

***The White Earth* by Andrew McGahan – annotated passage from Chapter 1**

William's mother, meanwhile, had not received the grace of an early death and a martyrdom to fire, but his feelings about her had always been more complex. She was hard to love that her husband – physically harder, too a thin woman of angles and bones, with long wispy brown hair. If at his father's core there was a crucial weakness, a life of plans but never fulfilled, then at his mother's core William sensed something fractured and brittle. It was never spoken about, but he was aware from a young age that she was delicate, in a special way. Headaches plagued her, and much of the time she was listless and exhausted. At other times she was wildly short-tempered, screaming weakly at William if he annoyed her, and stinging him with slaps. Afterwards she would lock herself in the main bedroom and weep. She took many pills and frequently visited the doctor. On several occasions she had disappeared for up to a week. Resting, William's father would say, at a place where people went when they needed time away by themselves.

But when William played with other children he could see that their mothers were different. They bustled with energy, they were friendly and welcoming, they helped their children with homework, they volunteered to serve on school committees and in the canteen, they had sandwiched waiting whenever William arrived. His mother did none of these things – she was always too tired, or her head hurt, or she was hidden in her room and William was forbidden to make a sound. It made him feel secretly ashamed of her, and he felt guilty about the shame. He knew that at least part of her behaviour was explained by the simple fact that life was or difficult for them than for other families. Their farm was not prosperous, their car was not as new, their house was not as nice, and while these things did not seem to bother his father, they made his mother unhappy.

**Topic sentence:
complex emotions**

**Comparison to father
introduced by dash
which acts as a
separation from him**

**Her physical
appearance suggests
she is hard emotionally**

**More comparison to
father's 'core'**

**Her 'delicacy' and
erratic reactions**

**Comparison to 'normal'
mothers listing their
activities introduced by
the comparative
conjunction 'but'**

**Short sentence
contrasts his mother to
other mothers followed
by a dash her exclusion
from the world of
mothers
William's feelings of
'shame' and 'guilt'**

**Reasons listed through
negative comparison
'not as'**