

# AP<sup>®</sup> ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

## 2013 SCORING GUIDELINES

### Question 1

(Mary Oliver's "The Black Walnut Tree")

The score reflects the quality of the essay as a whole — its content, style, and mechanics. **Students are rewarded for what they do well.** The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by 1 point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a 3.

- 9–8** These essays offer a persuasive analysis of Oliver's use of figurative language and other poetic techniques to convey her ideas about the relationship between the tree and family. These essays offer a range of interpretations; they provide convincing readings of both the ideas and Oliver's use of figurative language and other poetic techniques. They demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the analysis of poetry. Their textual references are apt and specific. Though they may not be error-free, these essays are perceptive in their analysis and demonstrate writing that is clear and sophisticated, and in the case of essays scored a 9, especially persuasive.
- 7–6** These essays offer a reasonable analysis of Oliver's use of figurative language and other poetic techniques to convey her ideas about the relationship between the tree and family. They are less thorough or less precise in their discussion of the ideas and Oliver's use of figurative language and other poetic techniques, and their analysis of the relationship between the two is less thorough or convincing. These essays demonstrate the student's ability to express ideas clearly, making references to the text, although they do not exhibit the same level of effective writing as the 9–8 responses. Essays scored a 7 present better developed analysis and more consistent command of the elements of effective composition than do essays scored a 6.
- 5** These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of Oliver's use of figurative language and other poetic techniques to convey her ideas about the relationship between the tree and family, but they tend to be superficial in their analysis of the ideas and of figurative language and other poetic techniques. They often rely on paraphrase, which may contain some analysis, implicit or explicit. Their analysis of the relationship of the ideas or of Oliver's use of figurative language and other poetic techniques may be vague, formulaic, or minimally supported by references to the text. There may be minor misinterpretations of the poem. These essays demonstrate some control of language, but may be marred by surface errors. They are not as well conceived, organized, or developed as 7–6 essays.
- 4–3** These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of the poem. The analysis may be partial, unconvincing, or irrelevant, or it may ignore Oliver's ideas about the relationship between the tree and family or her use of figurative language and other poetic techniques. Evidence from the poem may be slight or misconstrued, or the essays may rely on paraphrase only. The essays often demonstrate a lack of control over the conventions of composition: inadequate development of ideas, accumulation of errors, or a focus that is unclear, inconsistent, or repetitive. Essays scored a 3 may contain significant misreading, demonstrate inept writing, or do both.

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**2013 SCORING GUIDELINES**

**Question 1 (continued)**

- 2–1** These essays compound the weaknesses of the essays in the 4–3 score range. Although some attempt has been made to respond to the prompt, the assertions are presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the poem. These essays may contain serious errors in grammar and mechanics. They may offer a complete misreading or be unacceptably brief. Essays scored a 1 contain little coherent discussion of the poem.
- 0** These essays give a response that is completely off topic or inadequate; there may be some mark or a drawing or a brief reference to the task.
- These essays are entirely blank.

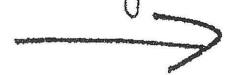
Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1

1A  
(2014)

"The Black Walnut Tree" is a conflict between ~~the~~ <sup>literal</sup> and <sup>figurative</sup> the practical and sentimental. In a matter-of-fact, <sup>almost</sup> dismissive tone, the mother and daughter debate selling the tree to pay off their mortgage. But with a <sup>transition</sup> ~~switch~~ to more figurative language comes a ~~turn~~ switch to a more ~~as~~ symbolic view of the black walnut tree: it is a symbol of their family heritage and father's labor, and though the mortgage weighs heavy, ~~selling~~ <sup>shameful</sup> cutting down the tree would be a SOA of <sup>v</sup> betrayal.

"The Black Walnut Tree" is written in free verse and straight~~forward~~ <sup>forward</sup> accessible vocabulary, which is most pronounced at the beginning: "My mother and I debate: / we could sell / the black walnut tree / to the lumberman, / and pay off the mortgage." It is stated casually, and the symbolic meaning the tree holds later in the poem is currently unknown or, more likely, suppressed. The two women attempt to justify their plan, claiming "likely some storm anyway / will churn down its dark boughs, / smashing the house." In addition, roots are <sup>creeping</sup> ~~growing~~ into the cellar, and the crop of walnuts is growing



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1A  
(2014)

increasingly large. Their tone ~~is~~, though slightly reluctant and grasping for justification, is practical and logical.

But suddenly there is a dramatic shift from literal to figurative language: "But something brighter than money/moss in our blood." This parallels the change in how the walnut tree is viewed—it becomes more than an ordinary tree with monetary <sup>worth</sup> ~~value~~; it is a symbol with undeniable familial ~~value~~ value. The speaker dreams of her fathers laboring in the fields, building a life of <sup>growth and</sup> "plenty, shown by the idyllic "blue fields... with leaves and vines and orchids."

~~And~~ The speaker realizes now that her mother and her would "crawl with shame / in the emptiness they'd made" if they cut down the tree, a <sup>betraying their</sup> symbol ~~of her~~ <sup>and</sup> ancestors' dreams, <sup>and</sup> labors and ~~now~~ <sup>show their</sup> family heritage.

Even when it is difficult, the speaker <sup>symbol</sup> realizes she must hold onto such things, for they ultimately hold more value than money or physical <sup>well-tended</sup> comfort. The <sup>well-tended</sup> walnut tree was grown large and healthy, just as the family has after years of labor



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1

1A  
(3 of 4)

and love. Heritage and family, like "roots in the cellar drains" have grown across every area of life, and this family tree yields great fruit. Instead of complaining about the increasing quantity of walnuts to be harvested, the speaker and her mother ought to celebrate the bountiful harvest. ~~And~~ Even though families ~~can~~ can cause injury and damage, just as a tree can threaten to fall on a house, their value is so great and their necessity so clear that the risk is worthwhile.

And so the speaker and her mother elect to keep the tree, unable to value financial security over this symbol of what their fathers worked for. The tree is said to "[swing] through another year / of sun and leaping winds / of leaping and bending fruits," a dancing description of joy and bounty. This optimistic tone is immediately contrasted against the final lines: "and, month after month, the whip- / crack of the mortgage." The tone ~~is~~ <sup>and connotations are now</sup> harsh, "Whip-crack" emphasizes by its split over two lines, calls up images of ~~the~~ slavery, oppression, and pain, showing the sacrifice the speaker and her mother took to preserve their heritage

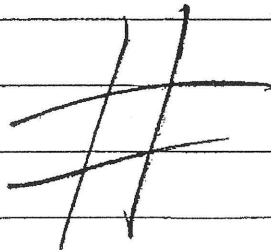


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1A  
(4 of 4)

instead of snatching financial freedom. Although the poem ends on this moment of suffering, it should not be forgotten that the walnut tree endures — and even flourishes — during this hardship. Family heritage, which was deemed more valuable than money, has also proved itself stronger and more independent. Even when times are tough, the hard work of their ancestors still endures and they have this treasured remembrance, which is never dependent on transitory circumstances such as finances. In these times, the speaker and her mother are perhaps comforted and strengthened by this eternal love and hope, glad they took the chance on something that <sup>seemed</sup> ~~was~~ sacrificable and in danger of crashing down.



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1

(1 of 2)

Mary Oliver's "The Black Walnut Tree" from Twelve Moons, is a poem describing a mother and daughter's conflict in deciding whether or not to remove a family tree that could potentially ease their financial struggles. Oliver uses figurative language, metaphor and simile to convey the relationship between the tree and the family which gives the work its purpose.

The speaker and her mother present the reader with several reasons as to why it would be intelligent to sell the walnut tree to the lumberman. These reasons include the tree growing weak, and, given the tree's proximity to the house, becoming a threat to the well being of the family's dwelling. There is a particular hint of reluctance that can be sensed in the women's voices as they "talk slowly" trying to find the best decision. The diction that Oliver has chosen, including words ~~was~~ and phrases like "debate", "difficult time", and "talk slowly" show the reader a particular foreshadowing of the women's decision to come.

In lines 16-35, the reasoning that the women present in favor of keeping the tree because of its long standing history within their family. The simile that states, "-an edge sharp and quick as a trowel that wants us to dig and sow" serves to introduce a



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1 B  
(2042)

visualisation of the men of the speaker's family's past sowing the seeds of many other plants and trees, just like the walnut tree that graces the speaker's backyard with its presence. The knowledge of this history strengthens the relationship between the family and its tree, presenting to the reader the justification for the shame that the speaker and her mother would feel if they were to sell the walnut tree to the lumberman.

The history of the women's family is said to be "brighter than money" which is why the family will bear "the whip-crack of the mortgage". Oliver uses such powerful diction because it is necessary if the reader is to accurately depict the importance that this walnut tree has as a foundation for this family's history.

In conclusion, not only is Oliver's diction overall appropriate for the setting described, it is also necessary to portray an accurate description of the black walnut tree's role in the speaker's family history.

This tree functions as a bond between the past and the present, therefore, it is necessary that it remains standing, ~~and~~ <sup>which</sup> is the case in the final decision of whether or not the tree lasts through another year in this work by Mary Oliver.

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1C  
(1 of 3)

Yards are a symbol of the families that live in the houses ~~that~~ they ~~guard~~ guard. Families spend countless hours working on them to show the community who they are. In the poem "The Black Walnut Tree" by Mary Oliver, this relationship between yard and family is brought to ~~the~~ light, specifically on a particular tree. Through the use of figurative language and other poetic techniques Oliver conveys the relationship between tree and family as one of respect. The family, a mother and daughter, are faced with the decision to take it down. Their actions ~~are~~ depict how they feel about the tree.

In the poem, Oliver uses figurative language to highlight the relationship between the tree and family. In line 7, Oliver chose the word "dark" to describe the boughs of the tree. This reflects on the dislike the mother and daughter have for the tree. They view it as a "dark" tree that could smash the house. Then Oliver says that "something brighter than money moves in our blood." This line tells the reader that they ~~aren't~~ are not going to cut the tree down just for money but that they ~~truly~~ have a desire to. The desire is "sharp and quick as a trowel." This ~~is a simile~~ simile punctuates the fact that they would cut it down with little regret. ~~At~~ Oliver also uses the word "crawl"



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in line 27 to describe how they would feel if they did cut it down. Crawl conjures up the thought of ~~innocents~~ and children, which rightly describes how the two women would feel. The tree meant so much to their late father that if they cut it down they would feel terrible. The word "whip-crack" in lines 34-35 is chosen ~~set~~ by Oliver to convey the pressures that the mortgage places on the family. The tree and the family struggle through each month's trials.

Mary Oliver utilizes other poetic techniques to convey the relationship between the tree and family. In lines 18-19, Oliver uses parallelism to ~~show~~ convey the feelings of the family. "Sharp and quick" and "dig and sow" both have one syllable words that make the feeling of the family seem harsh and unemotional. They really want to get rid of the tree. The parallelism also emphasizes the idea it presents that the family wants to cut the tree down and be done with it. In line 25 Oliver repeats the word "and," ~~between~~ This is to describe the vastness of the father's love of nature. ~~Even though the~~ Because of the father's love of nature and trees the family can't cut it down. And in line 34 "month after month" serves to create a sense of continual suffering that both the tree and family endure.

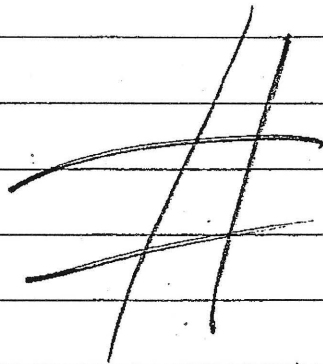


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1C  
(3 of 3)

Through Oliver's use of figurative language and other poetic techniques, he ~~conveys~~<sup>conveys</sup> the relationship between the family and tree. The word choice and techniques used all serve to give the reader of a respectful relationship. Even though the family wants to cut the tree down they do not because they respect their father's wishes.



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## 2013 SCORING COMMENTARY

### Question 1

#### Overview

This question asked students to carefully read the poem “The Black Walnut Tree” by contemporary American poet Mary Oliver and to write a well-organized essay analyzing how figurative language and other poetic techniques help Oliver convey her ideas about the relationship between the tree and the family.

With a continued emphasis on devices and techniques as a means of conveying meaning, the question was designed to help students examine ideas and their relationships, as well as how those ideas and the relationships between them are conveyed to the reader. While the beginning of the poem focuses on the relationship between a mother and daughter and a particular black walnut tree, the poem’s meaning broadens to include how the particular family views itself against the backdrop of its heritage and the sacrifices made by “the fathers” to cultivate the land and develop roots in America. Imagery is one form of figurative language that students readily cited, and many of them discussed a number of other poetic techniques in their essays.

#### Sample: 1A

**Score: 8**

This persuasive essay offers a clear thesis in the opening paragraph, asserting that the tree is “a symbol of their family heritage and fathers’ labor.” The second paragraph lacks sophistication in language but nonetheless recognizes the reluctance on the part of the speaker and her mother to remove the tree, even though doing so would be “practical and logical.” The third paragraph identifies the shift in the poem from “literal to figurative language” and connects that shift to what the student sees as one of the central ideas in the poem: the tree as “a symbol with undeniable familial value.” This idea is further developed with apt textual references, which contribute to the building of a persuasive case for the significance of the tree. The fourth paragraph becomes a bit didactic but ultimately remains focused on the main argument. The concluding paragraph analyzes the phrase “whip-/crack,” focusing both on the connotation of the phrase and its position within the text. The assertions are made with confidence and are connected to both the text and the argument. The final assertion that the tree is a “treasured remembrance, which is never dependent on transitory circumstances” is an effective conclusion. The essay contains clear and confident writing throughout, but it is not quite as sophisticated or well developed as an essay scored a 9.

#### Sample: 1B

**Score: 6**

This essay offers a reasonable analysis of Oliver’s poem, paying attention to how literary devices are used to convey the relationship between the speaker and the tree. The first paragraph does not do much more than rephrase the prompt, but the student does indicate the poetic devices that will ultimately be addressed in the analysis. The second paragraph focuses on how diction shows “the reader a particular foreshadowing of the women’s decision to come.” This is reasonable analysis, although this phrasing is representative of the writing found throughout, which is somewhat ineffective at times. The connection the student makes between the simile and “visualisation of the men” is tenuous, but the larger, reasonable point of the history between the family and the tree is not obscured by this issue. The essay then returns to a discussion of “powerful diction” but does not fully develop the analysis around this point. Instead of analyzing the language itself, the student makes the somewhat circular argument that the powerful language is necessary to indicate the importance of the tree. The conclusion does not merely restate the ideas offered in the introduction; it instead synthesizes the various points in service of conveying the larger role that the tree plays within the speaker’s family. Overall, this essay offers a reasonable, though at times less developed, analysis of the poem.

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**Question 1 (continued)**

**Sample: 1C**

**Score: 4**

This essay has fairly competent writing and attempts to elaborate, but it doesn't demonstrate a thorough understanding of the poem. The introduction addresses the prompt with the claim that there is a respectful relationship between the tree and the family. In the second paragraph the student misreads the caution the speaker conveys about the tree as "dislike." This inaccurate analysis is further developed with a misreading of lines 16-17, leading the student to conclude that the speaker and her mother would "cut [the tree] down with little regret"; this misreading reflects the unconvincing nature of the analysis overall. The student then focuses on how parallelism "convey[s] the feelings of the family" but does not develop this observation to the level of convincing analysis. Repetition of the word "and" is offered in support of the claim regarding the fathers' love, but the analysis making that connection is absent. The final point about "continual suffering" is partially accurate, but the assertion that the tree is suffering along with the family is problematic. Although the student should be rewarded for presenting some successful claims and demonstrating some control over the elements of composition (especially those related to structure), the generally unconvincing nature of the analysis kept this essay in the lower half of the scoring range.