



AP[®] English Literature and Composition 2005 Scoring Commentary Form B

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Question 1

Sample: 1A

Score: 9

This response to the two poems is especially impressive. It begins with an effective, brief opening contrast between the two poems, stressing their differing views of time. Following this is a richly detailed analysis of “Five A.M.” that gets the tone exactly right: “gentle and calm,” “at peace,” “security,” “contentment,” “promises.” This is followed by a paragraph on poetic devices, connecting each one convincingly with the poem’s imagery. For example, the use of free verse, with enjambed lines, helps “represent the speaker’s free flowing thoughts as he continues along his stroll.” Similarly, “The caesuras in the first stanza may also symbolize the speaker pausing to look at the new things he passes.” The student then contrasts Bishop’s poem well, with a focus on “struggle,” a differing view of nature—“a huge, unfathomable idea,” a different sort of dog. The student’s observation that “humans cannot understand animals” is, in fact, an exceptionally good recognition. There is an insightful comment that “Only nature is at peace” in Bishop’s poem. The writing, however, is not dazzling. More detail on Bishop would have helped, especially detail about technique (as was done for Stafford’s poem). Still, good final sentences and strong overall control of the argument make for an essay that ascended into the upper half of the score range.

Sample: 1B

Score: 6

This essay focuses well, but somewhat simply, on the first poem’s “tones of carefree happiness,” versus the second poem’s “burdened observation.” Comparisons are clear and accurate, so far as they go. For example, the student notes that the animals in the second poem are “‘inquiring’ and unsure and asking ‘questions—if that is what they are,’” adding that the first poem also asks a question, though the student aptly recognizes that this question “is rhetorical [*sic*] and exemplifies the assured certainty of the speaker.” The essay establishes a good contrast between Bishop’s pervasive questioning and Stafford’s simple, merely rhetorical question. There are, however, lapses in the control of syntax and rather pedestrian language, with a lot of weak verbs. Despite the occasional astute insight, neither poem receives a fully or richly developed analysis, keeping the essay from achieving the maturity and control required in the highest score range.

Sample: 1C

Score: 4

This essay provides an unpersuasive, undeveloped response to both poems. Claims of “astounding observations” turn out not to be convincingly demonstrated. There is some good observation about Elizabeth Bishop’s “mesmerizing” tree descriptions, the “meticulous detail” the author provides, and how the animals “live in the moment.” However, there is almost no control of argument and no thesis to focus the student’s remarks. The student’s limited response to “Five A.M.” is also problematic. The two sentences written say almost nothing substantive: “Stafford takes a walk early in the morning and . . . thinks about everything, yet nothing at all.” Such undeveloped, unsupported claims fail to respond to the question adequately. The analysis of poetic technique is inadequate; the student fails to analyze the devices the authors use to communicate the speakers’ different states of mind.

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Question 2

Sample: 2A

Score: 9

This well-written, persuasive essay stresses from the start that the predominant tone of the passage is one of pity, made evident through “the juxtaposition of his [McTeague’s] strength and his stupidity.” The student demonstrates how diction builds up, then undercuts McTeague in paragraph one. The essay thoroughly chronicles how details demonstrate the sources of the narrator’s pity. McTeague’s failures—“his clients are limited to ‘butcher boys, shop girls, drug clerks, and car conductors’—none of which are professions that would allow great amounts of spending on dental work,” his office a “corner room . . . far removed and remote,” exhaling “‘a mingled odor of bedding, creosote, and ether’”—are all richly detailed. This is followed by an exceptional paragraph on syntax that brings in fuller dimensions of tone—“irony,” “sympathy,” “reverses,” “balance sheet,” “stupid contentment”—all arising from shrewd insights about how the syntax works. The student clearly understands that the dentist’s “endless balance sheet of unfavorable items” outweighs “what potential may exist.” The conclusion shows again a perfect control of argument: “diction and details create a tone that adds credibility to the narrator’s attitude, leaving the reader with no choice but to agree with him.” The only limitation in this sophisticated analysis is the fact that the student does not see the humor of the passage, and what irony is recognized is only briefly discussed.

Sample: 2B

Score: 7

Two excellent sentences begin this essay. The writer addresses both tone and technique in the brief introduction: “With an almost cruelly indifferent tone, the author uses structure, setting, and metaphor to describe McTeague as a simple man of simple background with simple ambitions. By refusing to deliver an outright opinion of McTeague the author does not speak ill of him but by not praising him for his honest intentions and good work, he defines McTeague as unsatisfactory.” The rest of the essay is good, but it does not go into sufficient detail to develop the claims that are asserted as convincingly as essays that earned an 8 or 9. The student recognizes the author’s pity for McTeague but doesn’t develop this idea. Some excellent diction (“This barb,” “stupid oaf,” “previous jabs”) and vigorous writing (“the author clearly illustrates his disdain for this simple man and his simple dreams”) cannot fully compensate for this student’s sketchy analysis.

Sample: 2C

Score: 5

While this student understands that the “entire tone . . . is mocking,” with “unflattering” descriptions of McTeague, the essay relies too heavily on simple summary. This student does not analyze how the details show the narrator’s “dislike” and “superiority.” Repetition of sentence openers (“The first,” “The first,” “Next,” “The author then,” “Then the author,” “Next”) does not suggest much attentiveness to style. Overall, this is a one-dimensional discussion. The final body paragraph, on syntax, is weak, claiming—incorrectly—that the sentences describing McTeague’s dwelling are ‘short and worded simply,’ when some are actually quite long and detailed. A very brief conclusion relies on merely a single sentence to summarize the points the essay has already covered. Thus, the essay’s treatment of the passage is superficial and pedestrian.

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Question 3

Sample: 3A

Score: 9

Lysistrata provides an excellent vehicle for this student to discuss how the struggle of Lysistrata, and women in general, is central to the meaning of the work. This consistently focused essay demonstrates how Lysistrata and the play are concerned with female power and emancipation. The essay is well organized to show first the protagonist's domestic issues of women versus the men, and then the more global issues of women versus the war. Complex, resourceful, well-modulated sentences demonstrate the student's ability to discuss a literary work with insight and understanding and to sustain a thesis with precision and clarity. The student not only analyzes the play insightfully but moves beyond the play to argue the more general issue that it is "all people's rights to make decisions for their welfare if something is going to affect them directly." Moreover, the student's verbal control is exceptional, as in the following phrasing: "Aristophanes . . . uses his satirical tone and scathing stychomythia [*sic*] of sex as a weapon against war." There are limitations, however. More references to specific episodes in the play would increase the essay's persuasiveness. Additionally, there is a tendency toward a high level of generalization and a certain amount of repetition. Yet, the student indicates a high level of engagement with the chosen text and an ability to persuade through an argument that proceeds more on a philosophical than on a textual level.

Sample: 3B

Score: 6

This essay on *Medea* is clearly and cleverly written. The student consistently focuses on issues of power for Medea and for the play in general. The essay begins with a clear opening paragraph that delineates the ways in which Medea seeks to gain power over her husband, Jason, and her father, Creon—arguing that Medea's power struggle enables Euripides "to demonstrate the ultimate destruction and misery that power may cause." Minor weaknesses of interpretation ("power's banality") and phrasing ("Jason's unity to his daughter"; "cause emotional pain on Creon") are balanced by many good insights and well-turned phrases: "Relishing this hard won power, she doesn't suffer at the deaths of her children"; "power is able to freeze human compassion and loving emotions." Perhaps the major flaw of this response is its thinness. Although each paragraph investigates an appropriate aspect of the topic, paragraphs are consistently short, sometimes no more than three or four sentences long. This lack of supporting detail weakens the essay's persuasive power.

Sample: 3C

Score: 4

The student's choice of Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* is an appropriate one. However, the essay never defines the government's power or the people's power. It is unclear how the main character's struggle with the government "made him evolve." It is also unclear how the power of the people helped him. The second paragraph is almost completely a retelling of the novel's plot. In the one sentence where there is some analysis, the claim made is general—"the priest faced guilt and various other emotions"—and there is no support to validate and develop the student's assertions. One potentially good point about the priest's humanity, which enables "readers to empathize with him," is neither clear enough nor specific enough to be convincing.