



AP[®] English Language 2001 Sample Student Responses

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Jean-Luc Godard once said, "Photography is truth. Cinema is 24 frames of truth per second." But just as most cinema nowadays is an utter fabrication of the way people truly live, photographs can be very easily fabricated or misconstrued. As Sontag argues, there is one important thing missing in the art of photography: context. And as Sontag also points out, even if a surface reality is perfectly captured, does it reveal anything new?

I have a great deal of background in the study of film, and one thing I have found is that filmmakers tend to belong to one of two camps. Realists tend to believe that in capturing the world the way it looks, smells, and feels (like photographers) they are showing the audience something it hasn't seen before. Most of us are too self-absorbed to see reality as it really is. At the other pole are Expressionists, who, like Sontag, believe that external appearances are full of irrelevancies and sometimes deceit. They want to discard the unessential and go deeper. Only then, they feel, will they discover some kind of truth.

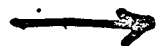
There are theorists on both sides of the debate who firmly believe that the other



is wrong. But if there is one thing that my long experience of watching films has taught me, it is that both sides can produce masterpieces. The realistic films of Jean Renoir and Vittorio de Sica have taught me what life is truly like for myself and people around me - a ceaseless struggle against forces we cannot control. They have also forced me to consider others as individuals in their own right and not just in terms of my involvement with them. I began to see more than one side to every issue, and I became less judgemental. On the other hand, the works of Expressionistic directors like Stanley Kubrick and Terry Gilliam has led me to truth in two ways: by exaggerating and intensifying current trends, they have allowed me to see what might happen in the future and, if necessary, try to change it; and, by exaggerating and intensifying the mental states of a human being, they have taught me about my own psychology. When dealing with something as subjective as truth, ~~there~~ one cannot afford to be dogmatic as to how to find it.

What Sontag overlooks, then, is that it is ~~no~~ often possible to place photographs in context (hence the whole art of photojournalism, and that, no matter what, photographs do

* not to mention cinema



something important by capturing and preserving appearances. Sontag does make a passing reference to the documentary function of photography, only to dismiss it. But how can we understand something if we don't know what it is? Photography provides a basis for deeper contextual understanding, and it also does something ~~else~~ else. When we look at a photograph, we are thrown back and forced to look at ourselves and others in a more objective light. Photography can also be Expressionistic, of course, which means it can be subjective, but Sontag also dismisses this photography as distortion of reality. What it is, but is also a vehicle for personal expression of the photographer, who is also an artist.

Essentially, Sontag is making a sweeping generalization about an art form that she ~~knows~~ knows little about. She claims that documentary photography distorts "truth" and prevents understanding, while expressionistic photography - which she ignores - is even a distortion of "reality," and thus presumably an even greater distortion of truth and understanding. What Sontag does not understand is that there is more than one kind of truth, and there more than one way to get at it. Photography is one of those ways; sure it distorts, but then, doesn't everything? Especially words, Sontag's chosen medium?

~~Photos~~ Photography in no way limits our understanding of the world, - photography instead broadens and enhances our understanding of the world. Photography increases awareness and provokes thought. Photography is as valid an artform as writing, and it ~~is~~ ⁱⁿ some ways preserves history and knowledge better than literature. Indeed, products of photography ~~is~~ ^{are} not mental pollutions but ~~is~~ ^{are} more like breaths of fresh air.

Sontag directly states: "one never understands anything from a photograph." This statement is only true if the viewer of the photograph is either blind or just dense. The understanding comes through the interpretation of the art form in the same way as understanding literature comes through the comprehension of reading. Sontag concludes the first paragraph, "Only that which narrates can make us understand." Again Sontag proves the dullness of her senses because photos do speak, she just refused to listen. When a person saw the famous photograph from the Oklahoma bombing of a fire-man carrying a small child through the rubble, they were immediately able to understand the ~~tragedy~~ tragedy, they immediately could hear the mother's heartbroken wails. The trick



Question 3

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

G2

to understanding photographs - or any art form for that matter - is to look, listen, and then just let the art penetrate.

Again Sontag makes a sweeping generalization about the inadequacy of photographs to provide any kind of ethics. She attributes any feelings of ethics to sentimentalism. Certainly some sentimentalism is felt, but is that not a valid feeling? When one sees the photos of children whose teeth have rotted out, whose bodies are covered with sores, whose stomachs are bloated for lack of sustenance, surely one feels not sentimentalism but the innate sympathy and desire to help that ethics demands of us. Or what about the prize winning photo of the sailor coming home after WWII to a kiss from a cute girl? Yes, that picture does ~~evokes~~ evoke sentimental feelings, but it also ~~gives~~ gives the understanding that war is a horrific thing and that America was a place for freedom, and that there was no place like home in your woman's arms after a gruesome fight for liberty. *

Photography is not mental pollution, it is mental, verging on spiritual, illumination. "A picture is worth a thousand words," and



one just has to ~~be~~ listen for the words. The art will speak to those willing to understand.

* Sontag ^{also} ~~also~~ claims that photographs make the world seem more available than it is. The opposite is true. Photography confirms the limits of this world. Photographs prove that there was history, that the human eye sees better than the camera lens, that art in this world are finite. Pictures help us to see but do not replace reality.

~~QUESTION 3~~

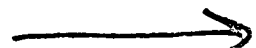
IN REALITY, THERE ARE TWO WORLDS: THE REAL WORLD AND THE RECREATED WORLD. BOTH ARE, OR CAN BE, INEXORABLE CHEF D'OUVRES, HOWEVER, ONLY ONE IS AUTHENTIC WITH NATURAL BEAUTY. THE REAL WORLD IS UNSCATHED BY HUMAN MANIPULATION, IT IS THE HONEST PICTURE OF THE TRUE WORLD. THE RECREATED WORLD IS TAINTED BY HUMAN CORRUPTION AND HUMAN IDEALISM. IT IS SIMPLY PROPAGANDA, LIKE THAT USED BY THE NAZI'S PRECEDING WORLD WAR TWO. ACCORDING TO SYLAN SONTAG, AND RIGHTFULLY SO, "IT IS THE MOST IRRESISTABLE FORM OF MENTAL POLLUTION."

ONE OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS WITH PHOTOGRAPHS, A CONDUIT OF THE RECREATED WORLD, IS THAT THEY ARE FALLACIOUS. THEY GIVE THE WORLD A FALSE SENSE OF REALITY. A PHOTOGRAPHER COULD TRAVEL TO QUEENS NEW YORK, GIVE A RICH MAN SOME CLOTHES AND A POSE, AND TAKE A HAPPY PICTURE. WHAT THE OBSERVERS DID NOT KNOW ABOUT THIS PICTURE IS THAT AN HOUR BEFORE TWO MEN ROBBED A LIQUOR STORE AND KILLED AN EMPLOYEE, BUT OF COURSE, NO ONE PHOTOGRAPHED THAT. AFTERALL, "THE CAMERA'S RENDERING OF REALITY MUST ALWAYS HIDE MORE THAN IT DISCLOSES." PHOTOGRAPHS DEPICT A CONTRIVED VERSION OF THE WORLD. THEY DO NOT EXHIBIT THE HONESTY A CITIZEN CAN OBSERVE SIMPLY BY BEING.



PHOTOGRAPHS ALSO ACCOUNT FOR A FALSE SENSE OF REALITY IN THAT THEY BUILD UP AN EVENT OR AN OBJECT, AND IT DOES NOT RESEMBLE ITS PROMISE. AN ORDINARY MAN WALKS INTO McDONALDS, HE SEES A LUCIOUS CHEESEBURGER ON A SIGN THAT, IN ALL ITS GRANDOUR, MUST WEIGH @ TEN POUNDS, WHEN HE OPENS THE TASTY TREAT AT HIS TABLE, HE IS SUFFICIENTLY DISAPPOINTED THAT IS BURGER IS OFFCENTERED WITH A CONGLOMERATION OF ONIONS AND MUSTARD, AND KETCHUP SLOPPILY STREWEN ACROSS THE FEEBLE, PITIFUL, SQUARE OF FALSE MEAT. THIS PHOTOGRAPH MAY HAVE EPHEMERAL MONETARY BENEFITS TO SUCH A LARGE CORPORATION, BUT THE DISAPPOINTMENT AND ANIMOSITY IT CREATES FAR OUTWEIGHS THAT. IT BECOMES INCREASINGLY MORE APPARENT THAT PHOTOGRAPHS ARE MERELY OBSTREPEROUS LIES. "THE ART OF PHOTOGRAPHY IS, INDEED, FALSE. IT "MAKES US FEEL THAT THE WORLD IS MORE AVAILABLE THAN IT ACTUALLY IS."

WHILE PHOTOGRAPHY IS OF LITTLE PRACTICAL PURPOSE, IT CAN MAKE SOMEONE FEEL BETTER BY REMEMBERING A LOVED ONE. IT CAN BRING JOY AND MARVEL IN THE ARTISTIC WORLD. HOWEVER, THE ~~SCREAMS~~ ~~AND~~ FEMININE SCREAMS AND GIGGLES THAT ACCOMPANY A "BAD" PICTURE ARE FAR MORE COMMON



THAN A PICTURE ~~CONTRASTING~~ THAT WON AN AWARD FOR THE BRILLIANT, INGENUOUS PORTRAYAL OF A LANCUID, DEPRESSED, EMACIATED, STARVING MAN. IT SEEMS AN OXYMORON THAT SOME WELL OFF MAN IS PROFITING FROM THE HARSH HARDSHIPS AND DEMISE OF A HELPLESS POVERTY-STRICKEN MAN. IT IS MORALLY AND ETHICALLY INHUMANE. IT IS TIME FOR SOCIETY TO ~~BREAK~~ BREAK ITS FETTERS AND OPEN ITS EYES TO A WORLD OF REALITY, NOT THE DARK ~~REDS~~ ALLEYS OF PROPAGANDA AND FALSE FRIENDS. AS SONTAG WRITES, "NEEDING TO HAVE REALITY CONFIRMED AND EXPERIENCE ENHANCED BY PHOTOGRAPHS IS AN AESTHETIC CONSUMERISM TO WHICH EVERYONE IS NOW ADDICTED," FURTHER REALITY WILL NOT BE BACKED BY PHOTOGRAPHS, BECAUSE THEY ARE OPPOSITES. ONE MUST, INSTEAD, EXPERIENCE REALITY FOR HIMSELF, NOT THROUGH THE EYES OF A PHOTOGRAPHER.