



THE AP EXAM

Opening Doors to AP English

Advanced Placement English Literature & Composition

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QUESTION 3 PROMPTS: 21st Century

2000

Many works of literature not readily identified with the mystery or detective story genre nonetheless involve the investigation of a mystery. In these works, the solution to the mystery may be less important than the knowledge gained in the process of its investigation. Choose a novel or play in which one or more of the characters confront a mystery. Then write an essay in which you identify the mystery and explain how the investigation illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2001

One definition of madness is “mental delusion or the eccentric behavior arising from it.” But Emily Dickinson wrote

Much madness is divinst Sense—

To a discerning Eye—

Novelist and playwrights have often seen madness with a “discerning Eye.” Select a novel or a play in which a character’s apparent madness or irrational behavior plays an important role. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consists of and how it might be judged reasonable. Explain the significance of the “madness” to the work

2002

Morally ambiguous characters—characters whose behavior discourages readers from identifying them as purely evil or purely good—are at the heart of many works of literature. Choose a novel or play in which a morally ambiguous character plays a pivotal role. Then write an essay in which you explain how the character can be viewed as morally ambiguous and why his or her moral ambiguity is significant to the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2003

According to critic Northrop Frye, “tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning.”

Select a novel or play in which a tragic figure functions as an instrument of the suffering of others. Then write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by that figure contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole.

2004

Critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Choose a novel or play and, considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers any answers. Explain how the author’s treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2005

In Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), protagonist Edna Pontellier is said to possess “that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.” In a novel or play that you have studied, identify a character who conforms outwardly while questioning inwardly. Then write an essay in which you analyze how this tension between outward conformity and inward questioning contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid mere plot summary.

2006

Many writers use a country setting to establish values within a work of literature. For example, the country may be a place of virtue and peace or one of primitivism and ignorance. Choose a novel or play in which such a setting plays a significant role. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the country setting functions in the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2007

In many works of literature, past events can affect, positively or negatively, the present actions, attitudes, or values of a character. Choose a novel or play in which a character must contend with some aspect of the past, either personal or societal. Then write an essay in which you show how the character’s relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.... Do not merely summarize the plot.

2008

In a literary work, a minor character, often known as a foil, possesses traits that emphasize, by contrast or comparison, the distinctive characteristics and qualities of the main character. For example, the ideas of behavior of the minor character might be used to highlight the weaknesses or strengths of the main character.

Choose a novel or play in which a minor character serves as a foil to a main character. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the relation between the minor character and the major character illuminates the meaning of a work.

2009

A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning.

Select a novel or play and, focusing on one symbol, write an essay analyzing how that symbol functions in the work and what it reveals about the characters or themes of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2010

Palestinian American literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said has written that “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unbeatable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” Yet Said has also said that exile can become “a potent, even enriching” experience.

Select a novel, play, or epic in which a character experiences such a rift and becomes cut off from “home,” whether that home is the character’s birthplace, family, homeland, or other special place. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the character’s experience with exile is both alienating and enriching, and how this experience illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. You may choose a work from the list below or one of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2011

In a novel by William Styron, a father tells his son that life “is a search for justice.”

Choose a character from a novel or play who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the character’s understanding of justice, the degree to which the character’s search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the work as a whole. You may choose a work from the list below or another work of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2012

“And after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency.” Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*

Choose a novel or play in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole.

You may choose a work from the list below or one of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

THE 'TRIPLE EIGHT'

ATTACKING THE AP EXAM ESSAY QUESTIONS

Questions 1 & 2

1. Find & mark verbs in the imperative and all conjunctions.
2. Identify all parts of the task.
3. Read the passage attentively and mark it up.
4. Watch for patterns of organization, repetition, echoing, or precedence.
5. Identify speaker, the audience, the setting, and the occasion.
6. Mark shifts in point of view, tone, or the like; mark any significant punctuation/pointing.
7. In poetry, note if a rhyme scheme or the arrangement on the page helps reveal organization.
8. Identify the main purpose & tone.

Question 3

1. Cover list of suggested works.
2. Ignore any opening quotations or other material that comes before the first imperative verb in the prompt.
3. Find and mark all verbs in the imperative.
4. Identify all parts of the task, including any that might be implied rather than explicit. Pay careful attention to any numbers in the prompt.
5. Go back and read the opening of the prompt.
6. Decide on a work to use
7. Decide on an appropriate "meaning of the work as a whole."
8. *[Optional]* Uncover and read the suggested titles to see if there is a better choice.

ALL Questions

1. Write down a plan.
Do *not* let the prompt dictate your organization.
2. Leave a space for an introduction.
3. Remember your audience.
4. Write legibly in ink.
5. Refer often to the text but avoid direct quotations of more than four words
6. Avoid plot summary and paraphrase.
7. Follow all detail from the text with your commentary; use the ratio of two pieces of your commentary to every one of detail from the text.
8. Avoid 'name calling,' the identification of literary elements without explaining why the writer is using them: *What / How / Why*

Close Reading: Real Preparation for Multiple-Choice Tests



by Jane Schaffer
San Diego, California

Taking a Different Tack

For some years, the English Vertical Team at my school has been concerned about our students' multiple-choice scores on AP Exams and other reading assessments. We were giving practice sets from previous AP Exams, but we didn't see much growth. We decided to take a different tack and began doing focused close reading assignments, asking open-ended reading questions that required sophisticated textual analysis.

At first, we looked at published materials designed for higher-order reading skills, but we found little on the market that suited our purposes. So, we wrote our own. Commercially available lessons asked, "What do you think was going on in Jack's head in *Lord of the Flies* when he looked at his reflection?" We wanted more analysis of the writer's choices and the kind of effect those choices created, so we deepened the question by asking, "When Jack looks at his reflection first in the pool and later in the coconut shell, what kind of light appears in the shell that wasn't present in the pool? What effect does Golding create here, and why does he create it?" The idea worked. Born from frustration, our approach to reading instruction can be used by any AP teacher.

We follow several steps in producing close reading exercises:

- First, we identify key passages from the assigned reading. Shorter passages are more successful than longer ones.
- Second, we write close reading questions for them, borrowing from AP multiple-choice stems, and assign them in class. We have learned that generic reading prompts asking about sequence or inference, for example, do not elicit higher order analysis. We write text-specific questions that require students to search the story for the information. "What is the main idea of the first paragraph?" is not nearly as effective as "How does Hawthorne describe the throng in the prison scene, and how does this description tell you his attitude toward the group?" If students can answer without looking back at the book, then we have written a study question, good in its own right, but not a close reading one. Students often must read a passage two or three times. They balk at this -- "We already read that page!" -- but they need to learn that good readers often reread challenging texts.

- Third, we revise our question sets based on feedback from the class. They always show us what we need to clarify and polish.

Writing Your Own Assignments

The best way to write close reading assignments is to work as a group with colleagues who teach the same literature. Our most productive session was a release day where five of us went off-campus to work. The synergy led us to questions that none would have thought of alone. Even working together, we realized how difficult it was to phrase the questions correctly to help our students achieve a greater understanding of the piece.

When students begin a close reading exercise, they annotate the passage and make observations in the margins. They have little experience in doing this, so we model the process for them. If duplicating is an issue at your school, it needs to be solved. Students have to have their own copies of materials to mark.

Sometimes we use a passage before starting the book. For example, at the beginning of *The Scarlet Letter*, we read the prison door scene to establish theme and tone. At other times, we might return to a selection that the class read several days before or assign the same excerpt twice to focus on an author's narrative technique. The only recommendation we have is that you not assign two or three days' worth in a row. Analyzing a passage is an intense process, one that students don't sustain well day after day. We average three to five excerpts per novel or play, fewer with short stories or essays. Poetry is an exception; by its very nature, it demands many questions. At first, we work as a class, then in pairs or small groups, and finally as independent work.

Our multiple-choice averages have moved up steadily over the last few years. By AP Exam time, our students are well versed in good reading skills and much more confident about handling the challenge of the multiple-choice section on any AP Exam.

Jane Schaffer taught AP English for 24 years in San Diego and served as an AP reader for 12 years. She retired to focus on teacher training full-time. She has published several articles about teaching English, including "Peer Response That Works" in the Journal of Teaching Writing, 1996; "Strategies for Critical Reading in English" in Making Sense: Teaching Critical Reading Across the Curriculum, 1993; and "Improving Discussion Questions: Is Anyone Listening?" in the English Journal, April 1989.

<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/members/article/1,1282,149-0-0-11289,00.html>

AP English Lit & Comp: MC Practice 1

	Guess	A	B	C	Questions Type	Vocabulary, Notes....
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
12	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

AP English Lit & Comp: MC Practice 2

	Guess	A	B	C	Questions Type	Vocabulary, Notes...
13	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
14	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
21	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
22	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
23	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
24	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
25	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Multiple-Choice Sample Questions: Passage 1

When we were all still alive, the five of us in that kerosene-lit house, on Friday and Saturday nights, at an hour when in the spring and summer there was still abundant light in the air, I would set out in my father's car for town, where my friends lived. I had, by moving ten miles away, at last acquired friends: an illustration of that strange law whereby, like Orpheus leading Eurydice, we achieved our desire by turning our back on it. I had even gained a girl, so that the vibrations were as sexual as social that made me jangle with anticipation as I clowned in front of the mirror in our kitchen, shaving from a basin of stove-heated water, combing my hair with a dripping comb, adjusting my reflection in the mirror until I had achieved just that electric angle from which my face seemed beautiful and everlastingly, by the very volumes of air and sky and grass that lay mutely banked about our home, beloved.

My grandmother would hover near me, watching fearfully, as she had when I was a child, afraid that I would fall from a tree. Delirious, humming, I would swoop and lift her, lift her like a child, crooking one arm under her knees and cupping the other behind her back. Exultant in my height, my strength, I would lift that frail brittle body weighing perhaps a hundred pounds and twirl with it in my arms while the rest of the family watched with startled smiles of alarm. Had I stumbled, or dropped her, I might have broken her back, but my joy always proved a secure cradle. And whatever irony was in the impulse, whatever implicit contrast between this ancient husk, scarcely female, and the pliant, warm girl I would embrace before the evening was done, direct delight flooded away: I was carrying her who had carried me, I was giving my past a dance, I had lifted the anxious care-taker of my childhood from the floor, I was bringing her with my boldness to the edge of danger, from which she had always sought to guard me.

1. The speaker might best be described as someone who is
 - (A) unwilling to forsake his family in order to gain his freedom
 - (B) long overdue in obtaining maturity and acceptance in the adult world
 - (C) struggling to find his own identity and sense of purpose
 - (D) disturbed by the overbearing attentiveness and attitudes of his family
 - (E) defining his passage from the role of protected to that of protector
2. The mythological reference in lines 7-8 reinforces the "strange law" (line 6) that
 - (A) wishes are often best fulfilled when they are least pursued
 - (B) conflict between youth and old age is inevitable
 - (C) anticipation is a keener emotion than realization
 - (D) in our search for heaven, we may also find hell
 - (E) to those who examine life logically, few things are exactly as they seem to be
3. The effect of the words "vibrations" (line 9) and "jangle" (line 10) is most strongly reinforced by which of the following?
 - (A) "adjusting my reflection" (lines 12-13)
 - (B) "electric angle" (lines 13-14)
 - (C) "frail brittle body" (line 22)
 - (D) "irony was in the impulse" (lines 26-27)
 - (E) "implicit contrast" (line 27)

4. Which of the following best restates the idea conveyed in lines 12-16?
- (A) There are moments in youth when we have an extravagant sense of our own attractiveness.
 - (B) We can more easily change people's opinions of ourselves by adjusting our behavior than by changing our appearances.
 - (C) Vanity is a necessary though difficult part of the maturing process.
 - (D) How others see us determines, to a large degree, how we see ourselves and our environment.
 - (E) Adolescence is a time of uncertainty, insecurity, and self-contradiction.
5. In line 15, "everlastingly" modifies which of the following words?
- (A) "I" (line 13)
 - (B) "my face" (line 14)
 - (C) "beautiful" (line 14)
 - (D) "lay" (line 146)
 - (E) "beloved" (line 16)
6. The image of the "very volumes of air and sky and grass that lay mutely banked about our home" (lines 14-15) is used to show the speaker's
- (A) desire to understand his place in the universe
 - (B) profound love of nature
 - (C) feelings of oppression by his environment
 - (D) expansive belief in himself
 - (E) inability to comprehend the meaning of life
7. The attitude of the speaker at the time of the action is best described as
- (A) understanding
 - (B) exuberant
 - (C) nostalgic
 - (D) superior
 - (E) fearful
8. The passage supports all of the following statements about the speaker's dancing EXCEPT:
- (A) He danced partly to express his joy in seeing his girl friend later that night.
 - (B) His recklessness with his grandmother revealed his inability to live up to his family's expectations for him.
 - (C) In picking up his grandmother, he dramatized that she is no longer his caretaker.
 - (D) He had danced that way with his grandmother before.
 - (E) His dancing demonstrated the strength and power of youth.
9. The description of the grandmother in lines 20 and 25 emphasizes which of the following?
- (A) Her emotional insecurity
 - (B) The uniqueness of her character
 - (C) Her influence on the family
 - (D) Her resignation to old age
 - (E) Her poignant fragility
10. Which of the following statements best describes the speaker's point of view toward his grandmother in the second paragraph?
- (A) Moving to the country has given him a new perspective, one that enables him to realize the importance of his grandmother.
 - (B) Even as a young man, he realizes the uniqueness of his grandmother and her affection for him.
 - (C) He becomes aware of the irony of his changing relationship with his grandmother only in retrospect.
 - (D) It is mainly through his grandmother's interpretation of his behavior that he becomes aware of her influence on him.
 - (E) Comparing the enduring love of his grandmother to his superficial feelings for the young girl heightens his appreciation of his grandmother.
11. Which of the following patterns of syntax best characterizes the style of the passage?
- (A) Sparse sentences containing a minimum of descriptive language
 - (B) Long sentences interspersed with short, contrasting sentences
 - (C) Sentences that grow progressively more complex as the passage progresses
 - (D) Sentences with many modifying phrases and subordinate clauses
 - (E) Sentences that tend toward the narrative at the beginning, but toward the explanatory at the end of the passage
12. In this passage, the speaker is chiefly concerned with
- (A) presenting grandparents as symbols worthy of reverence
 - (B) demonstrating the futility of adolescent romanticism
 - (C) satirizing his own youthful egocentricity
 - (D) considering himself as an adolescent on the brink of adulthood
 - (E) revealing his progression from idealism to pragmatism

Multiple-Choice Sample Questions: Passage 2

Advice to a Prophet

- When you come, as you soon must, to the streets of our city,
Mad-eyed from stating the obvious,
Not proclaiming our fall but begging us
In God's name to have self-pity,
- 5 Spare us all word of the weapons, their force and range,
The long numbers that rocket the mind;
Our slow, unreckoning hearts will be left behind,
Unable to fear what is too strange.
- 10 Nor shall you scare us with talk of the death of the race.
How should we dream of this place without us?
The sun mere fire, the leaves untroubled about us,
A stone look on the stone's face?
- 15 Speak of the world's own change. Though we cannot conceive
Of an undreamt thing, we know to our cost
How the dreamt cloud crumbles, the vines are blackened by frost,
How the view alters. We could believe,
- 20 If you told us so, that the white-tailed deer will slip
Into perfect shade, grown perfectly shy,
The lark avoid the reaches of our eye,
The jack-pine lose its knuckled grip
- On the cold ledge, and every torrent burn
As Xanthus* once, its gliding trout
Stunned in a twinkling. What should we be without
The dolphin's arc, the dove's return,
- 25 These things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken
Ask us, prophet, how we shall call
Our natures forth when that live tongue is all
Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken
- 30 In which we have said the rose of our love and the clean
Horse of our courage, in which beheld
The singing locust of the soul unshelled,
And all we mean or wish to mean.
- 35 Ask us, ask us whether with the worldless rose
Our hearts shall fail us; come demanding
Whether there shall be lofty or long standing
When the bronze annals of the oak-tree close.

*Xanthus: in Greek myth, a river scalded by Hephaestus, god of fire.

13. The speaker assumes that the prophet referred to in lines 1-12 will come proclaiming
 (A) a new religious dispensation
 (B) joyous self-awareness
 (C) a new political order
 (D) the horror of self-destruction
 (E) an appreciation of nature
14. According to the speaker, the prophet's "word of the weapons" (line 5) will probably not be heeded because
 (A) human beings are really fascinated by weapons
 (B) nature is more fascinating than warfare
 (C) men and women are more concerned with love than with weapons
 (D) people have heard such talk too often before
 (E) people cannot comprehend abstract descriptions of power
15. In the phrase, "A stone look on the stone's face," (line 12) the speaker is suggesting that
 (A) a stone is the most difficult natural object to comprehend
 (B) such a stone is a metaphor for a human lack of understanding
 (C) it is human beings who see a face on stones
 (D) nature is a hostile environment for the human race
 (E) the pain of life is bearable only to a stoic
16. In line 13 the speaker is doing which of the following?
 (A) Anticipating the prophet's own advice
 (B) Despairing of ever influencing the prophet
 (C) Exchanging his own point of view with that of the prophet
 (D) Heeding the prophet's advice
 (E) Prescribing what the prophet should say
17. In lines 14-16, the speaker is asserting that we
 (A) learn more or less about decay in nature according to our point of view
 (B) can never understand change in nature
 (C) are always instructed by an altering of our perspective
 (D) have all experienced loss and disappointment
 (E) realize that the end of the world may be near
18. The speaker implies that without "the dolphin's arc, the dove's return" (line 24) we would
 (A) be less worried about war and destruction
 (B) crave coarser pleasures than the enjoyment of nature
 (C) have less understanding of ourselves and our lives
 (D) be unable to love
 (E) find ourselves unwilling to heed the advice of prophets
19. The phrase "knuckled grip" (line 20) implies that the jack-pine
 (A) will never really fall from the ledge
 (B) has roots that grasp like a hand
 (C) is very precariously attached to the ledge
 (D) is a rough and inhuman part of nature
 (E) is very awkwardly placed
20. "The dolphin's arc" (line 24) refers to the
 (A) biblical story of Noah
 (B) leap of a dolphin
 (C) hunting of dolphins with bows and arrows
 (D) rainbow
 (E) migration pattern of the dolphin
21. The phrase "that live tongue" (line 27) is best understood as
 (A) a metaphor for nature
 (B) an image of the poet's mind
 (C) a symbol of the history of the world
 (D) a reference to the poem itself
 (E) a metaphor for the advice of the prophet
22. According to the speaker, we use the images of the rose (line 29), the horse (line 30), and the locust (line 31)
 (A) literally to denote specific natural objects
 (B) as metaphors to aid in comprehending abstractions
 (C) as similes illustrating the speaker's attitude toward nature
 (D) to reinforce images previously used by the prophet
 (E) to explain the need for scientific study of nature
23. Which of the following best describes an effect of the repetition of the phrase "ask us" in line 33?
 (A) It suggests that the prophet himself is the cause of much of the world's misery.
 (B) It represents a sarcastic challenge to the prophet to ask the right questions.
 (C) It suggests that the speaker is certain of the answer he will receive.
 (D) It makes the line scan as a perfect example of iambic pentameter.
 (E) It provides a tone of imploring earnestness.
24. Which of the following best paraphrases the meaning of line 36?
 (A) When the end of the year has come
 (B) When the chronicles no longer tell of trees
 (C) When art no longer imitates nature
 (D) When nature has ceased to exist
 (E) When the forests are finally restored
25. Which of the following best describes the poem as a whole?
 (A) An amusing satire on the excesses of modern prophets
 (B) A poetic expression of the need for love to give meaning to life
 (C) A lyrical celebration of the importance of nature for man
 (D) A personal meditation on human courage in the face of destruction
 (E) A philosophical and didactic poem about man and nature