
AP English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

2018 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 1: Olive Senior, “Plants”

The score should reflect the quality of the essay as a whole — its content, style, and mechanics. **Reward the students 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 how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. Using apt and specific textual support, they demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the discussion of poetry. Although these well-focused essays may not be error-free, they are perceptive in their analysis and demonstrate writing that is clear and effectively organized. Essays scored a 9 have especially convincing analysis and effective control of language.

7–6 These essays offer a reasonable analysis of how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. Using textual support, they are organized and demonstrate control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the discussion of poetry. These focused essays show insight in their analysis, and they offer clear and controlled analysis and writing. Essays scored a 7 have solidly developed analysis and consistent control of organization and language.

5 These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible discussion of how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life, but the analysis may be superficial and thinly developed. They often rely on paraphrase or general textual support that includes some analysis, implicit or explicit. Their analysis and discussion may be vague, formulaic, or minimally supported. These essays demonstrate some control of language, but they may be marred by surface errors. These essays have difficulty presenting a cohesive idea, clear organization, or sustained development of analysis.

4–3 These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of the poem. The analysis of how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life may be partial, unconvincing, oversimplified, or irrelevant. 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 and/or demonstrate inept writing.

2–1 These essays compound several writing weaknesses. Although these essays make some attempt to respond to the prompt, they are often unacceptably brief or incoherent in presenting their ideas. The essays may be poorly written on several counts; they may contain pervasive errors that interfere with understanding. The ideas may be presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence. Essays scored a 1 contain little coherent discussion of the text.

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.

Question 1

1 of 3

Plants have populated Earth since long before the dawn of humans. They have evolved over time to stay alive and reproduce throughout the many changes caused by mankind, such as industrialization.

As such, humans may never realize how truly brilliant and complex flora is. In ^{the poem} "Plants" by Oliver Senior, the speaker warns the audience not to underestimate the clever machinations of plants, characterizing them as manipulative beings whose goal is to ~~take over the world~~ ^{take over the world} ~~subvert humanity~~ ^{take over the world}. * The speaker argues his point through sinister diction, personification of plant life, and ~~enjoyment~~ ^{direct addresses to the audience}.

Senior's warning is underscored by the speaker's word choice used to describe the plants throughout the poem. The speaker describes the proliferation of plant life as "sinister" (Senior 8), meant for "conquest" (13). "Sinister" denotes an underlying malevolent intent, something ^{easily} overlooked, and "conquest" implies that plants are harmful to humanity beings ~~not~~ bent on taking over the world. The insidious nature of plants is further highlighted by Senior's use of the word "seduce" (28), suggesting that plants intend to persuade humans into lowering their guards and believing flora to be kinder than it is. The speaker is aware of this goal to take over the world, and attempts to let the audience in on the plan in the hopes of preventing it.

The malevolent nature of plants is also illustrated by Senior's use of personification. As beings without sentience, plants pose little threat to humans. However, the speaker gives human traits to the plants, portraying them as evildoers with strategies and



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

thoughts of their own. Plants purposely ~~the~~ are "anchoring themselves everywhere" (12), "seeking wide open spaces" (14), filled with "colonizing ambitions" (18). ~~The~~ Plants are not generally characterized as having "ambitions" of "anchoring" or "seeking" because that implies that they possess high-functioning minds. By giving such human traits to flora, the speaker demonstrates plants' ability to pose a true threat to people. Additionally, he states that fruit is but "an instrument to seduce" (28), implying that plants have tricked people into believing they lack manipulative and powerful traits. The misconception ^{of} innocence is evident in the implied audience's "sniffing and exclaiming" (26) over the fruit. However, the fruit has a deeper motive unknown to the audience as it wishes to have its "plant progeny" ⁽²⁹⁾ ~~be~~ seeded by humans. The speaker is the only one aware of the malevolent manipulation, so he attempts to enlighten the audience.

^{new} → In fact, the speaker's addresses to the audience display his belief that the audience ~~is~~ has been fooled by plants and must be shown the truth. He speaks as one who knows the many ways the audience has overlooked plant life's machinations, understanding that the audience has not "quite taken in the colonizing ambitions of hitchhiking burrs on [the audience's] sweater" (17-19). ~~The~~ The speaker's assumption that the audience has not taken note of plants' manipulations suggests that he knows more than the audience, both about plants and about the audience. His all-knowing perspective enables him



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

~~2~~ 1 3 of 3

to be more perceptive and in a better position to warn the plants. He also says that he has "seen [the audience] sniff and exclaim" (25-26), calling the audience "Innocent" (26). His condescension shows his belief that he is smarter than his audience and not so easily fooled by the plants.

The poem "Plants" ~~shows~~^{portrays} a speaker who believes plants are sinister beings who trick the audience into overlooking their machinations. Senior shows the speaker's warning of such to the audience through word choice, personification, and condescending addresses to the audience. Overall, the speaker reveals that plants are not all they seem and nothing is as benevolent as we believe.

* The speaker feels ^{intellectually-}superior to the audience, and adopts a protective role as the one who must enlighten the innocent audience.

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

1
1 of 2

Plants come in all shapes and sizes and are spread out all across the world. This characteristic of plants is directly paralleled with the existence of humans. In the poem "Plants" by Olive Senior, develops the similarities between people and plants. Thus the poet utilizes irony, personification, and allusions to illustrate how plants are an exact portrayal of human actions.

The use of irony throughout the poem develops the relationship that plants are an exact portrayal of human actions. For instance, Senior notes that plants are "not like animals, like us always running around, leaving traces." If we boil down this statement, however, humans and animals are much more similar and animals do run around and leave "traces." Yet, the author utilizes this irony to bring plants and humans more into perspective because in a grander scheme plants and humans leave their "traces" or legacy all around the world through offspring, while an animal can produce an off-spring, they are likely stuck in their dominion as they have no need to move around outside of their areas. Another instance, is when Senior mentions "we become plant food". Humans often devour plants as a source of food yet, to be portrayed as becoming plant food is ironic.

This illustrates how plants are an exact portrayal of human actions as we are both in the cycle of life →

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and death we are consuming plants but when we die the plants consume us through the soils in which our bodies are buried. Overall, the complex relationship of humans and plant life is like a mirror in reflection.

While irony was one tool used to convey plant and human relationship, personification and Allusion describe the indirect relationship that humans and plants share. ~~Senior~~ mentions "armies of mangrove on the march" which illustrates how plants can create armies or large bodies of themselves much like humans can. This alludes to how humans often form up when grouped to prepare for war. Another example of these indirect relationships is "The world is full of shoots bent on conquest, invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces," This directly alludes to humans in conquering and invading in our history which illustrates how plants are an exact portrayal of human actions in an indirect way. Overall, personification and Allusion indirectly highlight the relationships between plants and humans.

Ultimately, plants and humans share a complex relationship that are portrayed in this poem through irony, personification, and Allusion. The dynamic of plants mirror almost identical to humans throughout history.

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

Q1 pg:1

In Oliver Senior's free verse poem named "Plants ~~are~~", Senior portrays a very strong, negative emotion towards plants. Senior used multiple figurative language devices to portray these "evil beings" on our planet. Within his poem ~~he~~ Senior uses similes, metaphors and personification to ~~portray a complex relationship with "deceptive" plants.~~ portray a complex relationship with "deceptive" plants.

"plants are deceptive" right off the bat we witness a complex emotion toward a being with little to no emotion. Senior uses that to indicate that his poem is not in favor of plants, claiming they ~~can~~ act like they own the place. He added his claim into his next stanza implying they anchor themselves everywhere and using personification towards "marching mangroves".

In the next three stanzas he uses alliteration within most well known plant seeds saying they "hitchhike" and are special agents" showing a relationship of distrust because they get free rides.



Q1: Plants

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

In the last three stanzas senior shows a distrust with the implied audience due to a popularity of flowers.

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AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

2018 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 1

Overview

For Question 1, the poetry analysis question, students were asked to read Olive Senior’s poem “Plants” and respond to the following prompt:

Carefully read Olive Senior’s 2005 poem “Plants.” Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. You may wish to consider the author’s use of such literary techniques as syntax, diction, and figurative language.

Students were expected to do three tasks successfully:

- They were to **read** carefully.
- They were to **analyze** how the poet portrays the complex relationships in the poem.
- They were to **write** a well-organized essay on that topic.

These expectations mirrored those on recent exams. These expectations are also interrelated and interdependent. Reading aids analysis, but analysis also affects rereading. The ideas gathered during reading and refined during analysis become the content basis for the essay, and the act of writing often leads to further analysis and more in-depth reading as students gather and organize textual details to support their points.

These terms—reading, analyzing, and writing—were defined in the 2017 Chief Reader Report. To clarify, those definitions are reiterated here.

- **Reading** carefully means employing the techniques practiced during students’ Advanced Placement class and engaging with qualities (that is, the kind of text, the difficulty of the text, and the necessary context), terms (in this case, the prompt suggested some literary techniques as a beginning point for students, although these were not required), and characteristics (the unique nature of the structure, organization, or presentation of the text) related to the study of poetry.
- **Analyzing** means identifying the important parts of a larger whole and being able to explain how those parts connect to and function within that whole. In this case, students needed to identify the parts of the poem that led to an understanding of the relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. The word “complex” here is a cue to the students that they might see contradictory, shifting, paradoxical, or even opposing elements of those relationships. Students, then, had to articulate how the poet portrayed those relationships.
- Finally, **writing** a well-organized essay means understanding how students’ own thoughts about the text are connected; being able to support those assertions with clear, concrete examples; and cueing the reader with the appropriate compositional techniques, such as establishing an assertive, defensible thesis and using transitional devices to reveal how ideas are connected.

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Question 1 (continued)

Sample: 1A
Score: 8

This essay is clearly organized, well focused, and perceptive, and it achieves a persuasive analysis of the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. It opens with an observation about the “brilliant and complex” nature of flora for having evolved and survived in spite of human activity. It then offers the strong claim that “the speaker warns the audience not to underestimate the clever machinations of plants, characterizing them as manipulative beings whose goal is to take over the world” and evidences this claim by analyzing diction, personification, and direct address. The essay uses apt and specific textual references throughout. Its analysis of diction is layered, referring first to the word “sinister,” then “conquest,” then “seduce” to build to the point that “insidious” plants “intend [*sic*] to persuade humans into lowering their guards and believing flora to be kinder than it is.” The essay transitions smoothly from this point into an analysis of personification. It notes that “[a]s beings without sentience, plants pose little threat to humans” but that by ascribing “human traits” to them, the speaker “demonstrates plants’ ability to pose a true threat to people.” Because “[t]he speaker is the only one aware of the malevolent manipulation . . . he attempts to enlighten the audience.” Here, the essay’s insightful and well-phrased discussion of how personification negatively characterizes plants segues neatly into an analysis of the speaker’s relationship with the audience. The speaker “speaks as one who knows the many ways the audience has overlooked plant life’s machinations.” His “all-knowing perspective” is shown in his “calling the audience ‘Innocent’” and his condescension in thus referring to the audience “shows his belief that he is smarter than his audience.” The last two paragraphs repeat the claims made earlier in the essay, and they do not achieve the same level of control of writing and analysis as the majority of the essay does; they recapitulate earlier points and contain minor compositional missteps. A return to the opening observations about the tenacity and resilience of plants might have provided a stronger way to draw together all the insights offered in the body of the essay and might have raised this essay — which scored 8 — to a score of 9.

Sample: 1B
Score: 5

This essay responds to the assigned task with a plausible discussion of how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. It offers the claim that the poem “develops the similarities between people and plants” and offers superficial analysis of irony, personification, and allusion. The discussion of irony offers some sound ideas, e.g., noting that “humans often devour plants as a source of food yet, to be portrayed as becoming plant food is ironic.” The essay’s analysis of personification references the mangroves marching like armies, but the analysis of this image is thin: the essay argues that the image “illustrates how plants can create armies or huge bodies of themselves much like humans can.” Additional treatments of personification are vague; for example, the essay refers to the “indirect relationships” between humans and plants, but the essay does not progress beyond superficial observations about irony and humans and plants being similar. While this essay is plausible, it relies on paraphrase — albeit paraphrase that contains some implicit analysis — and it does not offer a sustained development of ideas. The writing demonstrates some control of language, but it is at times unclear: for example, “This directly alludes to humans in conquering [*sic*] and invading in our history which illustrates how plants are an exact portrayal of human actions in an indirect way.” It also lacks clarity in its discussion of how plants, animals, and humans are related in the poem’s first stanza. This combination of qualities earned the essay a score of 5. More careful attention to the text, greater clarity in presenting ideas, an exploration of what the similarities between humans and plants contribute to the speaker’s purpose, and a consideration of the *effects* created by the chosen literary techniques — or indeed other figures and syntax — might have helped improve this essay.

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Question 1 (continued)

Sample: 1C
Score: 3

This essay offers a partial and inadequate analysis of the poem and how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. It offers two thin claims that indicate an oversimplified understanding of the poem: “Senior portrays a very strong, negative emotion towards plants” and “Senior used multiple figurative language devices to portray these evil beings on our planet.” The essay refers directly to the poem in the second paragraph, quoting the opening sentence, “plants are deceptive,” but it offers scant analysis: “Senior uses that to indicate that his poem is not in favor of plants.” Other brief snippets of cited text are paraphrased in oversimplified terms and in writing that is inept, for example, Senior “added his claim into his next stanza implying [plants] anchor themselves everywhere and using personification towards ‘marching mangroves.’” Textual evidence is slight and the third paragraph demonstrates poor writing: Senior uses “alleteration [*sic*] within most well known plant seeds saying they ‘hitchhike’ and are special agents’ showing a relationship of distrust because they get free rides,” and “Senior shows a distrust with the implied audience due to a popularity of flowers.” An accumulation of errors such as misconstrued evidence, oversimplified and unconvincing analysis, a focus that is unclear, and a lack of control over the elements of composition earned this essay a score of 3. Analysis of the literary techniques that it mentions in the introduction — simile, metaphor, and personification — and a discussion of the relationship between the speaker and the audience, in addition to how the speaker feels about plants, might have elevated the score to a 4.