
AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

Inside:

Free-Response Question 2

- Scoring Guidelines**
- Student Samples**
- Scoring Commentary**

Question 2: Prose Fiction Analysis

6 points

The following excerpt is from Linda Hogan’s novel *People of the Whale*, published in 2008. In this passage, the narrator describes two events that occur in a community: an infant’s birth shortly followed by an octopus’s walking out of the sea. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the author uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex characterization of the community.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use 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>Row A</p> <p>Thesis</p> <p>(0–1 points)</p>	<p>0 points</p> <p>For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no defensible thesis. • The intended thesis only restates the prompt. • The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. • There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. 	<p>1 point</p> <p>Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the passage.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only restate the prompt. • Make a generalized comment about the passage that doesn’t respond to the prompt. • Describe the passage or features of the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 		<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a defensible interpretation of the complex characterization of the community.
<p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Restate the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“In this excerpt, the author depicts the community as complex through the use of various literary elements and techniques.”</i> <p>Do not respond to the prompt but make a generalized comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“In many communities, people react in different ways to strange events.”</i> <p>Describe the passage or features of the passage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“This passage employs magic realism to illustrate its point.”</i> 		<p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Provide a defensible interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“The community in this passage is characterized by fear, practicality, and reverence for the unknown.”</i> • <i>“While the community collectively considers the appearance of the octopus to be significant—despite being uncertain of its meaning—the mother of Thomas personally sees it as a specific response to the birth of her son.”</i> • <i>“Through the use of an unusual plot event and the characters’ responses to the octopus, the author exposes fault lines within the community that are not otherwise visible.”</i>
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. • The thesis may be anywhere within the response. • For a thesis to be defensible, the passage 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. • 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. • 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. 		

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

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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>”). • Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (“<i>While another reader may see ...</i>” OR “<i>Though the passage could be said to ...</i>”). • Make a single statement about how an interpretation of the passage comments on something thematic without consistently maintaining that thematic interpretation. • Oversimplify complexities in the passage. • Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the passage. 2. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. 3. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the passage. 4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 		

- **Important:** Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



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

Within Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale*, a baby is born followed by a mysterious octopus walking into a cave. The people of the community have varying responses to the octopus's arrival. Some seek to kill while others view it as a blessing. The author uses literary elements and techniques to establish a complex characterization of the community of one that differs in opinions but uniformly views the octopus as a blessing.

The first glimpse at the octopus interacting with the community is through the fisher men. They mention the need to kill the octopus and use it for bait because of it being a blessing (lines 24-30). The fisherman want to kill the octopus because it is a blessing. In contrast, the "wild-haired men" seek to kill the octopus due to its presense as a blessing (lines 30-32). They fear its potential origins and so they wish to destroy it. Despite both groups being the small ~~majority~~ minority of the community, they do represent two main views of the octopus. There are those who look at it in fear and those who look at it in hope. The men fear the unknown aspect of the octopus yet the fishermen view it as hope for a chance to feed the people. Despite the different views on the octopus, one thing remains the same between both groups and that is that the octopus is a blessing with higher purpose. The fisherman view the octopus as a blessing come to provide the people with food while the men see it as a blessing come to destroy the people. ~~There~~ There is juxtaposition ~~and~~ but also agreements in their views. This develops a characterization of the community being argumentative yet also united under the prospect of belief and spirituality.

As the passage shifts, the octopus is established to be left alone. The author continues to establish a communal sense of accepting the octopus is a ~~bless~~ viewed blessing with an objective by writing, "Its purpose was a

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Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



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mystery" (lines 36-37). The towns people all are in agreement that there is an unnatural element to the octopus, yet how to treat that is inconclusive. Most of the town sees the octopus as not only a blessing but also a holy figure. They make tributes to it and Thomas's mother goes as far as believing the octopus is the baby's "spirit-keeper" (line 55). This shows the spirituality of the community. They have a shared sense of religion. Thomas's mother leaving the valuable pearl prompts others to do the same (lines 53-63). This octopus aids in establishing the sense of community between people. Children respect the offerings and do not take ~~them~~ (lines 67-68). Those who fear the octopus respect the other's worship over it and watch it but do no harm (~~73~~ lines 73-76). The octopus is playing to the shared spirituality of all the townsfolk in order to create a sense of unity despite differing views on the octopus. The octopus is both the cause of the disharmony within the community and the creator of a sense of unity. All of the townsfolk see the octopus as a blessing of sort, whether good or bad. One side views the octopus's appearance ~~as~~ as a show of its holiness while the other views the ~~nature~~ nature of octopi as the reason why they are "shape-shifters" and do "witchery on humans" (lines 83-84). This establishes the contrast of opinions when it comes to the octopus. The latter half of the text further pushes the sense of unity and disharmony created by the octopus.

The author mainly uses juxtaposition to develop a complex characterization of the community. ~~On~~ On the one hand, the community ~~tries to~~ ~~utilize~~ utilizes the blessings for their own benefit, yet on the other they are sacrificing their time, valuables and energy on it. On the one hand, they want to save the octopus as it is holy but on the other, they want to

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Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



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destroy it for the same reason. The complex characterization of the community is that the mystery of the octopus is making them disharmonious yet the spirituality and respect within the community is uniting them.

Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



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

Communities are often associated with a characteristic that members all hold. In Linda Hogan's novel "People of the Whale" the community shares a distinct fear of the unknown, however the community is divided in how individuals express it. Hogan emphasizes the complexity within the community by employing imagery and narration in the third person.

Hogan sets the story in a small beach town filled with life. The day after Thomas was born an octopus traveled from the ocean into a local cave. Many members of the community expressed fear as they had never seen an occurrence such as this one. The incidence "scared them into silence" as the community stood and watched in shock. All in the community were fearful of this event, but the fear is shown differently by individuals acts. Some sought to remove the source of their fear as "a few wild-haired men, afraid of its potent meaning, wanted to throw kerosene in the cave and burn it". This creates an image of unkept men seeking to use aggressive tactics to solve a problem. The imagery of "wild-haired men" serves to reflect the recklessness in which they act due to fear. An opposing response to fear of the unknown is to turn the fear into

Page 2

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Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



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reverance. Unlike those who wanted to kill the octopus, other members began to worship the octopus and seek spiritual meaning. A shrine of sorts began to accumulate in front of the cave. Hogan details, "For the time it dwelt there, they brought offerings, even the first flowers of the morning. The treasures ~~with~~ built up like small middens." The image depicted here shows the vast reverance the people had for the octopus as mounds of offerings and sacrifices accumulated. Rather than trying to fight the unknown, this sector of the community embraced it and used the fear to fuel their spiritual connection with the ocean and its creatures.

Utilizing the third person omniscient point of view to narrate the story best displays the complexity of the community by allowing all perspectives to be shown. By letting the reader interpret both the reckless and reverant responses to the octopus and its mystery the novel is better understood.

Page 3

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Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



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

The people of the community are in awe of the sight of a walking octopus. There are multiple speculations on the reasoning for it, yet the answer is never truly given. The cave that the octopus was in was a famous cave many people would use for numerous reasons. People seemed scared about what it meant and didn't know what to do about it. Yet eventually led to them leaving offerings to it and treating it as a holy sign. A day prior a baby named Thomas was born, so his mother thought of the octopus was like a guardian or a heavenly sign for her son and prayed him daily for protection of her son. There were many mixed emotions, yet no one did anything about the octopus, they had just left it inside of the cave, unbothered, yet constantly left offers such as jewelry, food, and other.

Page 3

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Question 2

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

Overview

For Question 2, the prose fiction analysis question, students were asked to read an excerpt from Linda Hogan’s novel *People of the Whale* and respond to the following prompt:

The following excerpt is from Linda Hogan’s novel *People of the Whale*, published in 2008. In this passage, the narrator describes two events that occur in a community: an infant’s birth shortly followed by an octopus’s walking out of the sea. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the author uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex characterization of the community.

In a timed-writing situation and with an unfamiliar text, students were expected to complete three tasks. They were expected to:

- read the excerpt carefully,
- analyze the complex characterization of the community, and
- write a well-written response based on that analysis.

Reading the prose passage means reading closely for both literary techniques and meaning, a challenge given the relative length of the prose passage. Students were expected to view the text specifically as a prose passage, recognizing conventions particular to the genre, and then analyze how those techniques are used to shape the passage and its meaning. For example, in this particular excerpt, students might have noticed the structure of the passage and how it progresses; the function of setting and how it subtly affects the actions of different people; the tone of the narrator; the use of literal descriptions and how they also have figurative meaning; or the varied and contradictory reactions to the octopus and whether the narrator seems to value one reaction over another. They could also question the role that age, gender, or culture plays in the passage.

Analyzing the prose passage means taking the relevant parts that students identified in their reading and thinking about how the parts function collectively to create meaning. In this case, students needed to consider how the parts develop a complex characterization of the community. As always, students were not expected to know the context of the prose passage, such as the author’s background or historical background. Instead, students could rely on evidence from the passage itself; in this passage, for instance, students may have gathered evidence of this complex characterization from the descriptions of the people and their actions (particularly Thomas’s mother), the narrator’s tone, and the role of contrasting information.

Writing a well-written response to a prose passage means that students demonstrate the ability to establish an overall thesis and build the argument through evidence and commentary, ideally constructing a line of reasoning that shows the complexity of their understanding. A challenge of any prose passage lies in the amount of evidence that students must account for and analyze. The more successful responses covered the passage more fully, with the exploration illuminating the complexity of the passage with its differences, contrasts, and contradictions. It should again be noted that students were not expected in the timed-writing situation to write a polished, revised

Question 2 (continued)

essay but rather to engage in a process of thinking as they explored the passage and drafted their responses.

Sample: 2A**Score: 1-4-0****Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

This essay responds to the prompt with a defensible interpretation presented in the introductory paragraph: “The author uses literary elements and techniques to establish a complex characterization of the community of one that differs in opinions but uniformly views the octopus as a blessing.” This sentence identifies both the complex characterization of the community and its common response. Additionally, the essay expounds upon this idea, and its concluding sentence, “The complex characterization of the community is that the mystery of the octopus is making them disharmonious yet the spirituality and respect within the community is uniting them,” offers an insightful expansion of the original thesis. This essay earned the point in Row A.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

This response organizes itself around the concept of the arrival of the octopus being “a blessing.” This line of reasoning focuses on different reactions to the octopus and how each reaction brings a potential benefit to the community. The essay argues that the fishermen see the octopus as “a blessing” because they can “use it for bait.” This perspective is contrasted to that of the “wild-haired men,” who “fear its potential origins” and also seek its destruction. The essay goes on to characterize the community largely as “those who look at it [the octopus] in fear and those who look at it in hope.” The essay delves into the complexity of the reactions of the community by arguing, “The men fear the unknown aspect of the octopus yet the fishermen view it as hope for a chance to feed the people.” The “blessing” of the octopus’s arrival is further examined as “a blessing with higher purpose.” The essay identifies the juxtaposition presented in the passage and the seemingly contradictory nature of the community’s response in commentary that suggests that “all are in agreement that there is an unnatural element to the octopus, yet how to treat that is inconclusive.” The response argues, “The octopus is playing to the shared spirituality of all the townsfolk in order to create a sense of unity despite differing views on the octopus.” The recognition of this additional layer of spirituality adds to the complexity of the essay’s argument. The essay incorporates both quoted and paraphrased evidence from the passage, and its commentary consistently connects that evidence to the central claim: “The octopus is both the cause of the disharmony within the community and the creator of a sense of unity.” In the concluding paragraph, the essay’s argument that “[o]n the one hand, the community tries to utilize the blessings for their own benefit, yet on the other they are sacrificing their time, valuables and energy on it” shows the student’s insightful interpretation of the complexity of the passage. This response earned 4 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

While this essay displays some sophistication of thought, especially in the concluding paragraph, it does not consistently demonstrate that sophistication. Its style, while persuasive, is not particularly vivid; therefore, this essay did not earn the point in Row C.

Question 2 (continued)

Sample: 2B

Score: 1-3-0

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The thesis of this essay provides a defensible interpretation of the complex characterization of the community. The thesis, which appears in the introductory paragraph, argues, “In Linda Hogan’s novel ‘People of the Whale’ the community shares a distinct fear of the unknown, however the community is divided in how individuals express it” and earned the point in Row A.

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

The essay offers specific evidence that demonstrates the fear the community feels but also distinguishes the responses as “reckless” or “reverant.” The commentary consistently connects the evidence provided to the line of reasoning. In paragraph 2, the essay contrasts the “image of unkept men seeking to use aggressive tactics to solve a problem” with others who “began to worship the octopus and seek spiritual meaning.” The essay argues, “Rather than trying to fight the unknown, this sector of the community embraced it and used the fear to fuel their spiritual connection with the ocean and its creatures.” Moreover, the essay points to Hogan’s description of the flowers being brought to the cave and comments, “The image depicted here shows the vast reverence the people had for the octopus.” In addition to its analysis of imagery, the response considers the significance of the “third person omniscient point of view” of the passage and concludes, “By letting the reader interpret both the reckless and reverant responses to the octopus and its mystery the novel is better understood.” This commentary is a bit simplistic. While the essay focuses clearly on one emotion, fear, the response offers limited explanations supporting the complex characterization of the community and its relationship to the “spiritual connection” the community has with the ocean and its creatures. This essay earned 3 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The essay did not earn the point in Row C as it does not employ a consistently vivid style, explore in much depth the complexities and tensions within the passage, situate the interpretation within a broader context, or account for an alternative interpretation.

Sample: 2C

Score: 1-1-0

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response presents a brief but defensible claim in the first sentence: “The people of this community are in awe of the sight of a walking octopus.” This thesis earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The essay provides evidence that is mostly general and focuses on summary rather than analysis. No line of reasoning is established, and the commentary provided does not connect the evidence to the thesis. The essay begins with a broad assertion about the appearance of the octopus: “There are multiple Speculations on the reasoning for it, yet the answer is never truly given.” The essay later observes, “People seemed scared about what it meant and didn’t know what to do about it,” but no

Question 2 (continued)

evidence of fear or explanation of its significance is provided. While acknowledging, “There were many mixed emotions,” the response does not explore those diverse feelings in an attempt to convey the complex characterization. No literary elements or techniques are discussed. This essay earned 1 point in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

This response did not meet the criteria to earn the point in Row C, as it does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument.