last bit of advice Chau leaves readers with is found in the last stanza. She separates the female’s thoughts with parentheses from the male’s thoughts. Ultimately, Chau believes there is a divide between males and females that must be overcome to reach love.

Grace Chua utilizes humor throughout her poem to satirize how humans interact when in love. By comparing human endeavors to that of a fish trapped in a bowl, she effectively provides a social commentary on relationships that is relevant today.