

## AP English Literature and Composition

### Question 3: Literary Argument (2019) Sample Student Responses

*The student responses in this packet were selected from the 2019 Reading and have been rescored using the new rubrics for 2020. Commentaries for each sample are provided in a separate document. Student responses have been transcribed verbatim; any errors in spelling or grammar appear as they do in the original handwritten response.*

**HH** In *Candide*, Voltaire's satirical style is aimed at the philosophy of the time. He ridicules the enlightenment philosophers and their views of the world. Voltaire projects the target philosophy onto a naïve prince in order to satirize the philosophy. Candide is woefully ignorant and holds an overly optimistic view human experience. Like his friend and mentor Pangloss, he believes that "everything is for the best in all possible worlds." Candide's ideal view of the world is satirized when he experiences tragedy and portrays the fallacy of believing in idealism. Human experience is cursed by political structures, treatment of women and corrupt human nature. His adherence to the "idealistic philosophy" brings him pain and suffering, and ultimately the abandonment of his philosophy.

Political leaders and laws cause more problems than they solve. With the exception of the leader of El Dorado, virtually every monarch Candide encounters abuses or neglects his people. The book begins because Candide is sent away by the baron. Candide has dinner with six deposed kings and learns how hard it is to govern people. Candide sees many examples of how society doesn't work: brutal war, rape, murder, attempts at torture but justifies it all by believing it is all for the best for much of the text. The only king who can help Candide and his people in in El Dorado, which is an imaginary place and therefore not real.

Women are treated very poorly in *Candide*. Even the female figures endowed with moral virtue at the beginning of the book turn bad. Cunegonde becomes ugly and broken when she is enslaved. Candide chooses to marry her because he knows it will anger her brother. Pan gloss, Candide's wise friend, is easily distracted by a woman and provides Candide with terrible advice. Thus, the world around them ensures that women are as bad as men.

Voltaire offers a bleak concept of human nature. Every possible negative thing that could happen happens to Candide. He is robbed of his jewels, deceived multiple times and the reader wonders what the next abuse will be in his travels. The book is basically organized by pain and suffering. His friends are enslaved in a chain gang, nearly eaten by the Biglugs, and just escape getting hanged. Humans are almost always cruel to one another.

Candide's idealism is so exaggerated that the reader cannot see any plausibility in the popular philosophy. Candide is so optimistic that horrible events and tragedies are just swept away as devices for the improvement of public good. Voltaire's use of situational irony is so potent that the novel's meaning is incredibly clear to the reader, that optimistic philosophy is ridiculous and fundamentally flawed. There is no way adherence to the philosophy will bring improvement to your life. As we see in Candide's character, only despair comes to him. Candide's ideal world view is ridiculed to remove any credibility from Enlightenment philosophy of idealism. At the end of the book, Candide abandons his philosophy, believing that people need to "tend to their gardens."

**ZZ** In Khaled Houssin's novel "The Kite Runner", the reader follows the life of a boy named Amir, and how his actions and view on life, will affect him as an adult.

When Amir was a young boy he has a best friend named Hassan, who was just a servant boy, but Amir did not care at the time. During an annual event, Amir and Hassan were attempting to cut other kites down with their own. When Amir won, Hassan chased after the kite into an alley where the town bully, Assef and his friends cornered him and said that if Hassan didn't apologize and give him the kite, then bad things will happen. When Hassan said no, Assef forced him to the ground and raped him. As Amir caught up to Hassan, he got there at the wrong time. Amir remembered what Assef has said before about Hassan and he was just a servant boy. Amir was faced with two choices, run away and leave Hassan, or go save him. Sadly, Amir chose to run away. Hassan finally gave the kite to Amir, and they never talked about what happened. Amir's view on the world was always the same, there were servant and there were masters, and Amir was not a servant. This scene hurt Amir and Hassan's friendship badly, because things were never the same. On Amir's birthday he received a watch and money. That night Amir put his gifts under Hassan's mattress and said that he stole it. Instead of saying he didn't steal it, Hassan admitted to it, and lied to everyone. This event caused Hassan and his dad to leave forever.

Later in life, after Amir's dad died, and Amir was now an adult and married and living in America, he went back to Kabul, only to find out that Hassan was dead. Amir was heartbroken, because he never got the chance to apologize and make it up to Hassan. When Amir found out that Hassan has a kid, he was determined to give the child the life Hassan never had. When Amir finally found Sohrab, Hassan's child Assef was the one who had him. In order to gain possession over Sohrab, Amir got beaten up really bad by Assef. In Amir's eyes, he has finally repaid his debt to Hassan. When Amir told Sohrab that in order for him to stay with Amir, he had to go back to an orphanage before Amir could adopt him. Sohrab was torn up inside by this news and attempted to kill himself because he would rather die than go back. Amir took Sohrab to a kite running competition in a park and when Sohrab won, Amir chased after the kite and said what Hassan told Amir, "For you a thousand times over." The way Amir saw the world changed when he went to America, he saw everyone as an equal, not anything less.

**J** Oftentimes, when coming from a well-off upbringing, an individual develops an idealistic viewpoint of the world. He or she may believe humans to be innately good or government to be innately focused on the well-being of all. In his novel, Lord of the Flies, Author William Golding presents readers with one such individual whose view of the world is too ideal to be true - a young British boy named Ralph. When an airplane crashes leaving a group of boys stranded on an island, Ralph believes that he can help bring the boys rescue, as long as the others cooperate. He soon finds out, however, that his plan is too optimistic. Through his character, Ralph, Golding conveys that holding an idealistic view of the world is dangerous: while temporary success can be achieved, it ultimately leads to the destruction of governmental institutions and chaos. He encourages readers to adopt a more realistic view of the world and recognize the inherent evil in all people.

From the start, Ralph believes that he can create a direct democracy on the island that can ultimately bring the boys to safety. Shortly after the plane crash, Ralph and his friend Piggy find a conch shell on the beach, and Ralph, calling together the group, designates the conch shell as possessing special power. In particular, whoever holds the conch may speak; whoever does not cannot. It is this conch, then, that becomes a symbol of democracy on the island. At first, Ralph's plan seems to work. Using the conch shell to assert his leadership, he instructs the group to build a signal fire on the island, so that passing ships can see it and come rescue the boys. Ralph, moreover, instructs the kids to build huts, collect water for the group, and lays out a number of ground rules concerning urinating and other matters. Ralph's belief in his plan is based on his ideal view of the world; specifically, he believes that the boys - being good, rational beings - will follow the rules and help maintain the signal fire. Ralph also assumes that his democracy is somehow perfect and that all its members will cooperate.

As the novel progresses, however, Ralph begins to understand that his plan - built on idealistic assumptions - will not hold up. Specifically, the boys quickly stop constructing the houses, until it is only Ralph and Simon doing the work. The same carelessness is seen with the signal fire: when a ship passes, Ralph is enraged that the signal fire is out and that the boys are not rescued. Thus, the negative consequences of having an ideal view of the world begin becoming clear: the boys not only miss out on a rescue opportunity but do not even have homes to sleep in at night. Moreover, the democracy that Ralph creates begins crashing as well. At one point, while Ralph is speaking, another boy named Jack interrupts him and refuses to stop talking despite not holding the shell. As seen later on, other boys also complain of the rule imposed by the shell. Symbolically, then, democracy is breaking as well.

It is only near the end of the novel when the worst consequences of Ralph's naivete are in broad display. At the point, Ralph has virtually lost all of his boys, who have instead run to join Jack - who promises to provide food to the kids and laughs at the prospect of maintaining a signal fire. Jack, who demonizes members of his "government" with physical violence, symbolically embodies a dictator, indicating that Ralph's idealistic direct democracy collapses to the will of a dictatorship. Furthermore, one of Jack's sadistic companions named Roger rolls a boulder off a cliff, killing both Piggy (Ralph's best friend) and shattering the conch shell into a million pieces. The death of Piggy shows the demise of good (Piggy) in the face of evil (Roger), while the shattering of the conch shell shows the complete dissolution of Ralph's democracy on the island. Literally and symbolically, evil triumphs over good by the novel's end, and Ralph's optimistic hopes become a bitter reality.

In William Golding's Lord of the Flies, an optimistic, ideal view of the world is exposed by Ralph, who believes a direct democracy and cooperation can bring the boys off the island. When the boys gradually turn away from Ralph and towards Jack - destroying democracy and killing people in the process - the reader comes to understand the negative side of Ralph's optimism. Ralph's ideal view of the world makes his plan extremely precarious and is bound to fail from the beginning. The end result is nothing but violence, destruction of his government, and chaos. Golding therefore urges readers to accept the faults of humanity and the fact that no person or institution is perfect. In so doing, they can begin to create governments that stand strong and plans that work well.

**N** In the novel the Lord of the Flies a bunch of school boys crash land on an island with no adults. The kids try to form a 'government' in which they have a 'view on the world' from what they think how the island should be ran. This view on the world is what makes the kids lead to their own demise, as they live on the island in chaos.

The kids figured that if they lived/ controlled the islands as they thought adults did that the island would be very organized. This ideal would soon lead them to mischief, as where their plan starts to unravel. The kids soon away seemed to be excited to run the island with no rules. Yet they see this as a problem and they try to fix it with trying to live like adults.

Their ideals of the way that we run our society led to the kids downfall. They end up killing another kid. Their own morals and ways of their own life left them as they lived on this island. The kids lost their ways/minds not knowing how to control themselves in a world without rules. Their own ideals lead to their downfall in the end by killing one another and the kids turning into savages.

**FF** Many people subscribe to ideal views of the world, be it for better or for worse. In fact, V.S. Naipaul, in his novel Magic Seeds, writes, "It is wrong to hold an ideal view of the world. That's where the mischief starts. That's where everything starts unravelling". While Naipaul argues that holding an ideal view of the world is dangerous, that is not always the case. This is best exemplified by the story of the Joads in John Steinbeck's classic American novel, Grapes of Wrath. The main characters, a family called the Joads, have an ideal view of life in California, and even though it turns out to be largely untrue, simply holding the ideal view brings positive consequences. Steinbeck uses this idealism of the Joads to illuminate the meaning of the work by portraying the experience of migrant farmers.

Idealism is an essential aspect to the story of the Joads. A family of tenant farmers in Oklahoma, they never lost hope after being forced off their farm. In fact, they all possessed an ideal view of life in California. This ideal view came from a handbill that Ma Joad found proclaiming the abundance of jobs in California. A mere handbill forming the basis for an idealist worldview is questionable at best, but despite running into plenty of obstacles, the Joads never give up on their ideal view of California as a haven of jobs and prosperity. Misguided? Maybe, but this idealism would save their lives.

Contrary to what U.S. Naipaul suggests, idealism was actually very helpful to the Joads and without it, they probably would have died. Their ideal view of California is what inspired their perseverance through break downs, unemployment, violence, discrimination, and death. Had they given up on their ideal view of California, they would have never gotten jobs and the ability to better the family's prospects. By consistently holding that view, the Joads ensured they would never give up on securing a better future for themselves. So, although dangerous in some cases, an ideal view of the world ensured the Joads' survival.

The Joads' idealism, however is not just a plot piece. Steinbeck uses their idealism to illuminate the meaning of the work by portraying the plight of migrant farmers during the Dust Bowl in the 1930's. Steinbeck was writing a novel that, while telling the individual story of the Joads, also told a larger story of the terrible experience of displaced migrant farmers during the Dust Bowl. Though the Joads' idealism, Steinbeck displays the idealism in every migrant that was necessary for them to survive. By showing the Joads' perseverance and the persistence of their idealism, Steinbeck highlights a major theme to the book: the rugged perseverance of the migrant farmers, many of whom would have had nothing without their idealism.

So, while some argue that holding an ideal view of the world can be dangerous, it can also be essential to others. One example is the Joad family from John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath. The Joads consistently hold an idealist view of California, without which they would not have been able to survive and set up a new life. Steinbeck uses this to illuminate the meaning of the novel, highlighting the necessity of an ideal worldview to migrant farmers.