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# AP<sup>®</sup> English Literature and Composition

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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#### **Free Response Question 3**

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### Question 3: Literary Argument

6 points

In many works of fiction, houses take on symbolic importance. Such houses may be literal houses or unconventional ones (e.g., hotels, hospitals, monasteries, or boats).

Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which a literal or unconventional house serves as a significant symbol. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how this house contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

In your response, you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Provide evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p><b>Row A</b> <b>Thesis</b> <b>(0-1 points)</b></p>	<p><b>0 points</b></p> <p>For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no defensible thesis.</li> <li>• The intended thesis only restates the prompt.</li> <li>• The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent thesis.</li> <li>• There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1 point</b></p> <p>Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the selected work.</p>
<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>		
<p><b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only restate the prompt.</li> <li>• Make a generalized comment about the selected work that doesn't respond to the prompt.</li> </ul>		<p><b>Responses that earn this point:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a defensible interpretation of a literal or unconventional house that serves as a significant symbol in the selected work.</li> </ul> <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a claim about how the symbolism of a literal or unconventional house contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples that do not earn this point:</b></p> <p><b>Restate the prompt</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"Houses—either literal houses or unconventional ones like hospitals or hotels—often serve as significant symbols in fiction."</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Do not respond to the prompt but make a generalized comment about the selected work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"The 'house' in the title of Edith Wharton's <u>The House of Mirth</u> is actually a Biblical reference."</i></li> <li>• <i>"In <u>A Streetcar Named Desire</u>, Stella and Stanley find that their life is not what they had hoped it would be."</i></li> </ul>		<p><b>Examples that earn this point:</b></p> <p><b>Provide a defensible interpretation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>"The house on Bluestone Road symbolizes Sethe's escape from slavery and her inability to escape from her traumatic memories."</i></li> <li>• <i>"The Pequod, and its destruction, represents the futility of Ahab's obsessive pursuit of Moby Dick, which brings about his own death."</i></li> <li>• <i>"The Pyncheon mansion in <u>The House of the Seven Gables</u> symbolizes how the sins of the past are revisited on subsequent generations."</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Additional Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity.</li> <li>• The thesis may be anywhere within the response.</li> <li>• For a thesis to be defensible, the selected work must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>• The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn't do so to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>• A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning.</li> </ul>		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
<p><b>Row B</b></p> <p><b>Evidence AND Commentary (0-4 points)</b></p>	<p><b>0 points</b></p> <p>Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.</p>	<p><b>1 point</b></p> <p><b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides evidence that is mostly general.</p> <p>AND</p> <p><b>COMMENTARY:</b> Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the argument.</p>	<p><b>2 points</b></p> <p><b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides some specific, relevant evidence.</p> <p>AND</p> <p><b>COMMENTARY:</b> Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.</p>	<p><b>3 points</b></p> <p><b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.</p> <p>AND</p> <p><b>COMMENTARY:</b> Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p>	<p><b>4 points</b></p> <p><b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.</p> <p>AND</p> <p><b>COMMENTARY:</b> Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p>
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	<p><b>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are incoherent or do not address the prompt.</li> <li>• May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tend to focus on overarching narrative developments or description of a selected work rather than specific details.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities.</li> <li>• May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument.</li> <li>• May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim.</li> <li>• Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>• Focus on the importance of specific details from the selected work to build an interpretation.</li> <li>• Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims.</li> <li>• Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>• Focus on the importance of specific details from the selected works to build an interpretation.</li> <li>• Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Additional Notes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row.</li> <li>• To earn the fourth point in this row, the response must address the interpretation of the selected work as a whole.</li> </ul>					

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<b>Row C</b> <b>Sophistication</b> <b>(0-1 points)</b>	<b>0 points</b> Does not meet the criteria for one point.	<b>1 point</b> Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>Human experiences always include...</i>” OR “<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”).</li> <li>• Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (“<i>While another reader may see...</i>” OR “<i>Though the text could be said to...</i>”).</li> <li>• Oversimplify complexities of the topic and/or the selected work.</li> <li>• Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the selected work.</li> <li>2. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context.</li> <li>3. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the text.</li> <li>4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.</li> </ol>
	<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference.</li> </ul>	

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Homes are representations of selves. Just as each human being lives within the confines of their own mind, each person (save for the homeless) has their own house, ~~they~~ filled with their belongings of loved ones, like how a mind is filled with one's memories and relationships. Perhaps in no text is this more true than in Toni Morrison's Nobel-Prize winning "Beloved." In the novel, Morrison uses the characters' home "124" to represent the trauma they continually endure, ultimately illustrating that trauma is only remedied by support and love.

Sethe, an escaped slave, kills her baby ~~long~~ <sup>cut</sup> the prospect of <sup>them</sup> ~~it~~ being subjected to slavery. This happens long before Beloved starts, but is the catalyst that sets the story's events in motion. The trauma Sethe retains from the compound suffering of her slave-experience and her act of infanticide, ~~she~~ is represented by the ghost of the slain ~~the~~ infant, ~~who~~ <sup>who</sup> goes only by Beloved. This ghost haunts 124, Sethe and her remaining family's home, just as how her trauma haunts her mind. Although nobody outside the family dares to enter the home, Sethe refuses on ever leading it, communicating the thematic ~~idea~~ <sup>message</sup> that trauma traps people, preventing them from moving forward.

The ghost of Beloved's haunting creates much hardship for Denver, Howard and Bugler, ~~Sethe's~~ <sup>Sethe's</sup> three <sup>remaining</sup> children. They are tormented by the problems the ~~very~~ <sup>spiritual</sup> ~~spirit~~ <sup>spirit</sup> creates, just as how children are tormented by the adverse

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

effects their parent's trauma has on how they are treated. Eventually, Howard and Bugler can't bear the tumultuous, conflict-ridden home and leave, demonstrating how unprocessed ~~trauma~~ ~~trauma~~ trauma can hurt the trauma-afflicted's relationships. ~~Then~~ However, Denver remains in the house, and in time grows not only comfortable with trauma but reliant on it—she only knows how to exist with trauma, and finds peace and equanimity and happiness not just foreign but unfavorable. When Paul D, a ~~former~~ figure from Sethe's past who was enslaved on the same farm and thus shares much of the same ~~trauma~~ trauma, arrives and bestows IDA and Sethe with some joy, ~~Denver is~~ <sup>momentarily</sup> ~~dis~~ people dispelling the ghost (trauma), Denver is depressed. She burrows herself in what trauma she can still master, illustrating the harmful mental and emotional effects living with, in or near trauma has on people.

Paul D's arrival demonstrates another thematic <sup>conclusion</sup> ~~idea~~ on trauma. When he arrives, he's able to send away the trauma-spirit, but only for a short time. ~~For~~ <sup>For</sup>, not only does Beloved return, but she returns in corporeal form, as a person—not only does Sethe's trauma return, but it comes back ~~for~~ <sup>for</sup> infinitely more palpable ~~and~~ than it had been. The tangible trauma, the flesh-and-bone Beloved, is ~~initially~~ <sup>initially</sup> sweet, but in time devolves. She demands all of Sethe's attention, scares away Paul D, and ~~almost~~ <sup>nearby</sup> ~~drains~~ every ~~bit~~ source of life and vitality from Sethe. She takes a

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profound toll on Sethe's mental state, driving her up to and perhaps over the brink of lunacy. It's not until the whole town, at Denver's wish, arrives before the 12<sup>th</sup> ~~and~~ offers up support to Sethe that the malignant Beloved goes away. Here, the thematic conclusion on trauma is clear -- only through love, care, support and connection can one's trauma ever begin to heal.

As much as humans extol and laud their intellect, having such high-powered brains is often more of a burden than a blessing. Just as we can comfort ourselves in hard times by turning our minds to happier ~~times~~ <sup>moments</sup> and produce a sense of joy, positivity and even hope, but we can just as well have good or normal times turned ~~hard~~ <sup>horrible</sup> by lasting memories of horrible experiences, by trauma. The use of a home in Beloved builds this point brilliantly with Nobel-prize-winning genius. By painting the psyche as a home and trauma as a home-haunting ghost, Toni Morrison is able to reveal ~~profound~~ truths about the effects of trauma on one's self, ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> loved ~~ones~~ <sup>ones</sup> ~~living in or near~~ <sup>engaging with that</sup> ~~that~~ self, and ~~how~~ <sup>how</sup> such harmful trauma can be remedied. & With this, she inspires readers to pause the walls of their own house, consider the paintings that light up their eyes, the family photos that warm their hearts, and the ghosts that haunt them. Until they open that home to others, those ~~the~~ joy-bringing images will be thrown ~~on~~ off the wall and to the floor



Question 1    Question 2    Question 3  
                                       

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

by the pained spirits. Until they open themselves up to love and support, they won't be able to leave the bad moments ~~off~~ in their past <sup>behind</sup> ~~in the past~~, and they won't be able to <sup>move forward,</sup> enjoying the beauty and love <sup>all</sup> around them.

Question 1   Question 2   Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In House of Leaves by Mark Z. Danielewski, the novel mostly details the story, or documentary, of a man and his family whose house is larger on the inside than it is on the outside. The house signifies a certain overwhelming horror as various characters venture deeper and deeper into the ever expanding house. The house is almost like a cave system for the characters to explore and highlights all of the insignificant parts of life. The house makes the characters question their morals and overall place in the world.

House of Leaves is ~~not~~ truly about a man who finds the writings of his late neighbor which entails the story of a once famous film director and his family who move into a house which is bigger ~~in~~ inside than out. In some ways the house is almost human in its ever changing complexities. It originally starts when the director is renovating the house and realizes that it is bigger inside by some three-quarters of an inch. Throughout the novel the house creates a door which further leads to the cavernous hallways and labyrinth which is the house.

The house serves as a sort of ~~madness~~ madness for the characters, not only for the director, but also for the <sup>boss</sup> neighbor who documents the story, but also for

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

the main character who struggles with his mental illness and confusion and relationship with his mother. He later in the novel travels all throughout the US. trying to find the house. The house, whether actually real or fake, drives characters mad. The director becomes obsessed with exploring it, buying headlamps, rope, and high tech cameras to satisfy his purpose in documenting the house.

At one point in the novel, the director is lost in the house, there is no light and he sits on a <sup>staircase</sup> ~~stair~~ to think about what has happened. He is terrified, but also at peace knowing he is somewhere so silent and dark. It is a bleak description, but it is one that the author painstakingly wrote to describe life and its shortcomings. The house gives characters a purpose, but it is one that never feels truly worth it considering how endless both the house and the possibilities of life can truly be.

Question 1   Question 2   Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In the novel, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, by Mark Twain, Huck's "house" is nature. Houses often provide a sense of comfort and security. As Huck and Jim are traveling up and down the Mississippi River, the only "house" ~~that~~ that remains constant for Huck is nature.

For instance, Huck loves to "watch the undersides of leaves" turn up during thunderstorms. Nature was a place where Huck could safely escape the harsh realities of society. Huck's <sup>loves his</sup> companion, Jim, who ~~is~~ is a runaway/former slave. Huck does not view Jim ~~as~~ any different and thinks Jim should be treated equally. Since most of society does not agree with Huck's opinion on this topic, ~~nature~~ and society is unsafe for Jim, Huck and Jim are constantly spending time in nature together; that is where they feel comfortable and most "at home." Since Jim and Huck do not belong anywhere else, nature provides a sense of belonging

Question 1   Question 2   Question 3

    

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

that they have both been lacking. As a society, we should always try to make people feel included and be a "home" to everyone.

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### Question 3

**Note:** Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

#### Overview

Responses to this question were designed to demonstrate choice, comprehension, and ability to develop and support a claim. While the first two free-response questions build on a supplied text, this question includes both the opportunity and the challenge for students to choose a work to discuss. The framework for that choice was the idea of a house as a “significant symbol.” Using that choice, the students were to make a defensible claim and defend it using the chosen work. A few points here are worth remembering:

- When scoring the exam, readers do not judge the student’s choice of text. Whatever the student chooses to write about, the reader will read and score the response.
- Readers also did not judge how the students defined the concept of “house”—if the student identified a literal or figurative structure, variations were acceptable.
- Finally, readers gave students latitude with their understanding of “significant symbol,” allowing students to make claims about what and how a “house” might signify.

What readers were looking for was analysis and synthesis—what pieces and parts were chosen for discussion, what explanation and commentary were given, and how that explanation and commentary created a “line of reasoning.”

#### Sample: 3A—*Beloved*

**Score: 1-4-1**

##### A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The essay’s first paragraph presents the thesis, “Morrison uses the characters’ home ‘124’ to represent the trauma they continually endure, ultimately illustrating that trauma is only remedied by support and love.” This sentence presents a defensible interpretation of the symbolism of Sethe’s home and earned the point in Row A.

##### B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

This essay clearly establishes a line of reasoning that focuses on the connection of Sethe’s house in *Beloved* to the trauma the characters in the novel endure. While the organization of the essay focuses on the individual characters, the overarching focus on the house as a symbol of trauma is consistently presented. The essay begins by establishing the connection between Beloved, the “ghost of the slain infant” who “haunts 124, Sethe and her remaining family’s home, just as how her trauma haunts her mind.” The student goes on to examine Beloved’s effect on Denver, Howard, and Buglar, who “are tormented by the problems the spiteful spirit creates.” As further evidence of the power of trauma, the essay presents Denver’s decision to stay in the house and suggests she eventually “grows not only comfortable with trauma but reliant on it.” Additionally, the essay argues that the significance of Paul D’s arrival “bestows 124 and Sethe with some joy, momentarily dispelling the ghost” only to have Beloved return “in corporeal form” as “she takes a profound toll on Sethe’s mental state, driving her up to and perhaps over the brink of lunacy.” At the end of paragraph 4, the essay brings together the examples presented through the observation, “Here the thematic conclusion on trauma is clear—only through love, care, support and connection can one’s trauma ever begin to heal.” Each of these details serves as evidence to support the argument about the power of trauma, and the commentary consistently connects each incident to this idea. The line of reasoning, then, is built through the detailed examples and the insightful explanations that follow. The essay earned 4 points in Row B.

### Question 3 (continued)

#### C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

This response earned the point in Row C through its thorough exploration of the complexity of trauma. It situates the nature of Sethe’s trauma in a broader context, particularly the context of slavery. The contention that “trauma traps people, preventing them from moving forward” is further evidence of the student’s ability to contextualize their interpretation. The writing of the essay demonstrates a style that is vivid and persuasive, and the response develops a complex literary argument.

#### Sample: 3B—*House of Leaves*

Score: 1-3-0

#### A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The thesis includes a defensible interpretation presented in the introduction in three sentences: “The house signifies a certain overwhelming horror as various characters venture deeper and deeper into the ever expanding house. The house is almost like a cave system for the characters to explore and highlights all of the insignificant parts of life. The house makes the characters question their morals and overall place in the world.” The essay earned the point in Row A.

#### B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response offers evidence that the house symbolizes horror through the inclusion of details describing the house as “almost human” and suggesting that the house, “whether actually real or fake, drives characters mad.” The essay includes physical descriptions of the size of the house—“it is bigger inside by some three-quarters of an inch” with “cavernous hallways.” The essay points out, “The director becomes obsessed with exploring it [the house], buying headlamps, rope, and high tech cameras to satisfy his purpose in documenting the house”; this evidence further supports the madness the house inspires. While the response establishes the sense of horror the house instills in its characters, it also makes the point that the house “gives characters a purpose.” The essay does not, however, offer evidence to support the claim that the house makes the characters question their morals. The line of reasoning, therefore, is not fully supported, and the response earned a score of 3 in Row B.

#### C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

While the essay attempts to explain the complexity of the symbolism of the house, it does not offer a full interpretation of that complexity. Furthermore, while the last sentence of the essay describes “how endless both the house and the possibilities of life can truly be,” this attempt to contextualize the interpretation is not sufficient to have earned the point in Row C.

#### Sample: 3C—*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Score: 1-1-0

#### A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The essay responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the novel: “As Huck and Jim are traveling up and down the Mississippi River, the only ‘house’ that remains constant for Huck is nature.” This thesis earned the point for Row A.

#### B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

The essay focuses on nature as a place of refuge for Huck through commentary such as “Nature was a place where Huck could safely escape the harsh realities of society” and offers a few specific details: “Huck loves to ‘watch the undersides of leaves’ turn up during thunderstorms.” Most of the response, however, relies on

### Question 3 (continued)

recalling overarching narrative elements: “Huck and Jim are constantly spending time in nature together” supported by commentary that attempts to connect them to the thesis: “that is where they feel comfortable and most ‘at home.’” While the contention that nature is a home is valid, the essay does not explain how nature serves as a significant symbol. The reliance on a broad description of the plot does not allow for the development of a line of reasoning. This essay earned 1 point in Row B.

#### **C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 0**

The response does not demonstrate sophistication of thought, nor does it develop a complex literary argument; therefore, it did not earn the point in Row C.