
AP English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

2018 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3: The Gift

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 the complex nature of a literal or figurative gift and how that gift contributes to the work as a whole. Using apt and specific textual support, these essays demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition and language appropriate to their discussion. Although these well-focused essays may not be error-free, they make a strong case for their interpretation and discuss the literary work with insight and understanding in 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 the complex nature of a literal or figurative gift and how that gift contributes to the work as a whole. Using textual support, these essays are organized and demonstrate control over the elements of composition and language appropriate to their discussion. 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 command of the elements of effective composition.

5 These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading, but they tend to be superficial or thinly developed in analysis. They often rely upon plot summary that includes some analysis, implicit or explicit. Although the essays attempt to discuss a literal or figurative gift, how it may be complex, or what it may contribute to the work as a whole, they may demonstrate a rather simplistic understanding of the complex nature of the gift or its effect on the work. While these essays demonstrate adequate control of language, they may be marred by surface errors. They have difficulty presenting a cohesive idea, clear organization, or sustained development of analysis.

4–3 These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate reading of the complex nature of a literal or figurative gift and how that gift contributes to the work as a whole. The analysis may be partial, unsupported, oversimplified, or irrelevant, and the essays may reflect an incomplete understanding of the nature of the gift and/or its effects. They may rely on plot summary that is not in service to a clear idea. These essays may be characterized by an unfocused or repetitive presentation of ideas, an absence of textual support, or an accumulation of errors; they may lack control over the elements of composition. Essays scored a 3 may contain significant misreading and/or demonstrate inept writing.

2–1 These essays compound several writing weaknesses. Often, they are unacceptably brief or incoherent in presenting their ideas. They 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.

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3

The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James follows the life of one Isabel Archer, a spirited and intelligent young woman ~~who~~ comes to stay from the United States who comes to stay with her relatives in England. Isabel starts off her stay with a strong need for independence that extends to her views on matrimony; she refuses offers of marriage ^{from} to multiple men in favor of preserving her freedom. As her elderly uncle Mr Touchett lies on his deathbed, her cousin Ralph Touchett convinces him to leave her a large sum of money. Isabel's gift of a large inheritance gives her the advantage of moving more freely as a woman in society but also makes her more vulnerable to being seen ~~and used~~ by others as a tool, highlighting the novel's depiction of a woman's disadvantaged role in society.

Near the beginning of the novel, Isabel rejects a marriage proposal from one Lord Warburton. Her cousin Ralph is surprised and impressed by her refusal despite how universally appealing Warburton would be to many ~~use~~ women because of his looks, status, and ~~charm~~ charm. ~~Her~~ Ralph expresses an ~~eagerness~~ eagerness to see what a woman who rejects Lord ~~at~~ Warburton will do next. This motivates him to speak to his dying father and convince him to leave a large part of his money to Isabel. This gift is meant to open more doors for Isabel, to remove some of the hurdles that society has placed in front of

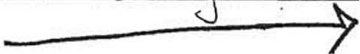


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her because of her gender. It is clear that a woman of little means is considered to have little autonomy. Women in the novel *Eve* have little autonomy, so this gift is meant to help amend this for Isabel. And it does enable her to travel to new places, something that she always wanted to do. Her gift of a monetary fortune widens the scope of her options as a woman in society.

Aside from just enabling Isabel to travel and move freely, her gift also increases her options of marriage. When Isabel inherits the money from her uncle, her friend Madame Merle takes an immediate interest. Mrs. Merle decides that Isabel would be a good match for her friend Gilbert Osmond, a quiet and relatively poor art collector living in Italy. When Isabel travels to Italy, Merle introduces her to Osmond and, unbeknownst to Isabel, slowly pushes the two together. Osmond eventually proposes marriage to Isabel, and she accepts. Had she not possessed a sizeable fortune, she would not have been free to marry Osmond. In the novel's setting, marriage prospects are largely limited by social status and financial situation, especially for women. Isabel's gift allowed her for more options for marriage; without it she could not have ~~been~~ made the choice she did. This further highlights how the role of a woman in society in the



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novel is further limited and predetermined by her financial status.

While Isabel's gift increased her freedom of choice, it also binds her. Much of why Madame Merle decides to facilitate Isabel and Osmond's marriage is because of Isabel's new financial prosperity. Merle and Osmond are former lovers, and Osmond's daughter Pansy is their illegitimate child. Merle seeks to improve their situation by granting them access to Isabel's money. Consequently, Isabel finds herself in a very unhappy marriage. Osmond expects Isabel to let go of her own ideas and defer to his in their marriage; essentially, he sees her as another piece of art for his collection. When Isabel continues to have a mind of her own, Osmond becomes distant, cold, and even cruel to her. Isabel is equally dissatisfied with Osmond, but won't leave him out of a sense of duty. Thus, the very gift that increased her ~~status~~ freedom before now takes freedom away from her. As Isabel's money made her a target for Merle's deception, Osmond was equally eager to use her for increased ~~status~~ financial and social status. He sees her not as an equal but as a tool to be used, and treats her accordingly. Isabel suffers as a result. Isabel's money ^{makes} ~~made~~ people eager



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to use her, which further demonstrates the ~~more~~ disadvantaged position of women in the novel.

Before gaining an inheritance, Isabel's ~~position~~ is constrained by her status as a poor female. After gaining her inheritance, ~~her position~~ she is constrained by the way others use her. Isabel's gift of ~~inherited~~ elevated financial status gives her the advantage to make choices with more autonomy but makes her more vulnerable to being objectified and used, ~~helping~~ demonstrating the novel's depiction of the disadvantaged position of women.

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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.

Question 3

In William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, a character named Benjy has a ~~severe~~ severe mental disability which ~~sets~~ sets him apart from all other characters in the ~~novel~~ novel. Benjy's disability is viewed as extremely negative by society and ~~some~~ some of his family. However, Benjy's imaginative ~~and~~ mind allows him to escape the failing ~~19th~~ 19th Century American South and his disgraceful family ~~that~~ that is crumbling apart with society. Benjy is a necessary character to the story because of his child-like nature that Faulkner utilizes as an example for his audience.

Benjy's condition is an extreme burden to his family. He is not able to eat or function on his own. Much of his family disowns him including his own mother. The people which come to his aid are his caring sister Caddie and the African American servants which work for the Compson family. The outcasts of the community are



Question 3

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ones that aid Benjy. This ~~contributes~~ contributes to the image of the broken southern society. The disowned sister and African-American Americans are the only ones that willingly help Benjy. Not just for his basic needs, but truly caring for him. Caddie, his sister would comfort and sleep with him at night, ~~and~~ The servant at the house, Dilsey, prepares cakes on Benjy's birthdays.

However, this disability is a gift which allows Benjy ~~to~~ ~~to~~ ~~to~~ to escape the harsh reality of society and remain as a child even at the age of 33. His mind allows himself to slip back to memories and imaginative places. Benjy's section of narration within the novel does not show the raw and harsh realities of the world. Rather it gives him a merciful and loving perspective of his family. ~~Benjy does not~~ ~~view~~ ~~society~~ Benjy does not ~~view~~ ~~society~~ view society in



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Question 3.

a cruel way which discriminates and hates. ~~It~~ Instead this complex gift gives Benjy the ability to seek love which often comes in the form of his sister. Benjy often imagines that he is with Caddie when he is not.

Benjy's complex gift not only allows him to escape society, but permits him to be a messianic figure to his broken family. He demonstrates true and compassionate love that is unparalleled within the novel. ~~This can be seen in his inability to let go of Caddie and is upset about it.~~

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Question 3

~~1A~~ Sophocles' play, *Antigone*

Antigone is a play about how Antigone wants to bury her brother Polynices so that he may move onto the afterlife even though her uncle Creon who is the king decreed that he should not be buried and anyone who attempts to give him burial will be put to death. In this play Antigone's nature to do what is right even if she stands alone was a gift but also a burden.

Throughout the play Antigone was very hard headed. She didn't really listen to people like her sister Ismene when she told her that burying Polynices just for the sake of him being their brother was not worth dying for. She also didn't listen to Creon when he gave her the option to forget what she had done so that she could live. Antigone firmly believed that ~~she~~ it was her duty to bury her brother because if Eteocles got to be buried and move on to the afterlife than by that logic her other brother should as well. ~~At~~ In the end Antigone died for her beliefs.



Question 3

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Antigone's gift of standing for what's right even when she stood alone contributed to the work as a whole because it brought out important themes such as family vs. government (or any type of power) and how do you know decipher who is right. And we saw this struggle when Antigone and Creon were arguing. Antigone consistently challenged everything he said. Since Creon was king and Antigone was his niece, it was hard for him to make the decision to stand by his edict or simply allow Antigone to do what she did.

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AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

2018 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3

Overview

For Question 3, the “open” question, students were asked to respond to the following prompt:

Many works of literature feature characters who have been given a literal or figurative gift. The gift may be an object, or it may be a quality such as uncommon beauty, significant social position, great mental or imaginative faculties, or extraordinary physical powers. Yet this gift is often also a burden or a handicap. Select a character from a novel, epic, or play who has been given a gift that is both an advantage and a problem. Then write a well-developed essay analyzing the complex nature of the gift and how the gift contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Again, students were expected to complete three tasks successfully:

- They were to **select** an appropriate character from a literary work.
- They were to **analyze** the complex nature of the character’s gift and how that gift contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.
- They were to **write** a well-developed essay.

The three tasks are, of course, interdependent and are actually one unified task; selection leads to analysis leads to writing.

- **Selection** of an appropriate character in a literary work continues to be crucial to success in Question 3. While no work or genre of work is automatically deemed to be “unworthy” of Question 3, some works can be limiting for the students. Either the student chooses a work that is not sufficiently complex to support a well-developed essay, or the student chooses a work that is beyond that student’s ability to manage. The issue of text selection was addressed in the 2017 Chief Reader Report and that advice bears repeating: Selection of appropriate works should be an outgrowth of a student’s ability to read, identify, and understand complexity within a text and not simply the result of a list or single rule. Helping students make good selections — that is, helping them understand what the criteria and judgment guidelines should be for them individually — should be part of individualized instruction.
- The **analysis** task in Question 3 always has two parts. In this year’s prompt, students were, first, to analyze the complex nature of the gift itself. Then, they were asked to analyze how that gift affects the meaning of the work as a whole. That phrase, common in Question 3 prompts, points the students to making an assertion about a possible meaning and supporting that assertion with evidence. It should be noted that there was great latitude given to students in allowing them to choose the particular “gift.” Nearly anything that the students wanted to identify as a gift, if handled properly within the essay, qualified. The prompt this year encouraged students to engage with complexity by specifically asking for a gift with contradictory qualities. Still, some students chose to highlight only the positive or negative qualities of the gift. In referencing a “meaning of the work as a whole,” students sometimes lost the complexity that was suggested by the prompt and instead reached for an oversimplification or overstatement of meaning.
- **Writing** a well-developed essay means that students are asked to assemble evidence to support their defensible claim about the gift and its impact on the meaning of the work. Here, students needed to select plot details carefully and make sure that they used them to serve the central thesis in clearly connected and clearly explained ways.

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Question 3 (continued)

Sample: 3A — *The Portrait of a Lady*
Score: 8

This well-written, organized, focused, and persuasive analysis of *The Portrait of a Lady* immediately identifies a gift that is both an advantage and a disadvantage and clearly explains why it is so: “Isabel’s gift of a large inheritance gives her the advantage of moving more freely as a woman in society but also makes her more vulnerable to being seen by others as a tool, highlighting the novel’s depiction of a woman’s disadvantaged role in society.” The essay provides relevant plot summary to contextualize the significance of the inheritance. The essay claims that the gift “is meant to open more doors for Isabel, to remove some of the hurdles that society has placed in front of her because of her gender” and then presents several examples of how the gift proves to be such an advantage: it enables Isabel to travel, and, since “marriage prospects are largely limited by [a woman’s] social status and financial situation,” it increases her marriage options. Through apt and specific textual support, the essay analyzes how Isabel’s gift contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole: it “further highlights how the role of a woman in society in the novel is further limited and predetermined by her financial status.” The essay’s analysis of the disadvantages of the gift is equally convincing: Isabel’s new prosperity makes her the “target” of the mercenary Osmond, who marries Isabel for her money and, with his lover Merle, “use[s] her for increased financial and social status” and curtails her freedom. Before she receives the gift, the essay argues, Isabel is “constrained by her status as a poor female. After gaining her inheritance, she is constrained by the way others use her” and this “demonstrat[es] the novel’s depiction of the disadvantaged position of women.” The essay’s many strengths, including its strong claims, thorough use of the text to evidence these claims, use of language appropriate to their discussion, and clear connections to its interpretation of the meaning of the work as a whole, earned it a score of 8. Although insightful, the essay is somewhat repetitive and its claims somewhat general. Providing additional details about Osmond’s tyranny might, for example, have enabled a more nuanced analysis of the problematic nature of the gift. The essay also contains a few slight compositional missteps, for example, “Aside from just enabling Isabel to travel and move freely, her gift also increases her options of marriage.” More nuanced claims and stronger writing might have helped raise this essay to a score of 9.

Sample: 3B — *The Sound and the Fury*
Score: 6

This organized and focused essay achieves a reasonable analysis of the complex nature of a figurative gift and how that gift contributes to the meaning of *The Sound and the Fury* as a whole. It identifies Benjy’s mental disability as a complex gift from the outset. While Benjy’s disability “is viewed as extremely negative by society and some of his family. . . . Benjy’s imagenative [*sic*] mind allows him to escape the failing 19th century American South.” The essay offers brief summary in the service of analysis and explains why the gift is a burden to Benjy: “He is not able to eat or function on his own. Much of his family disowns him including his own mother.” But the fact that “[t]he outcasts of the community,” such as his disowned sister Caddie, “are the only ones that willingly help Benjy” is a detail that “contributes to the image of the broken Southern society.” The essay then details the advantages of the gift: it allows Benjy to escape social reality, as “Benjy’s section of narration within the novel does not show the raw and harsh realities of the world.” Rather, the gift allows Benjy not to “view society in a cruel way which discriminates [*sic*],” and it “permits him to be a messianic figure to his broken family.” The essay uses appropriate textual support to analyze the complexity of Benjy’s gift and to identify elements of the dysfunctional Compson family and, by extension, the South. The essay demonstrates control over the elements of composition and language appropriate to literary analysis. While the analysis shows insight, a more sustained analysis, perhaps using additional textual support or presenting other salient episodes from the novel to evidence its observation about the “broken” nature of the South and

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Question 3 (continued)

the redemptive properties of love, might have presented a stronger case for how Benjy’s gift contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole and thereby earned the essay a higher score.

Sample: 3C — *Antigone*
Score: 4

This essay fails to offer an adequate reading of the complex nature of Antigone’s gift and how that gift contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. It identifies Antigone’s “nature to do what is right” as her gift and offers a partial and unconvincing reading that does not provide adequate textual support for its claims. The essay relies on plot summary to characterize Antigone instead of analyzing the contribution of her gift. For example, “Antigone was very hard headed. She didn’t really listen to people like her sister Ismene when she told her that burying Polynices just for the sake of him being their brother was not worth dying for.” Plot summary is also used to explain the actions of other characters, for example, “Since Creon was king and Antigone was his niece, it was hard for him to make the decision to stand by his edict or simply allow Antigone to do what she did.” Such summary is often irrelevant to the analysis of how Antigone’s gift contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole, and the way it is written also demonstrates a lack of compositional control. The meaning of the work as a whole receives only cursory treatment in the unsupported claim that “Antigone’s gift of standing for what’s right even when she stood alone contributed to the work as a whole because it brought out important themes such as family vs. government.” A more adequate analysis of this theme in the context of Antigone’s gift might have permitted the essay to rise to plausibility and to a score of 5. However, given its unfocused presentation of ideas and oversimplified analysis, this essay earned a score of 4.